

An exploration of the influence of gender dynamics on the experience of NGO staff members in Makhanda.

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ABSTRACT

This research explores gender dynamics within non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and examines whether, and to what extent women in the NGO sector perceive gender dynamics as playing instrumental roles in NGO organisational processes and structures. In conjunction with this, this research aims to explore the relationship between gender stereotypes and career progression.

Black feminism and postcolonial feminism will be implemented as theoretical frameworks to explore how social or gender, age, race, and class interact with the organisational process of NGOs. The concepts of intersectionality and subjectivity are useful in understanding how interactions between race, class, and gender play a role in the subjective experiences of women of all backgrounds in post-apartheid South Africa. A postcolonial feminist approach focuses on the representation of African women, and allows an exploration of the knowledge of South African women within NGOs that will provide more perspectives to organisational studies.

Traditional perspectives of gender stereotypes are widespread, but several respondents are indifferent to gender stereotypes while some of them feel that they are non-existent. The findings indicate that gender stereotypes continue to exist with forward movements in social progress, where progress might be stalled because of ingrained patriarchal norms, making it difficult to eradicate gender inequality. The findings from the research also suggest that there are tensions and contradictions involved when it comes to how female NGO staff members perceive gender discrimination, providing nuance to existing research. This research acknowledges the period of transition that society is in and recognises how complexities emerge. The findings capture the present state of gender identity, and applying an intersectional approach has indicated that other factors such as race, ethnicity and age take precedence. The research also recognises the importance of tracking and responding to changing societal attitudes in times of transition. Finally, the research also contributes to a broader understanding of the perceptions of gender identity and equality and ensures that discussions on patriarchy do not depend on established discussions that present reality in a stark way that does not leave space for nuance.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This case study explores gender dynamics within non-governmental organisations (NGOs), seeking to investigate whether (and to what extent, if any) gender norms and stereotypes impact women's roles and practices within organisational structures and processes. NGOs serve as a special point of interest for this study because of their role as developmental institutions that advocate for equality and their focus on service delivery for marginalised communities. The nature of NGOs creates the assumption that equality has been achieved in their organisational structure. This research seeks to take a gendered approach to the organisational structures and processes of NGOs, capturing the reality of female NGO staff members and exploring whether they experience stereotypes and discrimination. There exists the possibility that the gendered nature of NGO organisational structure reflects the microcosm of South Africa's inequality, and this study seeks to examine this through women's perspectives. This research makes a major contribution to the sociology of NGOs, contributing to larger discussions of how women's positionality interacts with NGOs' institutional culture.

The labour system during apartheid has influenced the current nature of women's participation in organisations. During apartheid, 36 per cent of women were economically active. In terms of racial classification, white women formed 22.6 per cent of the workforce, with Coloured and Asian women forming 14.6 per cent and 2.7 per cent, respectively, and 60 per cent of the labour market was black women (Maconachie, 1989: 83). The intersection of gender and race influenced the labour market in apartheid South Africa and organisations as well, as white women occupied managerial and executive jobs, and were less likely to occupy unskilled and domestic jobs as compared to black women (Posel and Casale, 2019: 4). However, the dismantling of the apartheid system also led to societal transformation, which led to shifts in power and dominance among social groups in South Africa. NGOs also played a role in the defeat of apartheid in South Africa, and as the socio-political and economic environment shifted, the nature of NGOs also changed (Pieterse, 1997: 154). The South African government and NGOs alike committed to eradicating gender inequality by pledging to achieve gender equality at

the Beijing Women's Conference in 1995 and introducing laws and policies that emphasised their dedication. In government, previously marginalised groups are presented with equal economic opportunities and anti-discrimination policies through affirmative action policies such as the Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment Act of 2003 (B-BBEE) (Matambo and Ani, 2015: 273). The gender wage gap has narrowed significantly, with women's participation in the labour force increasing from 44.5 per cent in 1993 to 48.9 in 2018 (World Institute for Development Economics Research, 2019: 1). NGOs advocated for gender equality by implementing and integrating gendered policies aligned with the developmental goals set at the Beijing Conference, a strategy known as gender mainstreaming (United Nations, 2002: 1). These are part of the several strides taken by NGOs and governments to eradicate gender inequality, but the question remains the extent to whether these changes have been implemented within the framework of NGOs.

The achievement of gender equality is a process that continues to transform, and as changes occur in the socio-political and economic environment, gender equality faces various challenges. Although women make up a large part of the labour force, they are still paid 23 percent-35 per cent less than men in an equal job (Collier, 2023:1). Economic participation is gendered, with women making up at least 53 per cent of the labour force, while men occupy 64.4 per cent (Department of (Statistics South Africa, 2022: 1). Women still occupy jobs that mimic the sex-specific distribution of occupations, leading to stereotypes and stigmatisation (Goyayi, 2023: 1; Heilman, 1997; Anat *et al.*, 2013). On the other hand, NGOs are also faced with internal challenges, such as insufficient systems for affirmative action in employment and poor strategies for human resource development (Pierterse, 1997: 162). The gendered nature of the South African labour force may be reflected in NGOs, and this research aims to explore whether the external environment of South African society has affected the gender perceptions and experiences of NGO staff members.

Previous research has explored the relationship between gender norms, stereotypes and organisational culture, and they have found that patriarchy and misogyny influence organisational processes (Khwela *et al.*, 2020; Ramohai, 2019; Hanyane and Ahiante, 2020). Stereotypes arise within this context, and they lead to unconscious bias, prejudice, harassment,

and stereotype threat (Tabassum and Nayak, 2021: 200). NGOs function in a space where the socio-political context has led to the marginalisation of women (Jakimow, 2011: 215).

South African women's exclusion and disempowerment in both their public and private lives may be reflected within organisational structures, and this research aims to understand the complexities that exist in the realities of NGO staff members.

This research will integrate black feminism and postcolonial feminism as the guiding theoretical frameworks. This research focuses on women, and the concepts of intersectionality and the subjectivity of women in postcolonial South Africa allow deeper insights into women's experiences of patriarchal and capitalist systems concerning their race, class, ethnicity, and other social markers (Tong, 2014). Within the context of NGOs, black feminism and postcolonial feminism centre women's perspectives within organisational structures and facilitate nuanced discussions on gender dynamics, offering new insights into the discussions on gender inequality.

1.2 Research Objectives

The main objective of the research is to explore whether women's gender dynamics play a role in the experiences that Makhanda employees have within the organisational culture of NGOs. The study's secondary objectives include:

- To explore how women perceive gender discrimination and stereotypes within NGOs.
- To examine the extent to which gender stereotypes affect women's career progression within NGOs.
- To explore how women's intersecting identities influence their experience with gender norms and stereotypes within NGOs.

1.3 Methods, procedures and techniques

This qualitative case study explored and interpreted NGO staff members' subjective meanings, actions, and contexts concerning larger organisational contexts (Fossey *et al.*, 2002: 717). The aim of this research was to explore women's subjective experiences with stereotypes and how they have influenced their experiences within NGOs in the broader social context that has led to the marginalisation of women (Gillespie *et al.*, 2019: 1). An interpretive approach was important

and it was implemented to understand meanings through women's interaction within institutional culture. (Fossey *et al.*, 2002: 719). According to Pervin and Mokhtar (2022: 421), the interpretive paradigm assumes that people's perceptions and meanings can be understood through their socio-cultural context. An interpretive approach is significant to this research because women's perceptions and thoughts, meaning diverse viewpoints, were understood through their perspectives within NGO organisational culture (Pervin and Mohktar, 2022: 422).

This research implemented purposive sampling, which refers to selecting respondents who are most likely to have information relevant to the research (Campbell *et al.*, 2020: 653-654). In this research, the respondents are six women who have been employed within the NGO sector for more than two years and are permanent employees of their organisations. The respondents were selected through convenience sampling because of their proximity and accessibility to Makhanda, where the research was conducted (Farrokhi and Mahmoudi-Hamidabad, 2012: 784). Semi-structured interviews were conducted for data collection. Although their insights do not represent the experiences of the entire population, the research drew themes and general conclusions from their experiences in Makhanda. The semi-structured interviews followed an interview schedule, which allowed flexible discussions with the respondents (Fossey *et al.*, 2002: 727). The data was collected at the respondents' respective organisations, and the interviews were conducted from 20 September-23 November 2023. The data was analysed thematically, and this method is used to identify and interpret similar patterns and themes (Clarke and Braun, 2017: 297).

1.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethics are essential to any research conducted because it is crucial to have the consent of the participants. Ethics approval was obtained from the Rhodes University Research Ethics Committee. Before the research was conducted, an informational letter was distributed to the Directors of the organisations, highlighting the nature and purpose of the research. However, ethical issues emerged when approaching the organisations, as the respondents could only be recruited through the Director. The main goal of a researcher is to ensure no harm to the respondents and recruiting through the Director presented several issues surrounding power dynamics, privacy and anonymity.

In a report by the International Development Committee of the UK government, within the aid sector, strategic resources and senior positions are held by white people whilst the service delivery jobs are held by black people and people of colour (International Development Committee, 2023: 15). In a study on the role of race within the NGO sector in Makhanda, Nomsenge (2022) revealed that race dictates the distribution of roles, resources, and responsibilities, leading to further differences, with white people occupying the senior roles. The directors within the NGOs under study are white and the power dynamics play a significant role in the recruitment of the respondents. The participant recruitment letter was shared by the directors to all potential respondents. The respondents may be hesitant to challenge the organisational culture, hence affecting their willingness to participate in this research. The respondents who participated in this research were in the middle-upper management, highlighting their proximity to the Director. Although there is a possibility of power imbalance, it is mostly mitigated by the agency of the respondents as they agreed to participate by initiating direct contact. To ensure no harm to the respondents, the names of the organisations and their real names were omitted in the recordings, transcriptions, and analysis. The respondents gave their consent, and in return, they were promised complete confidentiality and anonymity. The interviews were recorded for transcription and will be deleted after this research is completed.

1.5 Challenges and Limitations

According to Longino and Lennon (1995: 22), there is a complexity of interaction involved, where there are different processes and relationships involved in knowledge production. As the research included women from different backgrounds of race, class, and experiences, it was important to adopt a dialogical standpoint. A dialogical standpoint in feminist epistemology focuses on the importance of dialogue in knowledge production whilst acknowledging the diverse backgrounds of the respondents and researchers, and how their positionalities inform knowledge production (Yuval-Davis, 2012: 47-50). The identity and experiences of the respondents shaped the conversations around gender within NGOs and contributed to a deeper understanding of the complexity of gender inequality in NGOs. As an outsider of the NGO space, it was important to acknowledge these differences in experience and perspective, and highlight the nuances of the respondents' multiple perspectives.

The positionality of a researcher plays a significant role in the participation of the respondents. As a student researcher, I existed within the insider-outsider space, where my personal biography as a woman created an environment which gave the respondents a lived-in familiarity (Holmes, 2020: 6). On the other hand, I was an outsider because of my background as a student researcher, detached from the internal culture of the NGOs understudy. Participation recruitment with the Director's permission was required in two NGOs due to the topic's sensitivity, risking scrutiny and the exposure of NGOs' internal culture. The interview questions were shared with the Directors before gaining approval, and to minimise the chances of rejection, the questions steered away from topics that might threaten to reveal the sensitive details of the workplace, and topics that could threaten the employment of the respondents. Positionality changes over time, and as the respondents became more familiar with the topic, and as the interviews were semi-structured, the discussions were fluid, depending on the responses from the respondents (Herod, 1999: 324). Furthermore, my perception of my positionality might have differed from how the respondents perceived me. As discussed by Herod (1999), a researcher might perceive themselves to be an outsider but the respondents may not perceive the researcher as such and vice versa.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW:

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, effort has been put towards achieving gender equality in governmental and non-governmental spaces. NGOs have implemented numerous measures and interventions to address the implications of gender inequality on human rights, particularly women's rights. This research will adopt the metaphor of 'The Six Mountains on the backs of African Women' by Molara Ogundipe-Leslie as the lens to which women within NGOs are studied. Ogundipe-Leslie (1993) defines the six mountains as the multiple forms of oppression and discrimination that have affected African women historically and contemporarily. These six mountains are colonialism and neo-colonialism, traditional structures, backwardness, man, race, and the woman herself, (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1993: 107-114). Within the context of NGOs, these six mountains affect women in intersecting ways. Historically, women have been primarily disadvantaged and excluded from participatory development; not only that, but the societal inequalities that exist within organisations and intersecting identities of race, gender, ethnicity and class interact with institutional processes and policies, creating an interesting reality for staff members within NGOs. NGOs are unique to the organisational space, as they usually operate outside of traditional bureaucratic structures, focusing on the needs of marginalised and under-resourced communities and whilst advocating for social justice. Existing feminist literature on organisational studies revealed that gender inequalities are reproduced within organisations, and although there are limited studies on the reproduction of gender inequalities within NGOs, the authors have also concluded that there is a possibility of gender inequalities within NGOs. This research seeks to fill a gap in the knowledge by approaching South African NGOs through a gendered lens, exploring whether gender perceptions and dynamics are influential in women's roles and practices. According to Gqola (2001: 11), African women, particularly black African women, redefine the terrain, using their agency to redefine their existence and challenge societal attitudes. This research will explore feminist organisational literature that has explored the influence of gender discrimination, and it will link existing findings with findings from NGO literature, which illustrates how the professionalisation of NGOs has led to gender-neutral approaches. Before reviewing the literature, the meanings of

gender and NGOs will be articulated, and the gendered dynamics of organisations will be explored through black and postcolonial feminist thought, which reveals that identities of gender, race, and class are reconfigured within organisations, interacting with organisational culture in the postcolonial context.

2.1.2 KEY TERMS

2.1.2.1 Gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes refer to shared generalised beliefs about what men and women are and what they should be like (Fiske, 1998; Reskin, 2001; Heilman, 2001:658). Existing literature on stereotypes states that they are descriptive and prescriptive. According to Heilman (2012: 115), descriptive stereotypes are based on the expected behaviour individuals hold of both men and women. Men and women are characterised differently, as men are expected to be aggressive, competitive, independent, and rational, whereas women are expected to be kind, helpful, and nurturing towards others. According to Heilman (2001: 659-660), masculine characteristics are needed as they are considered necessary for workplace success, implying that the behaviour of individuals within the workplace is based on masculine expectations. Prescriptive gender stereotypes dictate how men and women should be (Heilman (2012: 123). They serve as norms that dictate the appropriate behaviour that men and women should have, and violating norms of gender appropriateness may lead to discrimination.

The combination of gender stereotypes and the gendered division of labour has inevitably led to a social hierarchy that determines the work men and women occupy and how much they are paid for the work (Acker, 2006: 450). With that in mind, it would be imperative to note that the gender division of labour is rooted in the white middle-class ideology of separate spheres (Kalev and Deutsch, 2018: 258). This ideology dictates the archaic patriarchal notion that men belong in the public sphere of society, whereas women belong in the domestic sphere as homemakers with limited power to make impactful decisions. One would note that even though society is advancing, and there are new technological advancements, women still remain the primary household caregiver, doing most of the unpaid domestic work and childcare. In professional settings, women remain at the margins, relegated to roles that align with gender biases and perceptions. This is largely because of the societal expectations and power imbalances between men and women. Gender stereotypes emerge within this context, reflecting individuals'

perceptions based on their knowledge of social roles, power, and the status quo. On a systemic level, gender stereotypes are reflected in the discrimination experienced by women within the workplace, religion, and the law. One of the factors that has led to the generalisation of men and women within society is gender socialisation, as individuals are more likely to categorise others based on gender-related perceptions and biases that begin at adolescence (Crespi, 2004: 2). There is a possibility that the social hierarchy that exists in broader society is reflected within NGOs, and the nature of NGOs creates an environment where paradoxes may exist.

2.1.2.2 Non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

In this research, the term NGOs will be used as an abbreviation for non-governmental organisations, and the meaning of NGOs has not been consistent because of the different natures and focuses of NGOs. It is important to distinguish the differences between the terms “NGOs”; “grassroots organisations”; “civil society”; and “social movements” (Habib and Taylor, 1999, Lewis, 2009). There is no standard or definitive definition of NGOs, making the characterisation of NGOs complex and nuanced. Stephenson (2005: 1) purports that grassroots organisations are locally organised groups that address issues that concern the community, and some NGOs are grassroots organisations, though not all of them. NGOs may participate in social movements. However, social movements are not centred on any organisation but address broader social concerns, such as human rights (Stephenson, 2005), whilst NGOs overlap with various sectors. Civil society is a term used to describe the inclusion of societal participation in governance (Stephenson, 2005: 1; Veltmeyer, 2005). NGOs are part of the civil society, and they are designed to respond to the concerns of the public that the government or the for-profit organisations have struggled to address (Nzimakwe, 2008, Veltmeyer, 2005: 89). The diverse nature and roles of NGOs, and their varying size in structures, hierarchies, ideologies, cultural background, and organisational culture means that the definition of NGOs is unclear (Marten, 2002). Given this complexity, NGOs can be defined as professionalised independent organisations dedicated to promoting social progress and transformation locally and internationally (Martens, 2002; Lewis, 2009). The following section will discuss the theoretical frameworks guiding this research and will highlight how feminist organisational literature explores the notions of discrimination within organisations.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The principles within black feminism and post-colonial feminism are central to exploring the gendered nature of NGOs. As a theoretical framework, black feminism emerged within the broader feminist movement, intending to spotlight the experiences of black women that were made invisible by mainstream feminism. Black feminism as a conceptual lens centre on black women's knowledge and experiences, offering insights into how race, class and gender simultaneously affect how black women are perceived in society (Collins, 1990: 541). One of the significant contributions of black feminism is that black women experience and possibly resist domination on multiple levels. These experiences highlight how power is reconfigured and negotiated within institutions. Several tenets of black feminism explore how women experience domination. To capture women's experiences within organisations, the principle of intersectionality will serve as a guiding framework for this research. Women hold multiple social identities based on factors outside of race, gender and class, and these identities intersect to shape women's experiences within NGOs (Lakhani and Scheeper, 2020).

Feminist organisational theories have indicated the need to approach organisations as gendered (Acker, 1990; Kanter, 1977). The gendered division of labour, where divisions of paid and unpaid labour and income inequality between men and women are created within organisational processes and practices (Acker, 1990: 140). In addition, cultural symbols of men and women focused on sexuality and emotions are reproduced within organisations. However, organisation theories describe organisations as gender-neutral, and gender relations are often neglected (Zucker, 1987: 443). Feminist organisational theory remains in the margins of organisation studies, resulting in minimal attention to how gender is reproduced in organisations. Nevertheless, feminist studies that have been conducted so far highlight that the gender hierarchy in organisations is maintained by arguments around women's emotions and sexuality that create systems of exploitation and control (Yasmin, 2015; Irefin *et al.*, 2012). The gender hierarchy is also reproduced by sexual harassment, the exclusion of childbearing women in the workplace, and the penalising or rewarding emotional management in the formal hierarchy (Acker, 1990: 152).

Black feminism and intersectionality provide a deeper understanding of the gendered nature of organisations by centralising black women and other identities that interact with organisational

processes and culture. Intersectionality is a multi-dimensional analysis of how power, discrimination and privilege empower and disempower marginalised groups (May 2015: 3). Crenshaw (1989: 31) analyses anti-discrimination and antiracist policies that affect black women within the workplace. Her analysis illustrates that discrimination against black women cannot be attributed to race or gender only; instead, discrimination also manifests through multifaceted factors of their identity. Crenshaw's (1989) analysis of anti-discrimination emphasises the importance of using intersectionality to explore the complex nature of marginalisation and discrimination. Organisational studies have implemented mainstream feminism to explain and address the gendered nature of organisations, focusing on women's sexuality and how it is reproduced. Still, they ignore the fundamental differences of race, ethnicity and class that create a multifaceted reality for black women and women of colour within organisations (Acker, 2006: 442; hooks, 1984: 97). Gender cannot be the sole category of analysis, as complex dynamics within organisations are influenced by other forms of inequalities; hence shifting the focus from gender to other social identities allows a meaningful exploration into how gender may be used to produce other inequalities (Rodriguez and Guenther, 2022: 3). The research seeks to use intersectionality to describe the lived experiences of women within NGOs, highlighting how identities interact with institutional processes and structures of organisations.

2.2.1 The Sisterhood Myth and the Boundaries of Sisterhood.

According to hooks (1986: 128), the sisterhood myth is the idealised notion that women share common experiences and are oppressed in the same way. The myth suggests that women can unite based on their gender, and their roles as sisters and mothers (Fouche, 1994: 78). The sisterhood myth offers simplistic notions about women's solidarity, and the effects of class and race on the different experiences of women. The inclusion of white women within a black feminist framework might appear to reinforce the sisterhood myth, but for the purpose of the development of sustainable feminism, it is important to this research to include them. The historical differences between white and black women indicate that the term sisterhood holds little to no meaning in South Africa. During apartheid, black women faced more difficulties than white women because of pass laws and migrant labour, and this led to a life that was qualitatively harder for them (Fouche, 1994: 85). In political movements, black women were at the forefront of protests and mass movement against apartheid laws, whilst white women's political movements excluded black women's needs and rights. Ogundipe-Leslie (2003)

expressed that the woman herself is another mountain on her back, where women do not always share sisterhood bonds because of race, class and sexuality differences. Theoretically, mainstream feminism reinforced the notion of the “Other”, where black women and women of colour were portrayed through colonial lenses by white feminist women. Feminist authors such as Simone De Beauvoir and Margaret Daly are prominent contributors to contemporary feminism, but the authors held ethnocentric and androcentric views, overlooking race and class differences among black women and women of colour, reinforcing the idea that women’s issues are the same (Simons, 1979: 386; 395).

The implementation of black feminism in this research whilst including the perspective of white women might appear to be incongruent, but it is important to include different perspectives. This research is located within a South African context and aims to highlight the viewpoints of South African women. The inclusion of white women within this research serves as a cross-cultural reference. According to hooks (1986: 133-134), sisterhood is an important component to the feminist movement, and instead of focusing on women’s differences and reinforcing them as the reason why there cannot be a sisterhood, acknowledging these differences and confronting sexist socialisation and racism among women ensures social justice. There are class and cultural differences among the respondents, and acknowledging these differences fosters dialogue and awareness.

In addition, this research will also implement postcolonial feminism to explore further the concepts of diversity, representation, and social change (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012: 573). As a framework, black feminism and intersectionality acknowledge how social identities interact with each other and within the broader institutional processes. However, the concepts are centred around the experiences of black women in the Global North, and they assume that women share universal perspectives and experiences of discrimination (Mishra, 2013: 1; Oyekan, 2014:8). In exploring women's experiences globally, subjectivity is essential for black women in the global North. African women do not share the same perspectives on race, gender, and class (De la Rey, 1997: 8). A postcolonial feminist perspective applies to this research, as it encompasses elements that explain how the history of South Africa may influence women’s contemporary realities in NGOs. Postcolonial feminism emerged from the critique of mainstream feminism as well, emphasising how the history of colonialism has created different contexts for African

women in how their work, lives and identity are related to gender, class, race, ethnicity and sexuality (Mishra, 2013: 131).

As explained by Acker (2006: 443), inequality within organisations is linked to society's fluid and changing politics, history and culture. South Africa's transition to a post-apartheid society also meant reconfiguring social identities. Shifts in dominance, power, and status have reconfigured social identity for South African groups. These changes are reflected within organisations (Booyesen, 2007: 1). During apartheid, white men were the dominant group in all societal institutions, with white women holding indirect power because of their race (Booyesen, 2007: 7). The labour market during apartheid was influenced by the apartheid laws that controlled social dynamics by separating people based on race and their roles in the community (Groenmeyer, 2011: 261). Groups were stereotyped based on race in dichotomous categories of productive/unproductive and male/female, with the white male population being placed at the top of the job hierarchy with high-earning jobs and better working conditions (Groenmeyer, 2011: 263). The South African labour market was entrenched within the apartheid system, and the intersections of race, class, and gender placed black women at the bottom of the hierarchy.

The transition to post-apartheid South Africa shifted black women from the margins to the centre, where development policies focused on empowering women and eradicating gender inequality. Postcolonial feminism serves as a guiding framework to explore how the social identities of South African women have transformed within NGOs within a post-apartheid context. Mainstream feminism perceives women in the global South as implicit victims of colonialism and apartheid who lack agency and cannot resist oppression (Mohanty *et al.*, 1991: 61; Dogra, 2011:335). Women's thoughts, knowledge, and experiences in the Global South are marginalised and excluded from the mainstream narrative of organisational studies. However, their perspective highlights how South African women construct their identities within the organisational space (Imas and Weston, 2011; 206). Postcolonial feminism emphasises the local experiences of women within NGOs, concentrating on how the location and the history of South African women intersect with their social identities. Black feminism and postcolonial feminism highlight women's narratives within the NGO sector in South Africa, contributing to organisational knowledge of the global South (Manning, 2021: 1215).

2.3 THE EMERGENCE OF GENDER STEREOTYPES

Gender is socially constructed, and it is perpetuated through education, culture, and media. Taking on a symbolic approach to gender, it is important to analyse the evolution of gender from a focus on differences among men and women to the exploration of gender identity beyond dichotomies of male/female to explore the dual presence of gender relations (Bruni and Gherardi, 2003: 24). Gender stereotypes emerge in varying contexts in and outside of the workplace. Existing literature has indicated that stereotypes have led to gender discrimination within organisations (Heilman and Eagly, 2008: 394; Heilman *et al.*, 2024). In a study by Moloto *et al.*, (2014), individuals within a South African higher education institution experienced and held stereotypes based on age, gender, and race. Before exploring the internal culture of NGOs, the following discussion will elaborate on the emergence of stereotypes and how they are reflected in organisations.

2.3.1 The emergence of gender stereotypes: culture

Culture shapes an individual's understanding of gender roles and responsibilities (Albertyn, 2009: 171). The essence of culture is maintained through the way gender roles are formed and valued. Women are viewed as the representation of the collective's identity, as they are expected to embody proper behaviour and clothing (Yuval-Davis, 1997: 55). Traditional gender roles are mainly enforced through women's sexual and reproductive capacity (Albertyn, 2009: 171). Culture has sustained the patriarchal ideology where men are viewed as the head of the household and women are subservient to men (Khuzwayo, 2016: 94). Culture is fluid and diverse, and its changes are not separate from the social, political, and economic conditions (Albertyn, 2009: 173). These changes challenge the orthodox values of culture, and the inclusion of women in organisations may lead to a transformation crisis. According to Booysen (2007: 1-2), the changes to South African society mean that cultural values are challenged, and it may present as a threat and loss to the previously dominant and privileged groups, and it may also present as an opportunity to gain status to those previously marginalised. Gender stereotypes may arise within this context, as women challenge the orthodox values women are expected to uphold in their culture, presenting a threat to men's position. Within organisations, women may be excluded from leadership roles and are expected to occupy roles that maintain their cultural role as subservient and exploitative (Khuzwayo, 2016: 94).

2.3.2 Power dynamics and social inequality

The power imbalances and inequality in South African society may cause gender inequality in the workplace. South Africa has undergone a political and economic transformation after apartheid and colonialism. This led to a shift in dominance, power, and status (Booyesen, 2007: 1). Racial and gender hierarchies were embedded in the apartheid system, and they infiltrated the workplace where white men occupied managerial and leadership positions (Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010: 289). White women experienced privileges because of their race but were still limited to typical female jobs such as secretary and nursing. Black men were mainly employed in unskilled and low-paying jobs, whilst African women were confined to domestic work (Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010: 290). The end of apartheid led to the transformation of the workplace, as power was transferred from white individuals to black individuals, changing the power within social identities of South African social groups. Although white and black men in organisations experience conflict based on racial hierarchies, white and black women have different organisational experiences. White women have better career progression and mobility, but they may be constrained by gender, whereas black women experience both gender and racial discrimination (Booyesen and Nkomo, 2010). Power imbalances between men and women along racial and gender lines may cause negative stereotypes, perceptions and generalisations that are more likely to harm women's experience in organisations, particularly black women. The emergence of gender discrimination within organisations is reflected in the persistence of gender bias and perceptions that affect women in various ways. The following discussion will explain the reproduction of gender stereotypes within organisations and their impact on organisational processes and structures.

2.3.4 Controlling Images

Furthermore, the portrayal of women in media, society, and political structures also lead to the emergence of stereotypes. Collins (2000: 73) explores the portrayal of African American women in the media, highlighting how controlling images have been used to subordinate women and justify their oppression. Controlling images portray women through a stereotypical lens, and in the context of Collins' (2000) work, African American women are portrayed through the stereotypical Jezebels, the Mammy, Welfare Mothers, and the Strong Black Woman (SBW). The use of controlling images normalises the oppression of women, making discrimination and

sexism appear to be an everyday reality. According to Motsaathebe (2018: 386-389), the portrayal of South African women in popular films such as *Tsotsi* and *Jerusalema* represents the traditional expectations of women where they are limited to the home, and exploited for their labour, imitating the racial and gendered stereotyping of black women during apartheid. In addition, Pilane and Iqani (2016) studied the images of black South African women in a popular magazine and revealed that the portrayal of black women reflected the racial, patriarchal, and neo-liberal ideals, where black women were presented as valuable based on their proximity to white ideals. The controlling images of South African women may lead to stereotypes as the exposure to stereotypical black characters in film and media may lead to perceptions that reflect the racial and gendered past of South Africa.

2.4 GENDER DISCRIMINATION WITHIN THE WORKPLACE

Studies have explored gender discrimination in the workplace in various forms, such as promotion, hiring, and wages (Gorman, 2005; Olson and Becker, 1983). It is evident that gender discrimination occurs in the workplace, but it is crucial to understand why it happens in the first place. According to Ridgeway and England (2007: 193), cultural beliefs are the primary cause of gender discrimination, whereas organisational structures and practices are secondary causes (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011). Organisational structures and policies have formal rules that determine the behaviour of employees. According to Wicks and Bradshaw (2002: 141), despite their visibility and formality, these rules are culturally negotiated, and gender is usually hidden in these aspects. The formal rules of an organisation, particularly NGOs, create an image of rationality, objectivity, and equity, making them socially desirable and creating the assumption that these rules determine individual behaviour. However, cultural influences such as gender stereotypes are overlooked (Wicks and Bradshaw, 2002). Gender discrimination and stereotypes are interrelated concepts because discrimination within the workplace is derived from gender stereotypes that dictate women's roles and behaviours in society (Heilman et al., 2024: 169). Although it is important to analyse how cultural beliefs influence gender discrimination, the interactions between employees in the organisation influence and reinforce existing gender ideology.

2.4.1 The effects of gender discrimination within the workplace

The gendered phenomena within organisations, including NGOs, may reflect the inequality within South Africa. According to Jakimow (2012: 215), organisations are an important part of society, and the external environment influences the internal conditions of organisations and how the norms and behaviours of employees affect the internal environment within organisations. As discussed above, culture and social inequality in South Africa may affect an individual's workplace experience despite the government's interventions and measures to ensure gender equality and non-discriminatory practices. The following discussion will focus on how gender inequality within organisations has unexpected consequences on women's experiences and behaviours, focusing on expectations, norms and the organisational culture.

2.4.2 "The Ideal Worker Norm" and its implications in organisations

The ideal worker norm is an organisational cultural mechanism that perpetuates gender stereotypes. Gender inequality is reproduced in the workplace through the ideal worker norm. The ideal worker norm is the portrayal of an employee who is dedicated to work and the workplace and has no competing demands outside the workplace (Williams, 2006). Within the context of NGOs, the ideal worker is one that is passionate, purpose driven, and entrepreneurial (White, n.d: 1). The ideal worker purportedly has no gender, but upon closer inspection, the traits associated with the ideal worker are the masculine traits of competitiveness, heroism, power, and individualism (Rao and Kelleher, 2002; Kalev and Deutsch, 2018: 261). This is related to the prescriptive stereotypes described above, as women's failure to meet the ideal worker norm may lead to social penalties (Heilman et al., 2024: 169). Within the South African context, the ideal worker is associated with the apartheid history of South Africa where the ideal worker is constructed through racial lens and white men dominated the workplace based on patriarchal notions (Jaga *et al.*, 2017: 431). Affirmative action policies have led to the numerical presence of black men and women within South African organisations, but limited attention has been paid to the norms that are centred on the gendered division of labour, where women juggle the demands of work, family, and the household (Dancaster, 2008: 1). The ideal worker is a committed and rational individual who has limited demands outside of the workplace, and a woman's failure to meet this criterion may lead to discriminatory and exclusionary behaviour, affecting their performance and experiences.

2.4.3 “Think Manager, Think Male” stereotype in organisations.

Gender stereotypes are also reproduced within the workplace in terms of leadership abilities. Schein (1975) examined the image and attributes of middle managers in the USA and discovered that the perception of a successful manager and leader was held more by men than by women, and further research revealed that a successful manager was described as male (Schein *et al.*, 1996; Sczesny, 2003). The “Think manager, think male” phenomenon is a psychological barrier to women’s career mobility as it can cause bias against women in the training, selection, and recruitment process (Schein *et al.*, 1996: 34). Women are not associated with masculine characteristics that are deemed necessary for a successful manager and the success of an organisation. South African census studies have revealed that the conditions of the South African labour market are more conducive for men than women, as 69.6 percent of managerial positions are occupied by men while women occupy 33.1 per cent (Statistics South Africa, 2021: 1). In a study of the intersection of the race and gender with the “think manager, think male” stereotype, Booysen and Nkomo (2010: 18-20), black men and white men were revealed to hold the stereotype, as they believed that men had the characteristics of a successful manager. Although the “think manager, think male” norm is associated with masculine traits, cultural orientation also influences this stereotype. Manwa (2002: 72) and Steady (2007: 147) concludes that although men and women possess both male and female attributes in management, cultural orientation plays a significant role in the perception of female employees because it is part of the everyday routine and norms of individuals, where power relations may maintain unequal social structures. Within the workplace, organisational stereotypes discussed above may lead to gender inequality and discrimination, which has various effects.

2.4.4 Gender bias

Gender stereotypes within the workplace are most likely a result of conscious and unconscious gender bias (Ryan, 2023: 1). Unconscious gender bias occurs when an individual is aware of gender inequality and rejects stereotypes but still makes decisions based on gender stereotypes (Madsen and Andrade, 2018: 62). Unconscious gender bias is evident in the recruitment, hiring, and training process, and it has affected women’s inclusion within the workplace. As mentioned above, gender stereotypes result from beliefs and generalisations shared about how men and women should be, and they function as “cognitive shortcuts” in decision-making in evaluating

individuals and their performance within the workplace (Correll, 2017: 727). Gender bias within South African organisations may lead to lower levels of productivity, harassment, and a higher rate of employee turnover (Chirwa and Lukamba, 2016: 34). Individuals rely on their beliefs and perceptions to make decisions when there is not enough information. Both men and women are affected by unconscious gender bias, but women are far more disadvantaged.

2.4.5 The Female Fear Factory: Power and stereotype threats

The experiences of African women within the workplace can be examined under the female fear factory, a term popularised by Pumla Dineo Gqola. Gqola (2021: 78-79) defines female fear factory as a manufacture of female fear using tools of violence. Rape, murder, and the threat of violence are tactics used to keep women in line. Fear is a social construct, used to control and remind women that their power can be violently taken away. According to Gqola (2021: 80), patriarchy has socialised women into being desensitised to the conditions that create female fear. Within NGO context, male-dominated workplaces and organisations that are not gender sensitive may manufacture female fear through power tactics that devalue and minimise women's achievements and experiences. Women's conscious awareness of power inequalities and discrimination may lead to internalised power threats. Power exists in a dynamic state, and in an organisation, it may operate precariously, as anyone, including those who are powerless, can climb the organisational ladder (Scheepers *et al.*, 2015: 1). This may present a threat to those in power and a challenge to powerless individuals (Jordan *et al.*, 2011: 1). The fear of losing power can affect the well-being and behaviour of women in an organisation, as the awareness of power dynamics and negative stereotypes can affect their perception of their role and success within the organisation (Feenstra *et al.*, 2020: 3). According to Spencer *et al.*, (2016: 416) and Tabassum and Nayak, 2021: 200), stereotype threats exist when an individual is aware of negative stereotypes associated with their group, and the fear of judgement may lead to poor performance and affect the wellbeing of an individual. Women may have a hard time believing that they are worthy of their success and achievements, leading to a phenomenon called impostor syndrome.

2.4.6 Impostor syndrome

Impostor syndrome occurs when individuals cannot internalise their objective success because they believe they earned their achievements through luck (Feenstra *et al.*, 2020; Ryan, 2022; Clance and Imes, 1978). Research has discussed this phenomenon at an individual level,

discussing its effects on the well-being of individuals and their careers and highlighting interventions and methods to help individuals, especially women, overcome (Chandra *et al.*, 2019; Bravata *et al.*, 2019; McGregor *et al.*, 2008). In exploring the influence of impostor syndrome on assertiveness of South African female professionals, Nazakwe-Masiya *et al.*, (2017: 53) explained that the phenomenon was significantly found in women, and lowered women's assertiveness within the workplace. However, recent literature highlights the importance of understanding the causes of impostor syndrome by shifting from an individual level to framing it at a structural level, as external forces may lead to impostor syndrome (Cohen and McConnell, 2019; Feenstra *et al.*, 2022; Ryan, 2022). Gender discrimination is among these factors, as the experiences of gender bias and stereotypes may highlight inequality within an organisation, making women doubt themselves and their capabilities (Feenstra *et al.*, 2020: 3). Women may experience discrimination more subtly in the form of criticism and having their contributions overlooked, leading to low self-worth which can make women undermine their achievements (Holleran *et al.*, 2021; Lyness and Thompson, 2000).

2.4.7 Glass ceiling and glass cliff phenomenon

Women who have experienced gender bias within the workplace may experience the “glass cliff” and the “glass ceiling” effect. These phenomena have been used to highlight the challenges women experience in the workplace because of the inclusion of women within organisations without challenging the everyday habits and routines that exist within the organisational culture. The “glass ceiling” is a metaphor that highlights the under-representation of women in leadership and the conditions under which women are appointed to their positions (Ryan, 2023: 2; Sabharwal, 2015). It is important to explore the experiences of women when they are appointed to leadership positions, and so far, studies have highlighted that women continue to face gender discrimination despite attaining leadership positions (Heilman, 2001: 658; Haile *et al.*, 2016). The achievement of breaking the glass ceiling is undermined by women's negative experiences where they are perceived less favourably, receive less support, and receive greater criticism and scrutiny. As women achieve more in the workplace, the “goal post” shifts, meaning the evaluation criteria change, and women are evaluated under heavy criteria (Correll, 2017: 730). Women are held to higher standards, and unless they are known for their competence, which is also scrutinised, they are more likely to be stereotyped (Correll, 2017).

Once women break the glass ceiling, they are more susceptible to the glass cliff phenomenon. The glass cliff phenomenon occurs when women are appointed to leadership positions under circumstances where the company is experiencing prolonged poor performance (Stewart, 2018: 1; Bruckmuller *et al.*, 2014). As stated by Ryan (2023: 3), the glass cliff is a form of gender discrimination as women are put under additional stress and scrutiny in precarious situations where the risk of failure is perceived to be higher because of their leadership. As women experience several challenges under these conditions, gender stereotypes are more likely to be reinforced, affecting women's presence and performance within organisations.

2.4.8 Language and communication

Language and communication are critical components of organisational culture. The values and beliefs of an organisation are conveyed through words, phrases, and communication styles (Randlesome, 2002; Bechan and Visser, 2005). As discussed, an organisation's culture is a pool of cultures in society, and the organisational culture is a culturally diverse space. In South Africa, the existence of multiple cultures and languages represents cultural diversity that is reflected in organisations. In this scenario, language is crucial in the organisational structure, decision-making process and behaviour. It also plays a role in how the norms and values of the organisation are perceived by employees (Bechan and Visser, 2005: 67). Cultural differences are expressed through language and communication styles, creating different levels of meaning among employees. Communication can be explicit or implicit, not perceived in a neutral state but in the organisation's context. The context in which language is conveyed has an impact on how it is understood, as hidden norms and power dynamics play a role in how information is understood by employees (Hoogervorst *et al.*, 2004: 289).

Men and women have different approaches to communication styles, and stereotypes play a role in how women are perceived in terms of their communication styles. Briton and Hall (1995) discuss the beliefs about female and male nonverbal communication, and they highlight that the perceived differences between men and women are evident in the perceived gender differences in communication styles. The belief that women are softer, emotional, gentle, and sensitive to others implies that women are more effective in sending verbal and non-verbal messages and can decode emotions and feelings from those around them, whereas men are regarded as logical, loud, and task-oriented, making them poor and aggressive communicators (Kramer 1977; Briton

and Hall, 1995: 90). Gender stereotypes influence how communication styles are perceived, and there is a possibility that conflict may arise if women are found to violate what is expected of them. The following section will discuss the nature of NGOs within South Africa and investigate how gender is reproduced and reconfigured within NGOs.

2.5 THE EMERGENCE OF NGOs IN SOUTH AFRICA

The history of NGOs in South Africa is nuanced, as there were NGOs that had the support of the apartheid regime and anti-apartheid NGOs (Habib and Taylor, 1999: 74). As the political and economic environment of the South African government changed, the function of NGOs also changed. The political environment became more liberal, but the apartheid state did not offer any services to South Africa's black population, which gave rise to anti-apartheid NGOs (Mueller-Hirth, 2010: 52). As stated by Heinrich, (2004: 4) and Pieterse (1997), different types of anti-apartheid NGOs existed at this time, but they were all linked by their struggle for non-racial democracy and inclusion of all stakeholders in development. The history of South African NGOs was "oppositional mode" as they were more political and accountable to the liberation movements (Walter 1993, cited in Pieterse 1997).

The dismantling of the apartheid regime caused an identity crisis within the NGO sector. NGOs were urged to focus on human development instead of being over-politicised, meaning they had to shift to "developmental mode" (Walter, 1993 cited in Pieterse, 1997: 158). NGOs experienced an identity crisis during South Africa's transition to a democratic state and in the immediate post-apartheid era. Furthermore, there was an influx of knowledge and funds from European states, which changed the discourse of what NGOs are capable of. The pressure from financial donors in the face of the global financial crisis has led to NGOs adopting a technocratic and bureaucratic approach to development (Matthews, 2017: 8; Lakhani and Scheepers, 2017). NGOs become dependent on their donors for funding, and as the NGO sector becomes more competitive, it becomes difficult for NGOs to maintain a commitment to their core values. NGOs preserve the status quo instead of challenging the inequalities in and outside their organisation (Engelbrecht et al., 2016; Lakhani and Scheepers: 2020: 119). Power imbalances exist in this dynamic, and the bureaucratisation of NGOs means that an individual has more power and control over another. The concepts of bureaucratisation are neutral, technical, and non-political, meaning that gender bias and discrimination may be perpetuated under a patriarchal environment

that is deemed to be neutral (Tremblay, 1999: 75; Gillespie *et al.*, 2019). The intersection of patriarchy and bureaucracy has led to the double oppression of women, as they may be excluded from participating in organisations as equals, and their behaviour is controlled by technical rules in the organisation (Ramsay and Parker, 1992: 259).

2.5.2 “NGO-ization”: The professionalisation of NGOs and its impact on organisational culture

The influence of the state, the donor community, and global crises has led to the formalisation of the NGO sector, also known as “NGO-ization”. (Roy, 2015). NGOs operate within a strict legal framework; hence, they adopt a hybrid organisational model that allows them to combine grassroots social movement with a formal organisational structure that contains hierarchies (Lakhani and Scheeper, 2020: 122). Since NGOs have become more professional, they employ individuals who have technical skills, sidelining individuals who have more experience and knowledge of the communities they address (Matthews, 2017: 8). Capitalism and the commitment to their donors have led to a loss of autonomy and a shift in internal structures, where employers are more focused on meeting the expectations of their donors, not their community or the other employees within the organisation (Heinrich, 2001; Lakhani and Scheeper, 2020; Gillespie *et al.*, 2019). Capitalism, patriarchy, and bureaucracy are related concepts, as patriarchy and capitalism prevent access to resources and power within an organisation, and bureaucratic structures create an additional barrier to women’s access to authority.

The technical and bureaucratic approach to NGOs is facilitated by the interaction between power, race, and gender. NGOs are known for being altruistic organisations that address global norms and inequalities. However, there is tension between the liberal nature of NGOs and their organisational culture (Lokot, 2021: 2). The formal policies and programmes of NGOs may appear neutral, but they marginalise and exclude women from the narrative. This is caused by the “deep structure” of organisations, meaning the unquestioned values, history, culture, and practices that may perpetuate gender inequality (Rao and Kelleher, 2002: 9). The deep structure of NGOs is characterised by exclusionary power, the focus on the individual, the split between work and family, and the singular focus on quantifiable results instead of the complexities of the organisation (Rao and Kelleher, 2002: 10).

2.5.3 The “form trap” and its consequences for NGO organisational culture

The professionalisation of NGOs also influences the subjective experiences of employees within the organisation. As NGOs become more professional and implement policies that advocate for equality and innovation, employees’ experiences within the organisation may differ. The form trap exists within organisations when there is an emphasis on efficiency equality, neglecting the reality of the employees (Nilsson and Paddock, 2014: 7). There is a difference between the appearance of the organisation and its lived-in reality. As NGOs drift their focus away from their core values, their commitment to bureaucracy leads to a performative practice, where employees are committed to saying and doing the right things because senior management and donors have dictated what is right. This influences employees’ subjective experiences, as they may work in an environment where their norms and beliefs are unchallenged (Lakhani and Scheeper, 2020: 124). The shift from their mission and core values is also reflected in the form-trap, and NGOs find themselves focusing on their survival in a challenging economic environment. The organisational culture of NGOs is affected, and employees operate in an everyday reality that may not address the effects of power on the relations between employees, donors, and the rest of civil society.

2.5.4 The organisational culture of NGOs

Organisations such as NGOs are part of the social structures that reinforce or challenge the rules set within institutions of society. Institutions have rules that specify how resources, tasks, and responsibilities are allocated in society. Although they are different across cultures and continents, they are embedded in social hierarchies of gender, class, and ethnicity (Rao and Kelleher, 2002: 7). Gender relations are part of institutional norms, and they are shaped by the household and family formations where the man is seen as the head of the household and women as subservient to the head of the household (Khuzwayo, 2016: 94). NGOs are considered neutral and rational structures with an organisational system rooted in efficiency and logic. However, they are not neutral as they are the microcosms of their social context (Rao and Kelleher, 2002: 8). The gender inequality in social institutions manifests in organisations such as NGOs. Gender norms and stereotypes are part of hidden gender biases, and it is important to explore whether they play a role in the participation of women in NGOs, which are highly viewed as progressive development structures.

Organisational culture is a taken-for-granted reality where identities and organisational dynamics are underexplored. Hearn (2003) and Aaltio-Marjosola (1994) explain that organisational culture is perceived to be gender-neutral, where masculine behaviour patterns, beliefs, and symbols are reproduced and assumed to be non-problematic. This research acknowledges the existence of internal and external factors that influence organisational culture. However, this research's lens of focus is the role of gender norms and dynamics, taking on a gendered approach to the organisational culture of NGOs. Organisational culture is not a monolith; it overlaps other cultures in existence. The perception of organisations as binary, where culture is characterised as masculine or feminine, diminishes the existence of competing realities where different attitudes and beliefs exist. (Mills, 2003). Exploring the multiple realities that exist in organisations from a gender-based perspective reveals how the culture of organisations can create and perpetuate or eliminate gender discrimination (Wicks and Bradshaw, 2003: 140).

2.5.6 Power and Organisational Culture

This research focuses on exclusionary power and its effects on organisational culture. Institutional power is historically male-orientated, and in organisations, the existence of a bureaucratic hierarchy means that an individual is subordinate to another based on their roles (Ferguson, 1984), cited in (Gillespie *et al.*, 2019: 2). As highlighted in the discussion of the ideal worker norm, male individuals usually hold most of the power within NGOs whilst women are excluded. Organisations' exclusionary power exists in three forms: traditional, agenda and hidden power. (Rao and Kelleher, 2002: 11). Traditional power is the power an individual holds to make decisions, and this usually lies within senior management. Agenda power is the power to decide organisational discourse about what an organisation can consider and talk about. In this case, this power possibly lies with senior management, the state, and financial donors. The form of power that is the focus of this research is hidden power, which shapes individuals' cognition, perceptions, and preferences. These power relations can create structural inequalities that may exclude alternative voices that do not align with the organisation's core values (Rao and Kelleher, 2002).

2.6 THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF GENDER IN NGOS

The previous section has analysed the organisational culture of NGOs, highlighting the consequences of the professionalisation of NGOs on their organisational culture. This section will discuss the existence of gender dynamics within NGOs, and how gender norms have been established within the broader organisational culture. Since the Beijing Conference in 1995, resources and initiatives have contributed to the shifts and transformation of gender equality, and donor funding has heightened its focus on gender equality. In response, NGOs have also committed to transforming their internal structures, but different contexts have led to different responses to these changes. Their prominent focus on gender mainstreaming has highlighted the commitment to gender equality within NGOs. Gender mainstreaming is a strategic policy the development sector adopts to achieve gender equality. Gender mainstreaming focuses on integrating gender equality in policies, programmes, and projects, seeking to include the perspectives of men and women in development (Monday, 2018: 39). However, there is a gap between theory and practice. Various factors influence NGOs' challenges in transforming their organisational culture. NGOs exist within a patriarchal social structure, and the inclusion of women within NGOs has been a technical approach, usually focused on increasing the numbers of women instead of addressing how power, hierarchy, and gender affect the everyday lives of men and women (Gillespie *et al.*, 2019, Lokot, 2021: 1). NGOs have been accused of implementing gender policies as part of a checklist, to appear as gender inclusive and progressive. Although gender mainstreaming has been adopted by several developmental NGOs, its establishment within South African NGOs has been contested.

2.6.2 The perception of gender mainstreaming among NGO practitioners in South Africa

The implementation of gender mainstreaming within NGOs in South Africa has been met with mixed perceptions. The effort to achieve gender equality by implementing gender mainstreaming has increased donor funding and heightened the visibility of women's issues. However, gender mainstreaming has been criticised by feminists as being too technical and over-politicised, diffusing the original goals of gender equality (Lokot, 2021; Gillespie *et al.*, 2019; Monday, 2018). In a study by Tiessen (2007), the failure of gender mainstreaming within NGOs was attributed to a patriarchal culture that affected the perception of female staff members within

NGOs. In South Africa, gender mainstreaming is not a popular concept, but it has been implemented in policy and organisations. The mainstreaming of gender in South Africa was the incorporation of gender inequality into the government, and the lack of support and funds led to the failure of mainstreaming in South Africa. In a study of the perceptions of gender mainstreaming by Mannell (2012), gender mainstreaming has been described as a “bad word” in South Africa. There are several criticisms of gender mainstreaming that are centred around the history of South Africa. Although NGOs may understand gender and the importance of advocating for women’s rights, the focus on gender may be deemed exclusionary of other inequalities that affect people in South Africa, affecting its perception and implementation within NGOs (Mannell, 2012). The success and limitations of gender mainstreaming within South African NGOs are nuanced, and it is essential to highlight the experiences and opinions of NGO staff members that may paint a different image from what has been studied so far.

2.6.3 Sexual harassment and violence within the NGO sector: #AidToo

In February 2018, a news article from the Times of London revealed that Oxfam workers were responsible for the sexual misconduct of Haitian locals after the 2010 Haiti earthquake, leading to several publications and exposés on the severity of sexual harassment and abuse within the NGO sector (Perez-Pena, 2018: 1). In the wake of the #MeToo movement, an independent news organisation, Devex popularised the #AidToo movement, to raise awareness of the rampant sexual violence and corruption in the NGO sector (Cornish, 2021: 1). A 2002 report by UNHCR and Save the Children UK examined the sexual exploitation of children in refugee camps, and this report revealed that the perpetrators were among the UN peacekeepers and teachers sent to protect and serve vulnerable groups (Levin, 2003). These incidents of corruption and sexual violence towards beneficiaries allow us to question the internal culture of NGOs and whether employees exhibit the same behaviour within their structures.

The case of Kathryn Bolkovac is an example of the existence of sex trafficking within the NGO sector. She was fired for attempting to expose the sex trafficking committed by UN Peacekeepers and the United Nations International Police Task Force (ITPF) (Prugl and Thompson, 2013). In this case, it is evident that the organisation’s hierarchy, which had men in the highest positions of power, prevented her from taking this case further. There is an unequal power dynamic because of the structural inequality between NGO staff members and the vulnerable members of the

community. As a result, most of these cases go unreported, affecting community members and NGO workers. According to Aziz (2018: 1), NGOs exist in a space where the priority is to protect the organisations instead of the victims of sexual harassment. If NGOs prioritise their image over their internal organisational environment, it can have severe consequences on how issues of sexual harassment and violence are dealt with within the organisation.

There are reports and research studies that discuss issues of sexual harassment and violence against female NGO workers (Humanitarian Women's Network (HWN), 2016; McEvoy, 2023; Nobert, 2017). Female aid workers have reported receiving unwanted sexual advances from male colleagues who are usually in higher positions. Most victims do not report these cases within their organisation due to the fear of repercussions. Globally, women experience discrimination and sexual harassment, but it is on a different scale for women in Africa. The power imbalance between the global North and South plays a significant role in this discourse, as historically marginalised individuals are excluded from the conversation around gender-based violence within the NGO sector. In articles published by African Feminism, Kagumire (2018) and Tsegaye (2018) explain the microaggressions and the experiences of African women in the NGO space, where the lack of representation of African women leaders has led to a poor narrative of the experiences of African women in and out of the NGO space.

2.6.4 The reproduction of gender inequalities within NGOs.

Although limited, there have been discussions on the reproduction of gender inequalities within NGOs. In South Africa, women hold at least 15-20 per cent of the Director positions within NGOs, and women are predominantly found in administrative and junior positions (Marston, 2013: 1). Gender issues within NGOs are perceived to be invisible because NGOs perceived themselves to be gender neutral (Dema, 2008: 444). In addition, Dema (2008) also concludes that the discourse around gender norms is in transition and that there are tensions involved in that. Gender dynamics within NGOs are experienced explicitly, meaning that the perception of NGOs as gender neutral is challenged. Fontes-Marx et al., (2018: 7) highlights the inconsistency in gendered knowledge within NGOs because gendered power relations are treated as an issue of representation among women only and biological differences. However, gendered power relations operate implicitly, making it impossible for individuals to be aware of them and creating a paradoxical reality where traditional gendered roles and norms affect their

organisational culture (Fontes-Marx *et al.*, 2018; Dema, 2008). These studies highlight the complex nature of gender dynamics within NGOs where explicit and implicit norms are at play, necessitating further exploration into the ways gender norms intersect with organisational culture and practices.

CHAPTER 3: DATA ANALYSIS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this research was to explore whether gender dynamics play a role in the experiences of female NGO employees in Makhanda. The dynamics under exploration are societal norms and stereotypes, and the goal of this research was to understand whether these gender dynamics interlock with other aspects of identity, such as race, class, and age, influencing the roles and practices of the experiences of women NGO employees. The main contribution of this research is that NGO employees perceive and experience gender in ways that indicate the need to approach research beyond binary forms of inquiry.

Williams (2007: 654-655) explains how the future of work is constructed through binary hierarchical thought, where organisations are viewed through the lens of formal/informal, bureaucratic/post-bureaucratic. Within this concept of gender, moving beyond binary thinking means questioning the discourse that exists around gender construction, moving away from simplified conclusions and dichotomous approaches to the complex nature of gender and organisations (Tsao, 2020: 8, Bateson, 2020: 1). Approaching NGOs as complex systems means acknowledging their history, where the transitions within post-apartheid South Africa introduced its challenges surrounding formalisation, poor donor funding, and neoliberal influences (Sakue-Collins, 2021: 978; Mlambo *et al.*, 2021: 186-188). Feminist organisational literature centred around NGOs concluded that these challenges inform the organisational culture and processes, and these exist within a patriarchal and capitalist system where power relationships are entrenched (Acker, 2006; Scheepers and Lakhani, 2020: 123). Instead of analysing concepts of gender within the patterns of masculine/feminine, male/female, and patriarchy/gender, this research embraces gender perspectives that illustrate the complex reality of the NGO staff members, where gender inequality is experienced in multiple contradictory ways that highlight progress and regression, influenced by intersecting identities and multiple perspectives. The findings also reveal that patriarchy is not all-encompassing within NGOs, as the majority presence of women indicates progress, but it also highlights that there are norms, beliefs, and practices that are ingrained within organisational structures.

Six respondents from three NGOs were interviewed. Four of the respondents are employed within education NGOs, and two of them are part of an agriculture NGO. The education NGOs

address education inequality, whilst the agriculture NGO supports rural communities through agricultural projects. One of the education NGOs, referred to as ENG2, is women-led, with a female director and an all-female team. The other education NGO (ENG1) is predominantly women, with only eight male staff members out of 29 employees. The agricultural NGO has five permanent employees and only two male staff members. The perceptions of gender discrimination and dynamics among the staff members are influenced by the complex subject positions of the various respondents, highlighted by their biographies below:

- Katie is a black woman in her 30s, and she has been employed with Education NGO 1 (ENG1) for 11 years. She is an Administration and Advocacy Manager.
- Amelia is a white woman in her 30s, employed within Education NGO 1 for seven years. She is the Director of a school under the NGO.
- Heidi is a coloured woman employed within Education NGO 2 (ENG2) for eight years. She is the Office Manager.
- Grace is a black woman in her 30s, employed within an agriculture NGO(ANGO) for six years. She is the Program Officer.
- Charlie is a black woman in her 30s, employed within an agriculture NGO for nine years. She is a Programs Manager and part of the senior Management team.
- Jackie is a white woman in her 50s, employed within Education NGO2. She has been in the NGO space for 38 years, and she is currently a Project Manager in Education NGO2 and Director of an NGO connected to a local game reserve.

3.2 WOMEN'S PERCEPTION OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION WITHIN NGOS

3.2.1 Perceptions of gender discrimination

To explore the nuanced reality of NGO staff members, the intersectional framework was important as it revealed how perceptions of gender are correlated with social identities of age and race, and they are also influenced by the social status of the respondents, such as their employment position. These variables are not viewed individually, but they are approached through an interlocking system that influences the perception of gender dynamics within NGOs. Prior studies of intersectionality and organisational studies by Holvino (2010: 262; Rodriguez *et*

al., 2016: 5) report that the subjective experiences of individuals within NGOs should be explored as being interconnected with dominant organisational discourse and power dynamics. This study reveals the dominating discourse on gender within organisations in Makhanda, and highlights local perspectives on the gendered nature of Makhanda NGOs. The findings also show that women do not experience patriarchal domination equally; hence, their experience and response to it are based on their values, cultural context, power, and organisational structure (Collins, 1990: 545). The findings suggest that in transitional times, where society's shifts in political, social, and economic structures imply that gender discrimination is perceived and experienced subtly.

According to Mercat-Burns (2018: 45), discrimination is either overt or a result of unconscious bias, and it is experienced in hidden and subtle ways. Two of the respondents offered a definition of what they perceive gender discrimination to be, and Charlie describes gender discrimination explicitly, defining it as "One being discriminated against or prevented from taking up certain roles because of their gender". Similarly, Grace corresponds with this perception, and both of their perceptions of gender discrimination are attributed to their experiences as women working within the same NGO. The perception of gender discrimination by the respondents is consistent with the findings of Steyn and Jackson (2015: 743), in which a smaller percentage of female employees within South African organisations understudy perceived discrimination by gender. In this research, only two respondents explained gender discrimination by focusing on gender, excluding other factors. In contrast, four respondents highlighted the existence of gender discrimination in subtle and hidden ways, highlighting indifference and neutrality. These findings indicate the multiple perspectives that influence the perception of gender discrimination, where gender is perceived in subtle and hidden ways, and where various factors affect the perception and experience of gender within organisations.

Within the context of black feminism, black women face forms of discrimination that are based on race, gender, and class. The findings in this research indicate that the experiences of the respondents do not entirely fit into the traditional narrative of gender discrimination which states that discrimination is experienced through the gender pay gap, limited representation of women, and barriers to career advancement (Gorman, 2005: 722; England, 2006). The experiences of the women understudy are unique to their location and subjectivity, and their insights offer an

understanding of the complexities involved. The perceptions shared by the respondents reflect the intersections of race, class and gender, which are fundamental to discussions of discrimination. As explained by black and postcolonial feminist scholars such as Mohanty (2003: 52) and Collins (1986: 515), it is important to recognise the unique privileges and struggles of NGO women within South Africa.

3.2.2 Gender blindness/neutrality in NGOs and its impact on the perception of gender discrimination

Four of the respondents did not perceive gender discrimination in the traditional sense, as they did not indicate whether gender played a role in their work experience within NGOs. All four respondents hold similar views that gender discrimination does not exist in their respective organisations, meaning they had no perception of it in their organisational context. Amelia, employed in ENG1, offers her perception of gender discrimination, stating that “I don’t feel that there is actually any gender inequality; we are always looking for the best person”. This sentiment was also held by Heidi, who also went on to add, “But for me, we are all equal...I don’t see the gender in it; it’s just basically what you bring to the table”. The common expression among the four respondents is that they are gender blind, meaning that they do not believe that gender has any role in their experiences within the organisations. Gender blindness is the inability to perceive gender differences between men and women (European Institute for Gender Inequality, 2023: 1). It seems possible that the gender blindness of the respondents is attributed to the depoliticisation of NGOs. As discussed in Chapter Two, NGOs were highly politicised during apartheid, and they addressed racial and gender inequalities overtly. However, as pointed out by Pieterse (1997: 158), NGOs expanded their development focus post-apartheid, leading to their depoliticisation and focus on formalising their structures and service delivery. The nature of the NGOs under study is focused on service delivery to address inequalities that affect the local community. The gender blindness of the respondents is linked to the shifts in the nature of NGOs, with the proliferation of NGOs that address community needs instead of engaging with political factors that contribute to inequality. Furthermore, the lack of awareness of gender inequalities also highlights how neoliberal ideologies and agendas have influenced the professionalisation of NGOs, and as indicated by Murdock (2003: 134), this has led to NGOs renouncing their antagonistic nature against structural inequalities.

3.2.3 Meritocracy

Another finding that stands out from the respondents' feedback is that meritocracy takes precedence over how they should act within the organisation. The notion of meritocracy states that individuals have equal access to opportunities and success despite their race, gender and class (Castilla and Bernard, 2010: 543). The four respondents feel that skills, values, and integrity make an individual the best fit for their organisations, and according to Amelia, "they are not looking to fulfil any diversity requirements". As explained by Castilla (2008: 1480) and Kalev *et al.* (2006: 598), the aim of a merit-based system centred on affirmative action and performance-based evaluations is to reduce gender inequality and discrimination in the workplace, and these perceptions by the respondents may lead one to believe that it is achievable, as they do not see gender.

However, these findings cannot be taken at face value, as gender inequality and discrimination may be concealed and practised unintentionally within organisations. Castillo and Bernard (2010: 545-546) describe this as the paradox of meritocracy, where the implementation of a merit-based system may actually lead to increased bias and discrimination. The respondents' emphasis on skills, values, and education have a neutralising effect on NGOs structures and organisational processes. Korvajarvi (2002: 112-113) explains that organisational cultures are embedded with neutralising processes that are intertwined between their formal and informal structures. Neutralising processes are strategies and mechanisms used to justify actions that would be viewed as unacceptable in other environments (Schindeler, 2016: 50). In the context of NGO understudy, the promotion of equality within communities neutralises the beliefs of gender inequality and may translate to the belief that equality exists within the internal structures of the organisation.

3.2.4 The Ideological dilemma of gender neutrality

Organisations with neutralising processes perpetuate the beliefs that NGOs are gender-neutral, but this creates an ideological dilemma for the respondents. An ideological dilemma refers to the notion that common sense knowledge is composed of contradictory elements (Billig *et al.*, 1988: 16-17). As discussed above, moving beyond binary thinking means acknowledging the existing paradoxes that shape the complexities of organisations. The concept of ideological dilemma

allows a recognition of the in-between nature that women occupy in events of gender discrimination, sexual harassment and assault in the workplace (Benschop *et al.*, 2001: 17). The ideological dilemma of gender neutrality presents a paradox, where women are caught between challenging gender norms, and adhering to them. In this case study, the respondents strive to have new perspectives and strategies to challenge gender norms, representing themselves as agents of change. This leads to situations where women find themselves minimising their experiences with discrimination within NGOs because of various factors, such as stigmatisation and fear of repercussions, and contribute reasons for it to other factors (Eikenberry and Mirabella, 2019: 27). As highlighted by Costello (2018: 1), NGO women are dissuaded from reporting cases of sexual assault because of the fear of losing donor funding, and NGOs receiving bad press. In this case study, Charlie minimised her negative experience with sexual harassment and attributed it to her being a new employee:

“I remember I was so new, and we had a workshop with farm workers...and there was this guy trying to make advances, I think because I was new. I was really bothered by it. But along the way, you just learn to have a thick skull. It never escalated to anything, even internally, never even reported it. But along the way, I learned that I need to have a thick skull and deal with those kinds of attitudes basically.”

The findings on ideological dilemma and gender neutrality in the workplace reflect Kelan’s (2009: 206) findings on gender neutrality within organisations, and the author concludes that employees acknowledge and experience gender discrimination and sexual harassment, but they also claim that their organisations are neutral. There are several reasons for this, but the avoidance of conflict and fear of retaliation as a new employee stands out in Charlie’s case, and this is further highlighted by the refusal to report the incident. Charlie’s feedback emphasises how individuals cope with negative experiences within NGOs by adopting coping strategies that make the experience of sexual harassment and gender discrimination an individual experience instead of an opportunity to address the organisational environment that allows such incidents to occur. This supports previous observations by Gauci *et al.* (2021: 1750), who revealed that women are reluctant to call out gender discrimination because they are reluctant to depict themselves as disempowered. Isolating gender as a non-contributing factor to their experiences and focusing on individuality provides insights into how women navigate and make sense of

their gender identity and experience within NGOs. The occurrence of gender discrimination in a space that champions equality may create a dilemma for women, where they may feel that gender progress has been made in terms of having predominantly women-led NGOs; hence, they cannot acknowledge incidents of gender discrimination.

3.2.5 Men, masculinities, and gender discrimination

The respondents are aware of what gender discrimination means and what it entails, but when describing their negative experiences, they downplay their experiences within NGOs. The respondents attribute their experiences to other factors such as personality, attitudes, and generational differences. As the NGOs under study are predominantly women, they may mitigate the severity of their experiences because they may view gender discrimination as an issue between men and women, undermining the influence of in-group biases and discrimination.

In a cross-national study of gender discrimination conducted by Birkelund *et al.*, (2022: 347-348), it was explained that women did not experience any discrimination and that men were more likely to be discriminated against in the hiring process. The general perception around gender discrimination is that men are the typical perpetrators. Gender norms and stereotypes are difficult to identify in organisations that have women as the majority because of these assumptions. Furthermore, women may be unwilling to recognise ingroup discrimination to avoid deviating from common perceptions of feminine niceness (Rudman and Glick, 2001).

The respondents' perspectives on the significance of gender as a defining element of organisational culture are evolving towards a trend of minimising its importance. While this was a significant finding, it was not a universal response. This can be linked with the central finding that while traditional stereotypes can no longer be said to dominate NGO workplace culture, the influence today of gender does remain in more subtle and ambiguous manifestations. For example, Jackie is the only respondent who acknowledges the possibility of gender discrimination against men within NGOs, expressing that, "I've got a feeling the men would be more likely to be, maybe not discriminated against, but viewed differently within the NGO sector than women because it's the exception, not the rule". Men are viewed as outsiders within NGOs because they are the minority, and the nature of NGO work is "softer". This means that compared to traditional corporate organisations focused on profit maximisation and shareholder

returns, the philanthropic nature of NGOs is associated with service delivery to the community, and women are mainly at the forefront. Women are predicted to participate in NGOs more than men because of the feminine traits associated with caregiving and community (Mesch *et al.*, 2015: 3). The softer nature of NGOs may create an environment for men where they are perceived as outsiders. According to Halper *et al.* (2012: 558), men entering female-dominated workplaces are rated lower in warmth, likeability, and job suitability. This is a possible factor of the absence of men within NGOs, and due to their outsider status, men within NGOs are more likely to resist female leadership.

Men's resistance to working under women within NGOs is highlighted by Grace when she states, "...because you know with men, its, they don't take it easily being managed by women", and she alludes that the men who were once employed within the organisation left because of the appointment of a female Director, stating that:

"I think having a woman in management was a good start because I think with men, they always take their roles of being Head of something, Head of something at home, even outside of work and bring it in the workspace. Now, it's difficult for them to adapt. 'OK, this is another space; we are being led by a different person.' So I think it was a good start, although maybe they didn't take it well."

However, it is the lack of male staff members within NGOs that influences their perception of gender discrimination, as some of the respondents do not believe in the existence of gender discrimination and inequality within NGOs. In explorations of the absence of men and how that influences gender discrimination, studies have revealed that women still experience gender discrimination in all-women organisations and that the treatment of men and women within organisations is based on inaccurate perceptions of gender differences (Ketchiwou and Dzansi, 2023: 359). It appears that the absence of men within the NGOs under study has influenced the environment that the respondents are part of, where the presence of women within an organisation can foster career development and inclusive workspaces. The space is less competitive as compared to working with men, creating more opportunities for career development (Jackie, Grace), but working with women only has influenced how the respondents view gender discrimination as a phenomenon that only happens between men and women.

3.2.6 Race and Masculinities within NGOs.

Charlie's perception of gender discrimination is influenced by her experiences in and out of her organisation, particularly her experience with patriarchy and culture. Working within the NGO space has created implicit connotations about women working with men in organisations that highlight the subtle nature of gender discrimination. This is explained by Charlie when she comments that:

“Because one of the people we meet or engage with would be like commercial farmers and most of them are white commercial farmers. So sometimes you get the sense that because “you are a woman, you can't tell me what to do”. It's never been explicit though, but you get those kinds of attitudes where you draw your own conclusions.”

The findings indicate the existence of multiple masculinities, influencing the subtlety further. Charlie's sentiments correspond with the study by (McGinley, 2004) on the influence of masculinity within organisations, which explains how hegemonic and other masculinities are practiced within organisations, contributing to the domination and reinforcement of stereotypes that dictate the expected behaviour of men and women. South African society is in a state of transition, and masculinity has been negotiated, translated, and reconfigured within a state of patriarchy. Although this sample does not reveal a comprehensive view of hegemonic masculinity within NGOs under study, it also highlights the complex gender systems within the organisational space, which may reflect the hybridity of masculinities that both men and women exercise, that seek to dominate those who are marginalised in organisations. In the case of NGOs, the existence of white masculinity has racial and gender connotations, where black women may experience oppression because of their race and because of their gender identity. This is in line with Berdahl and Moore (2006: 433), who state that minority women may experience harassment and discrimination not because they are just women, but because they are black women or white women. Reflecting on this finding, gender and racial discrimination are not separate experiences, and the perception of gender discrimination among women may be influenced by women's experiences with race within organisations.

Masculinity within NGOs is also constructed through gendered activity. There is an interaction of masculinity and culture within NGOs and according to Morrell *et al.*, (2012: 16-18), cultural beliefs and norms shape the structure of masculinity, where multiple masculinities are contested because of how men of different races and classes express their cultural ideals. According to

Charlie, the older generation has a set of expectations for young women within NGOs, explaining that: *“A married woman is expected to dress a certain way, you can't wear pants...It's not a common thing, but when we have sessions or workshops. men would expect the women to make them tea”*. Ratele *et al.*, (2010: 565) explain that men measure themselves and each other against a set of activities that embody what it means to be a man. Reflecting on these studies, masculinity within NGOs is performed through gendered activities that are centred on cultural expectations of women. Men within NGOs perform their masculinity by assigning domestic responsibilities within NGOs to women.

3.2.6.1 Female leadership and organisational culture

Female leadership influences the organisational culture of NGOs, and prior studies have highlighted that the presence of female management within an organisation may lead to better wages, reduced gender discrimination, and family-friendly policies, contributing to a better work-life balance (Lucifora and Vigani, 2022: 391). The presence of female leadership within an organisation has more positive results for women as compared to men, as female managers are more likely to promote and support women than men within an organisation (Cardoso and Winter-Ebmer, 2007: 11). The feedback from the respondents indicates that their views on gender are a result of working within predominantly female NGOs, with two of them being women-led, with two female Directors. The presence of female Directors is associated with reduced gender discrimination and a better work experience for female subordinates (Lucifora and Vigani, 2022). This is applicable to the respondents' experience, as their feedback highlights that having a female director has made gender discrimination non-existent. However, there is an indication that the environment can be competitive, as expressed by Jackie's use of the word “catty”. The competitive and possibly malicious nature may indicate the existence of the Queen Bee phenomenon, which is defined as an attitude of reluctance to assist other women within the workplace (Johnson and Marthur-Helm, 2011: 48). As explained by Derks *et al.*, (2016: 457), the Queen Bee phenomenon is a result of gender discrimination, and fear may be a powerful influence of this phenomenon. In the context of NGOs, the competitive nature between women may be a result of discriminatory practices that have been normalised. On the other hand, in Charlie's response on whether gender discrimination has been an issue as a staff member, she states, *“We would joke about it sometimes and ask ourselves how men feel about a women-led*

organisation. But it has never been an issue. It's never been an issue, you know". There is an awareness of potential gender dynamics that may arise when men work under female leadership, but the difference in the perceptions of Grace and Charlie is attributed to their role difference as Grace is a junior manager, allowing her to be observant of how men react to female leadership.

The factors affecting the absence of men within NGOs will be discussed further, but the relationship can be taken as signs of stalled progress as working for a female environment can create an environment that does not challenge patriarchal notions of organisations, where misogyny, discrimination and inequalities may be perpetuated. Stalled progress refers to the lack of progress in achieving gender equality, and in the context of the findings, men in NGOs may face stigmas for occupying female-dominated jobs (Friedman, 2015: 142). The appointment of female directors in NGOs signifies progress towards gender equality within organisations, but the departure of men from the ANGO reflects man's struggle to adjust to working under female leadership, and they reject attempts at creating integrated and inclusive work environments, perpetuating patriarchal beliefs of men as leaders of the workplace and at home (Friedman, 2015). Introducing women leadership highlights within NGO structures is challenging, as is overcoming traditional gender norms and expectations in the workplace. However, men's resistance to female leadership underscores the complexities of gender diversity.

3.2. 6 The influence of organisational transformation.

Organisational transformation is defined as the significant changes to the organisational processes and structures (Dibella, 2007: 232). Organisational transformation also means the changes in inequalities within organisations, where policies and interventions are introduced to address gender inequality. The findings centred around this concept support the discussions around transformational leadership, and they conclude that transformational leadership leads to positive results within organisational productivity and employee job satisfaction (Nielsen *et al.*, 2008: 1; Thomas, 2024: 1). Katie, employed in ENG1 speaks on the existence of discrimination before she was employed in the organisation, highlighting it as a thing of the past:

"So just to give you a sense of where my organisation is coming from, like the growth. Yeah, I guess that is how it has evolved over the years with obviously new management. So there has been a change because, in the past, it predominantly... had white, old staff

members. And then there was a change in leadership...Since then, there has been this shift not even just in the diversity of the staff, but generally the organisation as a whole.”

The dynamic nature of organisations, where changes in leadership suggest a shift in perspectives and priorities, indicates that there is a broader transformation within NGOs, where there is an increased diversity among staff members. The findings indicate that individual changes co-existed with organisational changes, as the increase in diverse staff members also meant the introduction of alternative viewpoints. Authors de Vries and den Brink (2016: 442) describe this as the bifocal approach to organisational change, where focusing on the development of an individual also creates organisational change. The diversity among staff members also indicates the existence of representative organisational spaces within NGOs.

However, the increased representation of diverse staff members has led to an internal struggle for white staff members. These findings are in line with Booyesen (2005: 15), and the author highlighted that social identities override organisational culture and have the potential to affect organisational beliefs and norms. Jackie, employed in ENG2, notes how South Africa’s racial past influences how she views herself within NGOs, stating that:

“It’s open, and it’s, you know, it’s open to everyone, and there is a lot more participation and involvement by other races in the NGO sector. So, occasionally, you know, I might have felt that maybe these people wonder what this white woman knows, you know. Especially older white women...It does increasingly feel in some way, like, you know, maybe working in a sector, you know, where it’s not your business. Well, you don’t know enough.”

In the respondent’s reflection as a white female NGO worker, she also acknowledges that she doubts her expertise and knowledge because of existing perceptions around white women and the negotiation of privilege Steyn (2001: 90) explores the loss of privilege of white people in South Africa and points out that as black South Africans addressed oppression and inequality in all areas of life, white South Africans felt that their reality was threatened. This might also be reconfigured within NGO organisational structures, where organisational transformation geared towards diversity led to the unsettling of white privilege within organisations. In the respondents’ context, she experiences impostor syndrome because she feels that she does not belong.

The discussion of impostor syndrome in Chapter Two (see 2.4.6) indicates how structural influences and changes may cause impostor syndrome. Her expression also highlights the possibility of impostor syndrome, as she doubts whether her knowledge is useful within the NGO sector. This is in contrast with the studies on impostor syndrome and privilege, which highlight that individuals from marginalised communities experience impostor syndrome (Heslop *et al.*, 2023: 1). The findings highlight the coexistence of multiple bases of which belonging is negotiated across identities. There are complexities that exist in terms of how women navigate identity and privilege in spaces that are open and inclusive. Women's experiences are shaped by intersecting identities such as race, age and class, and they may influence how women perceive their privilege in spaces that may be exclusionary to other forms of identity.

3.3 GENDER PERCEPTION AND SOCIAL IDENTITY

As discussed above, the depoliticisation of NGOs had an influence on the organisational structures and processes within NGOs, where neoliberal ideologies of privatisation may influence the organisational hierarchies (Lewis, 2003: 224). The respondents' intersecting identities interact with organisational culture, and they also influence how they perceive gender discrimination, providing more insight into their experiences within their NGOs. It is important to explore whether race, age, ethnicity and gender correlate with the respondents' perception of gender. The findings in the research support arguments found within black and postcolonial feminist thought, where perspectives from black women offer unique standpoints of how they negotiate their social identities within NGOs, and the

3.3.1 Age

As discussed earlier, the social identity of women within NGOs plays a bigger role in organisational culture, and the age of the respondents guides the gender perspectives the respondents hold. According to Kehn and Ruthig (2013: 294), older men held a zero-sum perspective of gender discrimination, where they felt that changes in traditional gender roles led to an increase in gender discrimination against men whereas women's perceptions of discrimination were not related to their age. In analysing the zero-sum perspective, the findings in this research provide insight into the nuanced experience of women such as Jackie, who has felt that her age has become a barrier to how she is perceived within NGOs, and Heidi also adds

to this when she says, “I just felt that because we are all in different generations, our generation shows more respect. And I feel that the younger generation feels more like ‘I’m taking you on’ ” The age of the respondents contributes to this variation, as the older respondents are cognisant of the existence of gender discrimination within organisations, whereas the younger respondents think that there is gender progression in organisations.

Katie discussed her perception of gender discrimination as a black woman, and her dual roles in the organisation highlight how age may not be a barrier to younger women within NGOs. Katie holds dual roles within her organisation, and when describing her career progression, she explains that she felt supported:

“So, for me, I wouldn’t say I have felt, since 2014, any sort of discrimination. Even being discriminated against because of age...I was promoted at a young age. And basically, I was trusted in the role, and it was such a big role in management. And I had no prior experience of being in a management role, but I was trusted, you know. I guess I was supported in the role as well.”

Similarly, Amelia expresses Katie’s sentiment, and as they are employed within the same organisation, their perceptions of gender discrimination are influenced by their organisational culture, which is female-dominant. The feedback highlights that their gender identity and their age have not been a significant barrier to their career progression to a larger extent, reflecting Ketchiwou and Dzansi’s (2023: 359) findings of the influence of gender discrimination among young women in South Africa, which reveal that younger women do not tolerate discrimination and are more willing to advocate for themselves in unfair situations. It is possible that the intolerance of discrimination of the younger generation has led to younger women advocating for themselves within organisations.

3.3.2.1 Gender awareness

However, an individual’s gender awareness plays a role in understanding how their gender identity functions within NGOs. Grace was sincere and revealed that she had not thought about how gender had played a role in her career progression, stating that:

“Maybe, sometimes, I am not aware. But for as long as I have been here at the NGO, by now, I thought I would have been in a Senior position, but it has not happened, unlike

males that were here. I think they were progressing before they left. It's something that I haven't noticed until you asked."

Some of the feedback from the respondents also highlighted that they had not noticed that gender had a role in how they were treated, implying that their subjective significance of gender inequality has decreased, affecting how they analyse gender dynamics within NGOs. The findings suggest that respondents may overlook gender-based barriers to career progression. This aligns with the findings from Gurieva *et al.* (2022: 65), who state that the subjective significance of gender equality is positively correlated with perceptions of career inequalities. If an individual has a higher awareness and experience of gender inequalities and the various forms it can take through discrimination and bias, it might affect their ability to perceive career progress and success (Gurieva *et al.*, 2022: 78). This finding might indicate that the respondents' gender consciousness is varied, and they may positively point out barriers to their career progression based on their level of consciousness compared to others. Factors such as the level of feminist consciousness and the emotional significance of gender to an individual also contribute to this variation.

3.3.3 Race

Three of the respondents are black women, two are white women, and only one woman is coloured. The respondents' racial identity influences the perception and experiences of gender discrimination. The double-jeopardy hypothesis highlights that minority women perceive and experience gender discrimination more than men because of their perception and experience of racial discrimination (Beal, 2008: 166). As this research analyses discrimination through an intersectional lens, it is important to expand the jeopardy hypothesis by approaching the experiences of the respondents through a multiple lens approach. According to King (1988: 47), the approach of discrimination through a multiple jeopardy approach allows an analysis of how interlocking oppressions of racism, sexism and classism interact affect minority women within organisations. Applying this to the context of NGOs, it is evident that the respondents' perceptions and experiences of gender discrimination are influenced by their racial identity. For Heidi, her experiences are based on how she is perceived as a coloured woman. According to Heidi, she has experienced difficulties as a coloured office manager, expressing that:

“I might have received comments about my attitude, maybe because living in a coloured community and working with coloured females. My title does become a problem towards others...I have received comments regarding not my age but mostly my personality and my work title...No, I don’t think my gender had anything to do with it. It’s just a community thing. That’s just a race thing.”

These findings affirm that rather than gender, racial identity and office position also play a role in how women are perceived within NGOs. Eagly, Makhijan, and Klonsky (1992: 13) reported that female managers were negatively evaluated and received greater criticism compared to male managers. The findings indicate the possibility of bias against white and coloured female managers based on racial stereotyping, but the responses by the black female managers do not reflect that trend. These findings support the study by Livingstone *et al.*, (2012: 357), which states that white female leaders were susceptible to stereotypes and discrimination whereas black female managers did not face backlash for showing dominance. The perceptions of gender discrimination held by Grace and Katie indicate a shift in the experiences of multiple jeopardy for black women, where black women might not experience multiple forms of discrimination within the workplace based on their social identities. The feedback illustrates the privilege they have, where access to knowledge, social status, and income reinforces the idea that gender discrimination has a minimal impact on their career.

3.4 THE ROLE OF GENDER NORMS IN CAREER CHOICES AND PROGRESSION

As discussed in Chapter Two, women are socialised into gender roles from adolescence, where they are expected to prioritise nurturing, caregiving and roles linked to their feminine identity. The socialisation of women from a young age may lead to women occupying job roles that are linked to internalised norms and behaviours of womanhood. The findings reveal the ingrained gender norms that are found within the internal culture of NGOs. The findings also explore the gendered factors that influence women’s decisions to join NGOs. The respondents under study are employed within NGOs focused on children’s education and community development, suggesting the role gender socialisation may have played in their choice of careers and career progression. When prompted about the role of norms, expectations and stereotypes in their career, the respondents had conflicting views, highlighting the realities that co-exist within NGOs.

3.4.1 Gender socialisation

The nurture assumption states that an individual's upbringing, peers, culture, and education impact their development and life experiences (Barglow, 2000). The feedback from respondents corresponds with this perspective, indicating that social spheres and upbringing have played a role in how women participate in NGOs. The women within the NGOs understudy have different experiences of gender socialisation, where some of the respondents have aligned with what is expected of them, whilst others have deviated from the norm. Charlie's upbringing highlights how gender socialisation that does not fit within traditional gender expectations can influence women's career's choices and decisions. When questioned whether gender dynamics within the family influence her work experience, she expressed:

“Not really; I think I was lucky because I wasn't raised up that way. I have a brother. He cooked before I could cook. He plays that role. And I don't. So I think I am lucky in that way because I was never brought up that way. So it not really an issue.”

When describing her career progression, Heidi's explanation highlights how women have deviated from the norm within education NGOs, where other respondents within education NGOs understudy indicate that it is natural and expected for women to take care of children revealing:

“I started as a receptionist here. And then, I moved on to aftercare. But that wasn't the type of scene in which I worked with children. I am a very impatient person, so yeah. I don't have the patience...I enjoy my role, I really enjoy it.”

These findings indicate that gender socialisation may influence some women's roles within NGOs into opposing gender roles as agency, attitudes, education, and career mobility can allow women to challenge their roles and allow them to find opportunities within their organisations. Ngo *et al.*, (2014: 299) conclude that gender role orientation influences how individuals perceive their careers, where masculinity has a stronger effect on job satisfaction and career advancement. These findings diverge from the studies on gender role orientation, where notions of masculinity and femininity strongly influence an individual's career attitudes and progressions, indicating that femininity may also contribute to greater job satisfaction. The results also contribute to the existing discourse on role congruity by Eagly and Karau (2002) which states that women may

violate stereotypes if they occupy jobs that are not in alignment with society expectations, highlighting that while some women's careers may align with traditional gender role expectations, there are instances where women challenge societal norms and deviate from patriarchal notions of gender within organisations.

However, gender socialisation has some influence on the rest of the respondents' career choices in the NGOs under study as they have roles that fit within gender norms. This is indicated by the respondents' terms when determining whether gender stereotypes and expectations have influenced their careers. Regarding gender role expectations, the respondents employed within education NGOs revealed they were expected to be patient and nurturing, and it was a natural expectation considering the nature of their work. Katie claimed that:

“I think it comes with the job, its needed especially when working with young people...So the nurturing part to answer your question, it just comes naturally. Its something that's demanded because you happen to work in the space.”

The other respondents share similar sentiments, with Grace mentioning that she volunteers to do work within the organisation. Jackie states that NGO work is within women's leanings, implying that compared to traditional corporate businesses, the “softer” nature suits women's feminine traits. Although the respondents work in organisations with different aims and values, gender role expectations are not influenced by the nature of the NGO but are a natural expectation of women working in the development sector.

3.2.2 The Breadwinner Model

Gender socialisation also shapes the traditional patriarchal environment that influences women's participation in the labour force. One of the most significant outcomes of the rise of feminism and its critique of the patriarchy is the criticism of the breadwinner model, a system responsible for the organisation of the family, where men are the primary earners (Pfau-Effinger, 2004: 389). Women are relegated to the household, where their main responsibilities are centred around housework and working as stay-at-home mothers (Apalla and Pillissery, 2020). Feminist perspectives on family structures highlight that power dynamics shape the construction of the family, where a white heterogeneous middle class family is the ideal family structure, with men having more power than women (Allen and Sierra, 2015: 93). The traditional breadwinner model

is less pronounced in South Africa, as it is reflective of the country's gendered history, where rural-to-urban migration during apartheid left South Africa with a different family structure, where forty-two per cent of households are female-headed, with thirty-eight per cent having female breadwinners (Cowlig, 2024; Parry, 2021).

The breadwinner model plays a role in the career choices and progression of the respondents, where traditional gender norms prevail. According to Jackie, "*NGO work is quite often poorly paid. So if you are a husband or man or whatever breadwinner, you should be earning a better salary, doing something else*". This is one of the reasons she provided for the absence of men and gender discrimination within NGOs, but this also explains how women may occupy low-paying jobs because the breadwinner identity is linked to men, making women the invisible earners in the household, as studied by (Apalla and Pillissery, 2020). These findings suggest that women are socialised into low-paying jobs because the breadwinner identity is linked to men and societal expectations of men as breadwinners also influence the career choices of men and women, with men seeking opportunities that allow them to provide financial support for their families. This finding also indicates the existence of the traditional breadwinner model and its influence on women, contributing to studies by Parry and Segalo, (2017: 193), which highlight that women are increasingly taking on the role of the breadwinner in the family. The socialisation of men into the breadwinner model also impacts the income equality between men and women as it widens the gender pay gap. The breadwinner model has consequences for women within NGOs, as it also reinforces the motherhood myths, affecting the work-life balance of the respondents.

3.2.3 Motherhood myths and penalty

The findings suggest that motherhood myths exist within the NGO space, influencing the respondents' perception of gender discrimination and their justification of discrimination within the workplace. The stereotypes centred around motherhood appear to be natural to some respondents, but they have influenced the decisions they have made during their careers. Assumptions of motherhood describe women as natural caretakers who are bonded to their children and believe that motherhood is innate (Tiberghien, 2016). Motherhood myths around women's careers, sacrifices and maternal instincts are evident in the respondents' description of motherhood and the organisational space. Amelia was the first permanent employee in her NGO

to be on maternity leave, and she describes the experience as a “learning curve for the organisation” but also explains that it has been positive overall, as she has not been side-lined. These findings highlight a different and forward experience for mothers within the workplace because several studies have highlighted the motherhood penalty, where women had to reduce their workload after childbirth, further reducing their earnings (Andrew et al., 2021: 1-2; Jones et al., 2023: 1).

However, some experiences exist within the NGO system that indicate the existence of motherhood myths, where women had to choose between their career and their family. When Jackie described whether norms or stereotypes affected her career progression, she revealed that she had to put her career on hold, stating:

“I suppose not, not in a deliberately discriminatory way, but in the fact that I interrupted my work in the NGO sector when my children were young, and I wanted to stay at home with them and be a stay-at-home mother. So yeah, I could have... I guess I could have chosen to carry on working while my children were little, but I chose not to. That was not direct discrimination from anybody. That’s just kind of a natural sort of result of being the woman and the mother. Nobody expected it of me, you know. But it was my choice.”

Contrasting the experiences of Amelia and Jackie, societal transitions determined how motherhood is dealt with in NGOs. Generational differences between Amelia and Jackie shape their experiences, as Jackie started working for NGOs during apartheid, where traditional gender norms rooted in white middle-class tradition prevailed (Huston, 2007: 83). Jackie’s beliefs on motherhood and career progression indicate the normalisation of motherhood expectations and norms, as she was reluctant to label her experience discrimination. Verniers and Vala (2018) indicate that motherhood myths play a mediating role in workplace gender discrimination, as employers may justify gender discrimination by arguing that motherhood means less involvement in the workplace and more focus on the children. Motherhood myths may be normalised and downplayed as discrimination as highlighted by Jackie’s experience.

In a study of gender discrimination within the USA workplace, Abrams (1989: 1187) pointed out that employers were unwilling to accommodate pregnant women, and most women were denied maternity leave. If they were to return to work, they would be moved to uninteresting work that put them on the slower track. Amelia’s experience reflects the shift and transition in norms and

expectations around motherhood for working women, where there is progress in how motherhood is dealt within NGOs, and also highlights how women navigate their motherhood roles and how shifts in organisational perspectives allow them to make choices that make it easier for them to balance work and family.

3.2.4 Work-family balance in NGOs.

The feedback from the respondents highlights that there is a justification for discrimination based on motherhood myths. This is evident in the respondents' portrayal of their work-family life and how family is their responsibility. Still, in their explanation, it is evident how exhausting it can be for the respondents. As discussed above, the respondents highlight the “softer” nature of NGOs, where the presence of female leadership and female employees highlight progress, but there is an indication that cultural expectations of mothers affect their work capability to balance work and family. Work-family balance is considered an individual’s responsibility, and they should be capable of balancing the demands of work and family and their personal needs (Federman, 2016). Men and women experience the demands of work and family differently, with women having multiple roles as wives, mothers and employees. Women may choose jobs that have fewer demands to allow them to meet childcare responsibilities. Organisations may augment the situation by not offering formal childcare policies and services (Wattis et al., 2013: 3). A poor life work-family balance may cause motherhood guilt, where women may feel guilty for returning to work and failing to meet unrealistic motherhood expectations (Constantinou et al., 2021: 853).

One of the six mountains that Ogundipe-Leslie discusses involves traditional structures and how they weave themselves into organisational structures. Tradition and culture have been utilised as compliance tools, where beliefs, values and gendered roles are reinforced to dictate men and women’s behaviours (Frenkel, 2008: 4). According to Ogundipe-Leslie (1993: 112), traditionally, division of labour was based on sex, with women mainly occupying jobs that involve food, cooking, and taking care of children. Contemporarily, many women work in jobs that involve taxing labour whilst men are more likely to hold managerial positions. In some cases, women are paid below the living wage and they may be expected to take on family responsibilities. (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1993: 112). As discussed in Chapter Two on the “Think Manager, Think Male” stereotype, Statistics South Africa (2021: 1) mentions that 66.9 per cent of managerial

positions were occupied by men whereas 33.1 percent were occupied by women. Domestic work was dominated by women, with men only occupying 5.5 per cent. Within the findings of this study, there are different experiences that highlight the contradictory realities of South African women and their different cultures. Charlie highlights that traditional structures had no effect on her as a black Zulu woman, stating that

“I have not experienced any challenges in relation to gender stereotypes. In fact, in terms of gender rules, which people often speak about, women have to be in the kitchen and cook and clean the house...Its actually the opposite. Yeah, one of my colleagues, he is the kitchen guy. He is the cook and I on the other hand, I am the total opposite. Put me there with cooking, no, not for me...Not really, not really... I think I was lucky because I wasn't raised up that way.”

On the other hand, the findings suggest that there is a strain that the respondents deal with when it comes to balancing their work and family. Jackie reveals that:

“Yeah, I do think that women have to juggle a lot more. So if they are working for an NGO full time and they have children, I think you know you are still expected to fulfil the roles of wife and mother. So you do a lot more juggling. Yeah, I do think you do a lot more juggling because you are maybe responsible for the children, responsible for the children's teaching and caring...And you may have to take more time off, you know, because if the children are sick or they need to go to the doctor or whatever, then you are most likely the one going to be taking them. You are most likely the one going to be taking them...you then have to take time off work in that time or whatever or sacrifice in some way.”

Similarly, Heidi also describes how she balances her role in her family life and the workplace, stating that:

“In my personal life, I am a mother, I am a wife, I am a sister...You can't always bring your personal problems to work, you can't take your work problems to your home, so you basically have a split personality...When you get to the office, you need to cut that personal baggage because you can't bring baggage to the office. You are not going to be

productive. You are going to be snappy, moody, emotional, you know. And I do think everyone experiences this. But you need to draw the line when you are at the office, you focus on work. And in the NGO sector, its always sad to hear when an NGO closes, so you have to be productive...When you get home, there is nothing about work. You don't talk about your colleagues, you don't complain, you just focus on being the wife, being the mother, and the house must be clean. Cooking must be done. Kids must be in bed."

The differences in experience and opinion can be attributed to generational differences, as Charlie is the youngest amongst the three. Furthermore, these discussions on motherhood and work-family balance indicate that NGO women are responsible for childcare and the household, even with full-time jobs. These findings also suggest that the respondents adopt strict boundaries and manage their emotions to allow them to balance work and family, although at the detriment of their work and health. Heidi's statement about having a "split personality" reveals the dichotomy between the professional and personal lives of the respondents. The respondents' insistence on boundaries between work and family also indicates a negative spillover of emotions, behaviours, and experiences, where stressors and conflicts from work may negatively affect the respondents' ability to meet family responsibilities and vice versa (Schmidt and Delgado, 2011: 1).

Motherhood myths and the breadwinner model are interconnected in this study, and they imply that women cannot be mothers and have careers at the same time, and if they were to have both, there is a possibility that they choose non-traditional corporate jobs that are flexible and that underpay to be able to meet family demands and still allow their husbands to be breadwinners. Research studies have argued that the feminisation of NGOs, which is the increasing presence of women in NGOs, may lead to a comfortable working environment (Chang, 2018). The findings also suggest that there may be imbalances in work-family dynamics, as the fear of NGO closure may cause pressure on the respondents. The expectations of motherhood and working women have been normalised because of the stereotypical expectations of motherhood that the respondents have internalised. Navigating motherhood and work is comparable to walking on a tightrope, where women constantly try to balance meeting social norms whilst maintaining their individuality

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this qualitative research has been to explore the gender dynamics within NGO organisational processes and culture from the perspectives of women within NGOs. The gendered nature of NGOs in South Africa and sociological literature has been underexplored, and this research adopted a case study approach to shed light on how NGO staff members perceive gender stereotypes and norms and whether these norms affect their roles and career progression within NGOs. A black feminist and postcolonial feminist approach were utilised as the guiding theoretical framework for the exploration of gender identity and non-governmental organisations in post-apartheid South Africa. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews, and six women from three local NGOs were interviewed, all from different racial and class backgrounds. The feedback from the respondents provided fresh insights into the nature of gender identity and perspectives within the organisational structures and professionalisation of NGOs.

The findings within this research highlight the transitional nature of gender dynamics within South African NGOs. Existing feminist organisational literature on the reproduction of gender inequalities within NGOs reveals that the reproduction of gender inequalities within organisational culture and processes has been underexplored because there are new patterns of perceptions that are emerging in a period of transformation. As NGOs are known for their developmental nature in aiding and empowering marginalised communities, the assumption is that their association with justice-seeking and progressive belief systems provides nuance to their organisational structures. However, the everyday reality and taken-for-granted assumptions of NGO staff members reflect the complexities of gender progress, where discriminatory practices and stereotypes exist alongside gender equality interventions and progressive attitudes towards gender equality. The gender dynamics under exploration were the perceptions and experiences of gender discrimination and stereotypes among women within NGOs, and the findings were unexpected but interesting. The findings corroborated existing literature on the existence of gender discrimination within organisations, where implicit, hidden and overt perspectives of gender discrimination play a role in the perception of women within NGOs. Traditional gender norms also affect the career progression of women within NGOs, where gender roles have negatively impacted working mothers within NGOs, as some of the respondents had to leave the

profession to take care of children. However, the age of the respondents plays a role in how gender roles are performed within organisations, as younger mothers within the study do not feel that their role as mothers affects their career progression. Traditional gender perspectives still exist within NGOs, but there is also evidence that suggests that stalled and continuous progress exists within South African NGOs.

The findings from this research align with existing literature in some ways, but they also reveal interesting insights that contribute to our understanding of the fluid nature of gender dynamics. The existence of gender neutrality has influenced some of the respondents to believe that gender discrimination does not exist, and that gender progress is happening within NGOs. However, there is a dilemma involved with this, as respondents may minimise their experiences and individualise them instead of approaching them as a structural issue. Furthermore, the gender makeup of NGOs understudy indicates a shift in the organisational structure, where women make up the majority of the staff members whilst men are treated as outsiders.

The feedback from the respondents has indicated that women within NGOs are not limited by their gender, but they are agents of change that move within the NGO arena in ways that allow them to express their identities despite the challenges they may face. This research also contributes to the studies of organisational culture and structures by offering a glimpse into the internal structures of organisations that have greatly focused on service delivery and the empowerment of communities, exploring whether NGOs practise what they advocate for. Further research on NGOs and organisational studies can also explore gender identity within NGOs through the perspectives of men within NGOs, as this study has also revealed the possibility of men being the minority. Furthermore, future research can also focus on NGOs that specifically address social injustices in South Africa and observe whether inequalities are reproduced within internal structures.

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APPENDICES

Name: Taguma Hove

Interview Duration: +30min

Introductory Questions

1. How long have you been employed in the NGO sector?
2. Can you describe your career progression in the NGO space?
3. What is your organisational position within the NGO space?

Women's Perception and experience with gender stereotypes within NGOs

1. In relation to your understanding of gender inequality, what is your perception of gender discrimination in the workplace?

Follow-up: Have you ever experienced it?

2. Are there any gender norms or stereotypes (that you are aware of, if any) that have affected your career progression?
3. Are there any expectations placed on women in society that are present within the NGO space? To what extent do they affect your role in the workplace?
4. What opportunities does gender inequality present within the NGO sector?

Follow up: Does the ratio of men to women in the NGO sector have any impact on how you are treated/ your role/ projects you receive?

5. Have you ever felt or been put in a position where you must challenge the status quo within the NGO when it comes your position as a woman within the NGO space? If yes or not, please explain.

Follow-up: Have you ever received any comments about your work that have been linked to your identity as a woman (race, ethnicity).

Follow-up: How do you deal with imposter syndrome in the workplace?

