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Women and Leadership: A Case of the Kenyan and South African Banking Sector

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Abstract: Throughout the history of management theories, masculine ideals have dominated the development of organisational leadership structures, often leading to a belief in the inherent superiority of men in leadership roles. Despite progress, many organisations still operate under the assumption that women are somehow deficient compared to men in leadership capabilities. The research objective was to investigate the difficulties Black African women encounter in leadership positions in Kenyan and South African banks, specifically concerning how society views women in leadership roles. The study conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups involving 41 Black African women managers from the banking sectors of both countries, employing an inter-categorical intersectionality approach. The research revealed a perceived lack of fit for top executive leadership positions among African-Black women. A comparison between masculine and feminine leadership styles underscored the gendered sex-role stereotypes that hindered the advancement of Black African women into top executive roles within the banking sector. In summary, the findings emphasise that, as long as 'think manager, think male' persists in leadership, Black African women will continue to encounter obstacles in attaining top executive positions within the banking sectors of Kenya and South Africa. The study's practical implications are that it emphasises the understanding of women and leadership and its role as an obstacle for Black women managers in the Kenyan and South African banking sectors. The originality of this study is that it contributes to the understanding of women and leadership literature in the banking sectors of Kenya and South Africa, as well as sub-Saharan African countries.

Keywords: diversity management; gender; human resource management; inter-categorical intersectionality; leadership; organisation sustainability

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1. Introduction

Women have participated in the workforce for decades, yet significant changes in their roles have only recently emerged (Higginbotham and Romero 1997). Historically, in the 1950s and 60s, women were relegated to supporting positions in banking, with minimal opportunities for advancement to top executive roles (Kephart and Schumacher 2005). While there has been a recent increase in the number of women in managerial positions, a concerning trend persists. Women remain concentrated in lower-level management with less authority and potential for growth than their male counterparts (Kephart and Schumacher 2005). This translates to a persistent gender gap in banking leadership, with women disproportionately occupying lower positions while men hold most of the top executive roles.

Black African women are still assigned a secondary place in terms of leadership because of the prevailing culture and customs. Gumbi (2006) demonstrated how leadership is a man's world and male-dominated organisation. Leadership is gendered and approved within a gendered context based on race and ethnicity (Littrell and Nkomo 2005). While most South African women may encounter a glass ceiling that hinders their advancement, they face an even steeper climb because of their underrepresentation in management and

top executive leadership positions (Littrell and Nkomo 2005). Significantly, as of 2024, there are only three female CEOs in the Kenyan banking sector, two who are Black African women, Anastaica Kimtai and Rebeccca Mbithi, and one who is an Indian woman—Nasim Devji, while in South Africa, there were only two Black African women CEOs—Basani Mululeke who was the first and quit, and Mary Vilakazi—in the listed banks in the NSE and JSE, respectively.

Perceptions of gender differences regarding women and leadership positions are crucial (Ayensu et al. 2024). Cultural attitudes and norms are pivotal in shaping perceptions of women's leadership capabilities (Thelma and Ngulube 2024). Traditional beliefs and cultural attributes of different races and ethnicities usually glorify the masculinity of good leadership (Mangatu 2010). In African countries, organisations that strongly reinforce their societal culture form their organisational culture to reflect societal values and beliefs (Akanji et al. 2020). In Africa, masculinity and femininity dimensions differ depending on the country of context, such as Kenya and the South. Society defines masculinity as men being tough, assertive, and focused on material success, while males and females define a feminine society as tender, modest, and focused on quality of life (Littrell and Nkomo 2005). In Africa, ambition and decisiveness are viewed as masculine, whereas gentleness and care are considered feminine. Leadership and management positions in the banking sector are usually called the 'old boys' club', implying that top leadership and management are reserved for men (Mangatu 2010). The 'old boys' club' is an informal network organised for high-status males, according to the masculinity principle that fortifies male domination and elites. The 'old boys' club' involves informal groups of Kenyan and South African men in the banking sector who can decide who receives what job and who receives a career advancement. Thus, women do not perceive their workplaces as providing equal opportunities for women and men to receive leadership opportunities (Milliken and Kneeland 2019). Acknowledging and addressing these obstacles to 'women and leadership' requires determined and serious efforts at the individual, organisational, and societal levels (Thelma and Ngulube 2024). With this in mind, this research intends to contribute to the literature by investigating the obstacles Black African women encounter in leadership positions in Kenyan and South African banks, specifically concerning how society views women in leadership roles. The article consists of five sections: 1. the introduction, 2. the literature review, 3. materials and methods for research, 4. findings and discussion, and lastly, 5. the conclusion.

2. Literature Review

A leader is an individual who influences others to reach organisational objectives. Without this ability to influence, they fail to meet the leadership criteria. Possessing leadership skills is essential for anyone in a managerial role. Additionally, it is important to recognise that everyone can be seen as a leader in some capacity, provided they can affect change in others (Salifu 2020). The 18th and 19th centuries saw the rise of the 'Great Man Theory' (GMT) of leadership (Jogulu and Wood 2006). This theory places the burden of history on the shoulders of great men. These qualities and characteristics focus on Whites and those in positions of political, social, or military power (Northouse 2021). According to GMT, great leaders are born with unique qualities that set them apart from the ordinary (Bass and Stogdill 1990). The theory suggests these inherent traits have made them great (Davis and Maldonado 2017). However, the theory's focus on a select few inherently gifted men downplays the roles of context, experience, and follower influence in shaping leadership.

Consequently, women were not considered leaders or potential leaders in the MGT literature. Therefore, the GMT was constructed as a male model that did not attribute anything to women in management when they were not visible in employment (Jogulu and Wood 2006). With this reasoning, for several hundred decades that have passed, many organisations still function from the perspective of thinking that women are in some way deficient and not equal to men when it comes to leadership (Lampe 2001). Male ideals

have heavily influenced the historical development of management theory, profoundly shaping organisations (Kephart and Schumacher 2005). Traditional leadership structures often reflect masculine principles, emphasising autocratic leadership styles, top-down decision-making, and the expectation of intense work dedication.

Studies support the notion that leadership roles are often linked with masculine characteristics more than feminine ones (Powell 2018), reinforcing that traditional management ideals favour a masculine approach. Generally, managers are presumed to be decisive, rational, and ambitious (Van Vianen and Fischer 2002). Specifically, managers who were men perceived the characteristics needed for effective management as generally male attributes (Burke and Collins 2001). This bias can have negative consequences on women's careers. If male managers primarily value masculine traits in leadership, they may overlook women's strengths, thereby limiting women's promotion opportunities within organisations (Burke and Collins 2001; Richardson and Loubier 2008).

The 1980s saw the pervasive belief that women were inherently unsuitable for leadership positions. Common justifications for this bias included women being 'too friendly', 'too helpful', and lacking the decisiveness necessary to lead (Kephart and Schumacher 2005). These outdated assumptions about gender and leadership create significant roadblocks for women seeking advancement (Heilman 2001). The traditional leadership model equates effective leadership with masculine traits, such as organisation, decisiveness, assertiveness, and strategic thinking. These characteristics are perceived as inherently linked to good leadership, contrasting with the feminine style, which includes caring, compassion, sensitivity, democracy, responsibility, participation, and nurturing (Davis and Maldonado 2017).

Research indicates that gender differences shape distinct leadership styles (Michaud et al. 2019). Leaders with typical masculine traits often focus on accomplishing organisational objectives, while those with typically feminine traits prioritise interpersonal relationships and the well-being of people (Carli et al. 2016). Men are usually inclined towards a transactional leadership approach, treating subordinates' job performance as transactions, where rewards are given for services or punishments for insufficient performance. Men are more likely to leverage the power from their formal authority and organisational position than women. This approach allows men to influence their subordinates based on the demands of their roles. In comparison, numerous women typically display transformational leadership. This approach encourages team members to merge their ambitions with group targets by emphasising wider goals (Ayensu et al. 2024). Such leadership is exceptionally useful in periods of change and instability. Instead of depending solely on the formal organisational ladder, women link their impact to innate qualities like charm, communicative prowess, dedication, and personal relationships.

There are three theoretical explanations for the variations in male and female leaders: they differ structurally (based on their relative positions in organisational structures), culturally (due to the socialisation of gender roles), and biologically (in terms of temperament and hormones) (Ayensu et al. 2024). In the research that has been conducted, the contents of leadership have been studied (Hofstede 1998) and defined as masculine and feminine styles. The power-oriented style versus the people-oriented style of leadership (Williams et al. 1993), the power and achievement style versus the support and role style of leadership (E. H. Schein 1997), and the rational goal style versus the human relations style of leadership (Quinn 1988) are all similar in the masculinity and femininity leadership styles described by a variety of authors in the field of organisational psychology. From this perspective, the masculine style can be summarised as establishing status and authority, competition, hierarchical relations, task orientation, autonomy, and promotional independence. Conversely, the feminine style has been defined as the promotion of the relational self, maintenance of balance in life activities, promotion of collaboration within the organisation, and promotion of participation (Maier 1999). Therefore, organisational culture is dominated by masculine norms and values in numerous organisations, as most senior executive managers and directors are male and are assumed to adhere to more masculine values than feminine values (Van Vianen and Fischer 2002).

Understanding how perceptions of gender disparities impact women in leadership positions is critical, and it is important to explore how these differences influence their roles as leaders (Ayensu et al. 2024). Significantly, whenever a female gender role is inconsistent with a leadership role, prejudice towards women as leaders is a common result. Many organisations are unfamiliar with the setting of a woman possessing a significant amount of authority that involves decision-making power (Eagly 2005). According to the traditional masculine leadership model, people doubt that women possess appropriate abilities and competencies and resent the change in the expected and usual hierarchical relationship between men and women (Davis and Maldonado 2017; Eagly 2005). As a result of this reasoning, organisations today still perpetuate double standards for women managers and men's leaders. Women are often challenged when working in male-dominated organisational cultures because, to advance their careers, they typically have to adopt the organisational culture by taking on male characteristics and values.

The primary source of prejudice against female leaders is the perception of the incongruity between feminine gender and leadership roles within an organisation. Gender perceptions towards leadership roles can greatly be shaped by their gender, anchored in gender stereotypes. These stereotypes encompass oversimplified beliefs and ideas about individuals based on gender, prevalent across various cultures and historical periods, especially noticeable within leadership contexts (Oliver et al. 2024). Such stereotypes pose notable hurdles for female leaders, as negative preconceptions challenge altering perceptions (Ayensu et al. 2024). Nonetheless, the availability of concrete, undeniable evidence of a woman's capabilities can mitigate the undervaluation tied to gender stereotypes (Miller 2022). For instance, a woman's leadership effectiveness should be assessed on her actual, demonstrated skills rather than prejudiced beliefs. While female leaders often have to prove their competence, male leaders tend to be assumed competent and authoritative. This disparity is clear in the language used to describe leadership roles.

Two forms of prejudice that women executives encounter in organisations were delineated by Eagly and Karau (2002). The initial manifestation of prejudice is a less favourable assessment of women's leadership potential (Richardson and Loubier 2008), which can be attributed to the activation of descriptive beliefs regarding female characteristics and the subsequent attributes of the feminine stereotype qualities of women, which contrasts with the qualities expected or desired in leaders. Prescriptive standards of leadership are the source of the second form of prejudice, which is the lower assessment of the actual leadership behaviours of women compared to males. Thus, the nonconformity of sociocultural expectations of femininity results in biased evaluations of women holding leadership positions (Richardson and Loubier 2008).

Research has found that women's executive management style differs from men's in many ways, which enhances their success, explained by how they handle management (Bell et al. 2002). Men are generally considered competitive, independent, risk-takers, and are concerned with status and authority. By contrast, women are generally perceived as caring, possess interpersonal skills, and are viewed as better suited for group work, team building, displaying empathy, and working together (Van Vianen and Fischer 2002). Women's feminine leadership style is more likely to lead an organisation from the centre of a network of interrelated teams than from the traditional masculine command style of leadership (Bell et al. 2002). Furthermore, men are more likely to use power from their organisation's position and formal authority. In contrast, women ascribe their power to personal characteristics, such as hard work, interpersonal skills, charisma, or even personal contacts, rather than traditional organisational stature (Rosener 2011). As organisations continue to assess promotability qualities based on masculine versus feminine leadership styles, this gender bias remains one of the main reasons women are held back by the glass ceiling into top executive positions (Kephart and Schumacher 2005).

Research also found that men managers are similar to women managers. Eagly and Johnson (1990) found a very small difference between the management styles of women and men when analysing gender differences in leadership. A similar pattern was found

for the personality characteristics of women managers and men managers; women who advanced into top executive management positions adopted and resembled men in their personalities and characteristics (Van Vianen and Fischer 2002). Further, Wachs-Book (2000) found that women who advanced into top executive leadership positions did so at a heavy price at the cost of their perceived femininity. Therefore, for women to be successful and crack the glass ceiling, they have to adopt masculine characteristics, men's methods, and even dress codes to excel because of the typical negative traditional stereotype associated with being a woman. Winning at any cost has become the mantra for some women trying to fit into the 'old boys' network' (Kephart and Schumacher 2005; Wachs-Book 2000).

Based on the above research outcomes, different conclusions have been drawn regarding whether masculine or feminine leadership styles are the most effective for women managers. Some studies have argued that women should adopt more masculine characteristics to advance to top executive management positions. Others have advocated that women managers who still display a feminine leadership style should be considered effective managers and be able to advance into top executive leadership positions (Van Vianen and Fischer 2002). In contrast, others advocate that women managers who display leadership styles different from men should still be considered effective (Baumgartner and Schneider 2010). Ayensu et al. (2024) noted that women who displayed assertiveness and authority were likely to be judged harshly. The greater their level of decisiveness and command, the more criticism they face. Also, doubts about women's leadership abilities are significantly amplified when they adopt a highly authoritative style. With this reasoning, it should be noted that women's leadership style is natural, unique to the individual, and feminine, rather than forced masculinity, traditionally thought to be best suited for top executive leadership positions. Therefore, if women can use the feminine characteristics and inherent leadership styles they naturally possess, they can still be excellent managers (Baumgartner and Schneider 2010). The feminine leadership style can be credited to effectively managing and inspiring performance, possessing high cultural competence, offering inclusivity, working together, democracy, and participation in the organisation (Davis and Maldonado 2017).

Organisational policies subtly maintain the status quo and keep men in power positions. Organisations continue to support masculine reward values and reward behaviours that conform to gender-based values. Stereotypes still very much persist, as women managers who engage in their feminine leadership style have trouble advancing their careers. The change from the traditional leadership style is slow since many organisations are structured to reward masculine behaviours and protect the dominant power structure deeply rooted in them. As a result, the gender-based stereotype and closed circle, known as the 'old boys' network', is strongly maintained. Women, for too long, have carried and continue to carry water to advance into top executive leadership positions with limited success as the parity between men and women continues downward. Therefore, these masculine organisational cultures are a fundamental component of the foundation that impedes the advancement of women to senior executive leadership roles.

3. Materials and Methods

The research objective is to investigate the difficulties Black African women encounter in leadership positions in Kenyan and South African banks, specifically concerning how society views women in leadership roles. The research question is

"What is the understanding of women and leadership by Black African women managers in the Kenyan and South African banking sectors?"

Prepositions

'Women and leadership' play a role in Black African women managers from getting into top executive leadership positions in the Kenyan and South African banking sectors.

The research objective guides understanding the concept of 'women and leadership' as obstacles Black African women face in the Kenyan and South African banking sectors.

The research objective was addressed by implementing a qualitative empirical design. This study employs a qualitative methodology to investigate the challenges that Black African women encounter in the finance sectors of Kenya and South Africa. A qualitative research methodology investigated and clarified the relationship between African black women and leadership in the Kenyan and South African banking sectors. The qualitative research process entailed interpreting the meaning of the data, data collection in the participants' setting, and inductive data analysis based on identified themes. This process involves the development of emergent questions and procedures. Therefore, qualitative research provides an explanation and a better understanding of Black African women and leadership. This study was based on an inter-categorical intersectionality approach.

This study adopted an inter-categorical approach (IA) called the categorical approach (CA). It helps to understand the relationship between social categories and, most importantly, the changing nature of social groups rather than their representation and definition of such social groups. The main task of IA is to expand those relationships that require the provisional use of existing categories by analysing how they relate to one another. The inter-categorical approach for this research achieved the foregrounding nature of the experiences by facilitating the unpacking and illumination of the experiences of Black African women managers in the Kenyan and South African banking sectors within multiple categories of race and gender.

Non-probability sampling allowed the sample to be selected purposely and reach difficult-to-identify members of the population in the research, especially when collecting qualitative data using interviews. The first non-probability sampling technique is a purposive sampling technique that enables cases to be selected based on a judgment that best answers and addresses the research objectives. It is best used when working with petite samples in a particularly informative study, such as this research. The second non-probability sampling technique, snowball sampling, was used when participants of the desired population of the research were difficult to identify (Saunders et al. 2009). In this manner, an exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling technique was utilised to form a sample in which one case was identified to identify more than one case for the research. The research focused on forty-one Black African women managers for the interviews and eight Black African women managers for the focus groups in the Kenyan and South African banking sectors.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews and focus groups were the most appropriate research instruments for investigating the concept of women and leadership of Black African women managers in the Kenyan and South African banking sectors. Semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus groups were conducted to address research objectives. Semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus groups were conducted to provide insights into the experiences of Black African women managers in the Kenyan and South African banking sectors. The focus groups for this research generated information on collective views and reasoning, facilitating a rich understanding of the beliefs and experiences of Black African women managers working in Kenyan and South African banking sectors.

To address the research objective and answer the research question, this study adopted a purely qualitative approach that focused on Black African women managers in the banking sectors of Kenya and South Africa. The Black African women managers were the best fit to answer and address the research objectives. The target population for this research was the Black African women managers located in Nairobi and Johannesburg in the Kenyan and South African banking sectors. The research used a non-probability sampling technique and purposively selected twenty Black African women managers working in banks located in Nairobi and Johannesburg. The sample was identified using an exponential, non-discriminative snowball sampling method. Through exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling, one Black African woman manager was identified in Kenya and South Africa, and the other three Black African women managers were in the banking sector. After that, the first three women managers further identified the other two women managers, each adding and forming the sample size. The sample consisted

of twenty Black African women managers from Kenya and South Africa who were to be interviewed, as seen in Figure 1, where BWM represents Black African women managers. Hence, this research purposefully selected twenty Black African women managers from the Kenyan and South African banking sectors from the sample of participants who participated in the individual semi-structured in-depth interview mentioned above. The forty-one interviews provided a better understanding of the concept of women and leadership as an obstacle Black African women managers experience from an individual perspective. After conducting individual semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus groups were conducted to provide a broader perspective to understand women and leadership, consisting of four participants in each country.

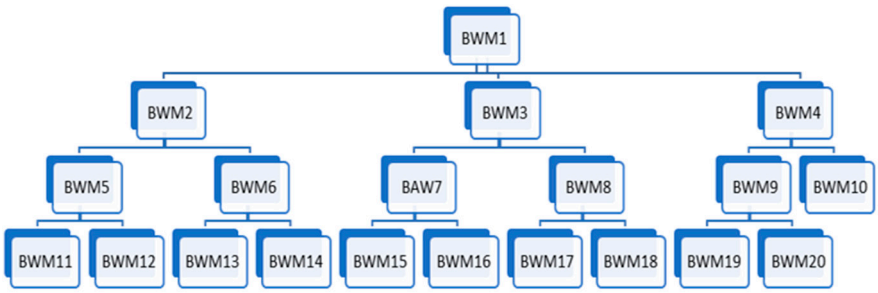


Figure 1. Exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling for research.

4. Findings and Discussions

Leadership is a social process that influences a person to direct and lead group members towards achieving a common goal. The performance of enacting power shows masculine character traits and explains why few Black African women (BAW) are still in top executive leadership positions (TELPs) in the Kenyan and South African banking sectors. In the banking sector, leadership is associated with male leadership styles, and banks still hold an image of leadership as male. The importance of male characteristics or traits in leadership describes the 'think manager, think male' phenomenon whereby successful managers possess attitudes, characteristics, and temperaments aligned to men rather than women (V. E. Schein 1973; Jogulu and Wood 2006). Unfortunately, the pervasive perceptions of 'think manager, think male' attributes are still found and practised in many cultures and, especially in male-dominated subjects. In African countries where societal culture is important, organisations adapt their organisational culture to reflect societal beliefs and values (Akanji et al. 2020). This emphasises the importance of societal culture in the banking industry (Pepple et al. 2024). Black African women employees frequently encounter hurdles in advancing their careers due to societal expectations favouring men (Marsh 2019). Thus, explain why the characteristics of success for TELPs are usually held by men, hence enforcing the 'think manager, think male' (Johnson and Mathur-Helm 2011). It should be noted that it is not only in the banking sector with the 'think manager, think male'. Societal norms pressurise women to be submissive to men, contributing to the leadership expectation that leadership roles are predominantly for men. When women assume leadership positions, it contradicts the notion of their submissiveness to men (Pepple et al. 2024). It is also in society's general culture, as the managers have pointed out.

> *"I think I will say yes. First of all, even when it comes to the staff, at first it will take time to understand it is ok, so this is the person who is in charge of me, whereas a male's voice would sound better for them, they will listen better to a male speaking and things like that, I do not to some extent, but not very, not much of that, but you would recognise those things within the workplace". (B00FM211B, p. 2)*

> *"Specifically, the locals, they do not believe, even some, the is a day specifically somebody came and asked me can I see the MBFMC004 manager, and I told them, please take a seat, Karibu (welcome). . . They said no; I wanted to see the MBFMC004 manager but did not know how to handle that. I walked out and returned after about fifteen to twenty seconds,*

and I told him, I am here. What can I do for you? Moreover, he was like, I'am sorry, I expected to have seen a 'BIG MAN' with some little white hair or some big stomach' You look small, you look very young, so I took it lightly, and we continued, and I was able to serve a client". (B00FM444B, pp. 1–2)

"Because if you are going to take Black men in particular with our culture, so if I am to take my culture, for example, they would be obvious cultural norms of subservience, and you ask yourself the Black men who has come from that culture, will he be able to see a Black senior woman as being equal, and being somebody who can have an equal seat at the table, so, it is a problematic thing?" (B00FM450B, p. 2)

With the 'think manager and think of male mentality, women are assumed to have a deficit and lack leadership skills in the banking sector. There is a perceived lack of fit between women and leadership (Javed et al. 2021). In addition, women's leadership skills are devalued and associated with powerlessness rather than leadership. The devaluing of female leadership skills can explain women's slow and uneven progress in TELPs in the Kenyan and South African banking sectors. Notably, leadership expectations are developed based on who a manager is in terms of gender-based expectations of managerial behaviour that depend on gender (Eagly et al. 1992). Hence, leadership expectations devalue women's leadership skills, placing them below men, affecting their job performance (Coleman 2020), and blocking the career advancement of Black African women managers into TELPs in the banking sector. Consequently, 'think manager, think male' facilitates the fix for women who assimilate into male-dominated leadership roles, preventing women from entering TELPs.

"In most cases, especially in the positions that I am appointed, generally, people tend to pick the men, yeah, for example, if you looked in the industry when they wanted to cure Uchumi, they picked a guy when he wanted to cure Reinsurance they picked the same guy, right, when they wanted to turn around KQ, they picked a guy, a White guy kwanza (first), when they wanted to, you know it is when they got a chance to have a new CEO at BKEB18, they picked a guy when they were reorganising EHF, they picked a guy, I mean, I do not get it, they are as qualified women, but it always seems, I mean, are not visible enough, in your opinion, I do not know? As it always seems, they will pick guys when you look at the industry, and they are qualified women. They are fit to do the job much better than men are. Women would do it better, but they never pick ladies; it is always guys, it is always the same guys, it is like the recycle them, which is annoying". (B00FM694B, pp. 3–4)

"They are some male colleagues who feel like you are not supposed to be their boss. They feel like you have been a woman; even as much as you are the manager, you are not supposed to be giving them orders, as in you are not supposed to tell them what they are supposed to do". (B00FM396B, p. 1)

Not only is 'think manager, think male' with good leadership essentially perceived as masculine, but leadership traits are characterised as masculine skills (Davis and Maldonado 2017; Isaac et al. 2012). Leadership skills and styles vary based on gender (Ayensu et al. 2024). Masculine skills include assertiveness, competitiveness, decision-making, risk-taking, strategicity, independence, status, and authority, which are associated with good leadership skills. Feminine skills like interpersonal, caring, and nurturing are better suited to teambuilding, group work, and collaboration (Davis and Maldonado 2017). Therefore, the masculine style can be summarised as promoting independence, autonomy, competition, hierarchical relations, task orientation, and establishing status and authority. In contrast, the feminine style has been summarised as promoting the relational self, participation, maintaining balance in life activities, and working together within the organisation (Maier 1999). As a result, the feminine leadership style is devalued even if BAW managers manage extremely well, as expressed by the manager.

"The ladies who are actually in Higher Management are considered to be. I do not want to go there, but they are considered to be like they do not deserve it, they do not deserve to

> *be there, maybe they just received favours because they know ABCD, that is why they are there; however, for the units that have ladies, especially in senior management, those units are usually very well run, they are extremely well run, especially those that have senior lady managers, yes, but it is just the belief that I do not know, the general belief that women are not capable of being in the senior management level, or even women fear been in those positions". (B00FM435B, pp. 4–5)*

With this reasoning, the Kenyan and South African banking sectors will always devalue women's feminine leadership styles, thus hindering their chances of entering TELPs. Black African women managers who display masculine traits and styles of leadership are deemed competent and have a higher chance of entering TELPs. Black African women often face pressure to adopt leadership styles that are more traditionally masculine. This requirement to modify their approach to masculine leadership styles presents a significant obstacle and obstructs their career progression (Ahmed et al. 2022). There is a need for BAW to be aware of the danger of falling into the trap of adopting male traits and characteristics that force them to adopt masculinity to enter TELPs and struggle to function by assimilating into a masculine context riddled with contradictions as they negotiate career demands in the banking sector (Isaac et al. 2012). This research confirms Mavin (2008) that the banks' organisation structure association of authority and power being masculine makes it difficult for BAW to hold TELPs because of the contradictions between the masculinity of power that comes with leadership and their gender identity.

> *"I had a woman boss. There is something wrong. I think it is the same thing that we are trying to get into a world that is not us, and therefore we have changed our nature. I mean, I am a nurturer. That is who I am. I take care of people, and now they tell me that I must be cut-throat and whatever, and then I become more cut-throat than them, and I am worse when everything falls apart, but unfortunately, yeah, true, I do not know we kill each other, and it is because we want to become like men instead of being who we are". (B00FM555B, p. 11)*

Black African women managers, therefore, face the dilemma of violating conventions concerning appropriate female behaviour by fulfilling masculine leadership expectations. Therefore, for the BAW to enter leadership, they are forced to contradict themselves as women and the cultural expectations of women. Black African women need to discern what level of commitment they are prepared to make when taking up leadership roles. This is crucial in African societies that are predominantly patriarchal and where women are typically expected to juggle both their professional responsibilities and domestic chores. Leadership significantly affects Black African women's personal and social aspects of life, which impacts their effectiveness in their role in the banking sector (Ayensu et al. 2024). As a result of BAW contradicting themselves, this affects their performance, which, in turn, devalues their contributions, thus doubting themselves behaving less competently and affecting their ability to lead effectively. With this reasoning, this research agrees with Isaac et al. (2012) that many BAW managers decide not to seek promotions and pursue TELP. With masculine traits being highly valued in the masculine banking sector, the BAW who display masculine traits are viewed as competent, which has repercussions for the BAW. Black African women managers must pay a high price for membership to obtain powerful positions by stereotyping masculine attributes and suppressing their feminine aspects. Women managers often internalise masculine requirements for TELPs and begin to act like men. Thus, the chances of BAW getting into TELPs are conditioned on their willingness to become more like men. Black African women cannot win this strategy as they face the contradictions of being feminine and, at the same time, masculine. This strategy of being one of the boys does not work, as it becomes exhausting as women are not men. Hence, women do not seek promotions or pursue TELPs in the banking sector.

> *"I think one thing women should know and acknowledge is that you do not have to be a man to make it, or be like a man to make it, like it is ok to be still a women, like it is ok to still be soft, it is ok to still have your feelings be heard, it is ok to still get pregnant, it is ok*

> *to have five children and still build your career, because now what we are been driven to is to be like the men, so I have to come to work at seven and leave at midnight because my male colleagues are doing that, I have to be stun and mean because that is what my male colleagues are doing that, I have to be rude and unapproachable, because that is what the, ahahaha, let me put in quotes, the successful men colleagues are doing, so, I think as we are been empowered, we can do those, I think we should also be told that, you can and it is still ok to remain a woman, like now don't borrow the male traits and now try to be that, cause now unfortunately moving the society to having empowered women is now moving the society to now not having children, it is now moving the society from having mothers at home, because now everyone is thinking for me to build my career, I can't stay at home, I cannot raise my kids, so I think we have the capability to be both, unlike the men, so let's just embrace that capability instead of throwing one side away". (B00FM868B, p. 7)*

This study found that BAW managers face two obstacles: getting into TELPs and advancing in TELPs. To first highlight BAW entering TELPs, the banking sector upsets the traditional organisational and societal gender hierarchy of men as leaders. As a result of upsetting the gender hierarchy, it also upsets traditional relations between the sexes in the banking sector. Second, BAW managers experience post-promotion obstacles, which affect their ability to lead effectively. BAW managers experience much resistance from their subordinate staff, who question their leadership abilities. Further, BAW managers experience subtle and explicit resistance to their authority, devaluing their contributions and becoming more constrained and reluctant to rock the boat as managers in the banking sector (Glass and Cook 2016). Some BAW managers mentioned resistance from men and women who did not feel fit to be top executive managers.

> *"Let me move up to the SBFMP38SM position, for a long time, it has been handled by men, so when I was coming in as the Director, I had a lot of, they used to be so many in fights, because they probably felt like I am not capable, I do not understand, but you see the no confidence this other team members had in me, and I literally put my foot down, and said this is the role I have been assigned and I am going to move with it, whether we like it or not and this is how we are going to go, so the first year was, push and pull, push and pull, because I had an assistant who is a gentle man I, so they were trying to push everything to the assistant, so they disregard me, I was like its fine but this is it, I am the one who signs everything, I am the one who says everything, I am the one who gives instructions at the end of the day, so eventually, they, they came into accepting, hahaha, accepting that oh well, ok, this is not the end, we cannot remove her and right now, three years down the line we work very well together, so I think it's that bit of acceptance, first when you are put into that role, it is usually, especially if the role that a man is the one who had been in that role for years, then when a lady is put into that role, the is usually an element of trust, not trust but doubt, will the lady fit into this role, so they will try as much as possible if, especially if you have an assistant who is male, they will try as much as possible to, even the ladies themselves, the team managers with all those teams, even the ladies themselves were actually giving the role to the man, the assistant which was shocking, and eventually once they realised that I am not moving, and I am not breaking, they decided, ok, then fine, she is here to stay, so everything worked". (B00FM435B, p. 3)*

> *"When you reach the glass ceiling, some of the obstacles you encounter, people do not just trust that you did it on your own, that it is your work, you know, the thing maybe she knows this person, or she had an affair with such and such a person and you look at your papers and look at your work, you are better than all these people you know, so sometimes that happens". (B00FM360B, p. 2)*

Due to the organisational structures of the banking sector, many people are unaware of the implicit gender biases and how women are disadvantaged when trying to get into TELPs, contributing to the glass ceiling hindering the career advancement of BAW in the banking sector in Kenya and South Africa. This glass ceiling prevents BAW from advancing into TELPs based on BAW's biased judgement and leadership. Thus, it blocks BAW from

being appointed to TELPs in the banking sector, as they are seen as lacking leadership qualities by being Black African women. By viewing leadership as 'think manager, think male' and as masculine, BAW will always be jumped over regarding appointments of TELPs in the Kenya and South African banking sectors. Furthermore, their feminine leadership styles will always be devalued and viewed as not fitting TELPs in the banking sector. These biased judgements contribute to the stereotypical assumptions about gender differences in leadership styles, which reaffirms the ceiling, making it difficult for BAW to crack the glass ceiling and enter TELPs.

> *"We can talk about that all day like I said to my previous Boss, ...(sighs)....., everything to him was a challenge to the point of insults, and telling you that you are useless, and telling you that you do not deserve to be here and this is why you will never go anywhere, just bring you down over everything, including the good, ok, for him the good that you do well, that is not good that is your work, but now anything bad, yeah that is shouted at you". (B00FM868, p. 3)*

5. Conclusions

To conclude, 'women and leadership', comparing masculine leadership styles and feminine leadership styles, facilitates gendered sex-role stereotypes for men and women in the Kenyan and South African banking sectors. As long as gender bias in the banking sector continues to assess promotability based on masculinity versus feminine leadership styles, Black African women will continue to encounter a glass ceiling when trying to enter top executive leadership positions. 'Women and leadership' is an obstacle that contributes to the glass ceiling and has resulted in the slow progress of Black African women managers getting into top executive leadership positions with the persistent assumption and stereotype that Black African women lack the fit or the capacity to be good leaders. Due to the assumption that Black African women lack the fit for leadership, they are riddled with contradictions in negotiating career demands as they struggle with assimilation into the masculine context in the banking sector. It prevents Black African women from cracking the glass ceiling as they avoid promotions and pursue top executive leadership positions as they self-select from these in the Kenyan and South African banking sectors. In summary, these stereotypical assumptions and biases on gendered leadership styles continue to play a role in preventing Black African women from entering top executive leadership positions in the Kenyan and South African banking sectors.

The practical implication for Black African women managers is that despite banking sector leadership being traditionally seen as masculine, they should not feel compelled to abandon their feminine traits in favour of adopting masculine characteristics. Women possess unique feminine traits that should be valued and not overlooked. In the Kenyan and South African banking sectors, Black African women must embrace and utilise feminine leadership traits. Only a small number of Black African women managers have reached top leadership positions in the banking sector, with the majority occupying entry-level positions and needing mentorship. It is essential for senior Black African women managers to actively take on the role of mentoring other Black African women managers in the Kenyan and South African banking sectors, as this will help encourage more women to pursue getting into top executive leadership positions instead of not pursuing getting into top executive leadership positions.

The practical implications to the Kenyan and South African banking sectors are that they must be deliberate in their efforts to appoint more Black African women to top executive leadership positions. Without intentional efforts, time and resources will be wasted with little long-term impact. It is crucial for the banking sectors and stakeholders to carefully plan and execute strategies to increase the representation of Black African women managers in top executive leadership positions. Additionally, the banking sector must fully commit to equal opportunities for women in leadership positions and ensure that the organisational culture, structure, values, and policies promote diversity and equality. Recruitment, promotions, and succession planning should be based on merit rather

than gender. The banking sectors and stakeholders must wholeheartedly advocate for equal employment opportunities for all employees. They should also have confidence in the capability of Black African women to lead and recognise their contributions to the banking sector. Trusting and having confidence in the leadership capabilities of Black African women is essential, and they should be given the chance to prove themselves in leadership roles.

The research findings have important theoretical implications for developing and advancing existing theories. This research focuses on the relationship between the concept of women and leadership and how it influences the experiences of Black African women managers in the banking sectors of Kenya and South Africa. The study reveals the challenges these managers face due to the prevalent perception of 'think manager, think male'. It also emphasises the need to explore further culture's influence on gender inequalities in these banking sectors.

The research suggests that organisational culture and structure are major obstacles for women in leadership roles in the banking sectors of Kenya and South Africa. It emphasises the need for additional facts and information to understand and change the organisational culture. The research recommends conducting future studies to explore how to change the culture and structure and to identify the specific culture and structure that will facilitate the advancement of Black African women into top executive leadership positions in the banking sectors. Additionally, the research recommends approaching the study of women and leadership in Kenya and South Africa from a quantitative angle. It states that the current research is based on the perspectives of only forty-one Black African women managers from Nairobi, Kenya, and Johannesburg, South Africa. This research suggests conducting intersectional quantitative research with an inter-categorical approach to explore the role of women and leadership in the Kenyan and South African banking sectors.

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