

# Investigating the challenges working-class women face in the construction industry-RSA

A Dissertation presented

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Further, I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Nowisile and late father, Saziso Wellington Ngqentsu.

## **Declaration**

I, Mangesi Benson Ngqentsu, hereby declare that the work on which this dissertation is based is my original work (except where acknowledgements indicate otherwise) and that neither the whole work nor any part of it has been, is being, or is to be submitted for another degree in this or any other university.

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## List of abbreviations

<b>BBBEE</b>	Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment
<b>BCAWU</b>	Building Construction & Allied Workers Union
<b>BCCEI</b>	Bargaining Council for the Civil Engineering Industry
<b>BIBC</b>	Building Industry Bargaining Council
<b>BWAWUSA</b>	Building, Wood & Allied Workers Union of South Africa
<b>CETA</b>	Construction Education and Training Authority

<b>COSATU</b>	Congress of South African Trade Unions
<b>EE</b>	Employment Equity
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>NUM</b>	National Union of Mineworkers
<b>PEPUD</b>	Promotion of Equity and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination
<b>PPE</b>	Personal Protective Equipment

## **Abstract**

South Africa's construction industry remains a male-dominated economic sector. Despite numerous progressive and transformative efforts, male domination and patriarchal behaviour continue to pose daunting challenges to women. This study investigates working-class women's challenges in the construction industry and considers possible avenues to ensure substantive transformation. The study provides critical insights into stubborn and widespread patriarchy within the industry by drawing on a range of feminist and Marxist theoretical perspectives.

The study uses qualitative research techniques, (i) three focus group discussions, (ii) six in-depth interviews and (iii) secondary data to demonstrate the prevalence of significant oppressive patriarchal and exploitative relations that marginalise women.

This study shows that women in the construction industry experience multitudes of challenges, not only from men as an expression of patriarchy but also as an entrenched ideology supporting structural and systemic features of capitalist exploitation and oppression within the industry itself. Women are peripheralized, relegated to low-wage junior roles and subjected to dehumanising treatment, including widespread sexual harassment.

Thus, this study's results essentially show that working-class women constitute the bulk of unskilled labour, semi-skilled and junior positions in the industry.

It is, therefore, incumbent on scholars and policymakers to motivate deeper analysis to generate behavioural and systemic changes to achieve substantive inclusion and empowerment of women in the sector.

Notably, the study recommends that employers and the construction industry's trade union movement (i) establish a single, central bargaining council merging civil engineering, manufacturing and building, (ii) establish effective Health and Safety and Employment Equity and Transformation Committees to drive and monitor issues related to skilling of workers, (iii) provide education on health and safety matters. Evidence and analysis provide fresh insights, including (i) a privileged section of white women positioned as senior administrative assistants whilst their black counter-parts occupy unskilled and semi-skilled positions, (ii)

the context within which women earn lower wages than men, and (iii) how femininity is conveniently used as an excuse to keep women in peripheral and junior positions.

**Keywords:** construction industry, juniorisation of women, marginalisation, masculinity, patriarchy, and femininity.

# **Chapter One: Introduction and research objectives**

## **1.1 Introduction and background**

South Africa's construction industry remains labour-intensive as it continues to be male-dominated. Statistics reveal that women constituted approximately 11% of the industry, whilst their male counterparts accounted for 89% (StatsSA, Quarterly Labour Force Survey: 1, 2020). Against this background, the subject matter is investigated to establish the position working-class women occupy, the type and nature of work they perform and their coping mechanisms or strategies.

The present study builds on prior research work conducted within the discipline of industrial sociology (Aadya and Kiran, 2013; Cottle, 2015; Kongolo, 2004; Kumar, 2013; Madikizela and Haupt, 2010; Moodley, 2012; Naidoo and Kongolo, 2004; Studies, 2013; Vandana, 2012). These studies found that women remain marginalised and relegated to inferior positions, characterised by poor treatment, dehumanisation, and sexual harassment. The concept of working-class women, not necessarily used in previous studies, is used deliberately in this study to refer to the semi-skilled and unskilled section of women workers in the construction industry.

The Marxist-feminist theoretical lens is employed as the theoretical framework. The essence of this lens is its capacity to historicise reproduction in relation to production to grasp better women's oppression and exploitation in a class-divided society (Armstrong, 2020). Thus Armstrong argues that the Marxist-feminist lens helps us to understand how the political economy is gendered in late capitalism (Armstrong, 2020).

## **1.2. Problem statement**

The vast number of working-class women continue to occupy entry-level semi-skilled (46%) and unskilled (29%) positions and are subjected to sexual harassment and dehumanising conditions ('Construction seta 1', no date). In many cases, they remain in entry-level and unskilled positions throughout their working lives, as they are routinely reduced to site clerks or flag women, secretaries, and administrators (Barnabas, 2009; Madikizela and Haupt, 2009;

Martin and Barnard, 2013). Inevitably, this condemns women to hold peripheral and junior positions classified as 'cheap labour'.

Furthermore, women continue to face challenges that frequently undermine their meaningful participation and contribution to the construction industry. Such challenges include peripheral positions, widespread sexual harassment and dehumanising conditions (Madikizela and Haupt, 2010; Mariska and Alifen, 2011; Patel and Pitroda, 2016). In addition, women are given fewer responsibilities and less authority than men, a phenomenon that continues to impede their career mobility (Mariska and Alifen, 2011).

Despite the considerable research previously conducted, no research identified and examined the challenges confronting working-class women in the three constitutive components of South Africa's construction industry. Thus the study seeks to fill this gap.

### **1.3 Rationale**

The rationale for the study is a meaningful contribution to the overall body of knowledge in the field of industrial sociology. Such is done by investigating the challenges of working-class women in the construction industry, paying attention to the three constitutive components: civil engineering, building, and manufacturing. The present study is important because it amplifies the voices, articulates women's prevailing realities, and highlights their challenges and coping strategies.

The results of this study must potentially provide lawmakers and policymakers with alternative ways of addressing the gender and class issues in policy development, thus ensuring sustainable co-existence between men and women, devoid of patriarchal attitudes.

#### **1.4 Research objective**

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the challenges working-class women face in the construction industry, targeting the three constitutive components described above. Notably, the study also aims to bring the voices of working-class women into scholarly literature. This study argues that the prevalence of patriarchy and male chauvinism results in women being marginalised, overlooked for skilled positions and relegated to junior positions, subjected to sexual harassment, and a dehumanising work environment.

#### **1.5 Research question**

The objectives were achieved by looking for answers to the questions below:

1. What are the challenges working-class women face in the construction industry -in South Africa?
2. How do these challenges manifest in their day-to-day work experiences?
3. How do women overcome these challenges?

#### **1.6 The organisation of the study**

The first chapter starts with the introduction, previewing the study, and unpacking the problem statement, rationale, research objectives, and questions.

Chapter two discusses reviewed literature, thereby introducing the theoretical framework, historiography, hegemony of masculinity, femininity, patriarchy, non-recognition of women, opportunities for women, practices of sexual harassment, macho culture, the nature of the construction industry and a gendered account of other masculine industries.

Chapter three discusses the research methodology, the research design, the data collection method, and the method employed to analyse data.

Chapter four presents an analysis and discussion of the research results. Chapter five is the conclusion, summarising the results, argument, recommendations, and areas for future research.

## **Chapter Two: Literature review and theoretical framework**

### **2.1. Introduction**

The preceding chapter presented the study's introduction, background, rationale, and objectives. This chapter offers a review of the existing literature related to the study. Literature reviews are essential for contextualising the study and informing the later discussion and analysis of results.

The approach was to present a brief appraisal of the related academic literature in the construction industry through a gender lens derived from Marxist-feminism. As argued later in this section, these theoretical lenses help establish women's roles, voice, and position.

This study argues that the present state of affairs in the construction industry, consciously or unconsciously, is limiting the substantive presence of women in the industry, relegating women to inferior positions, and muting their voices. Thus, in the historiography, this study argues that the contribution and position of women are ostensibly invisible. The study further argues that women in the construction industry remain marginalised, relegated mainly to the most subordinate roles with low wages, and subjected to dehumanisation and sexual harassment.

There are two fundamental reasons for delving into the historiography of the construction industry. Firstly, to examine how this masculine industry has been perceived concerning its culture, position, and the contribution of women. Secondly, to determine how academics in sociology, gender activists, and feminists alike have written about the role and the contribution women made in the construction industry.

Further, although the study concedes that the “women question” has been previously researched, the research has not been wide enough, which explains the gaps in the literature. The highlights of some of the significant studies carried out on the construction industry are presented below:

Sociologists Naidoo and Kongolo (2004) revealed in their studies that affirmative action remains a leading instrument for working-class women to enjoy equality

and opportunities in the construction industry. Kumar (2013) later found that the construction industry had deplorable working conditions, while Studies (2013) found that skilled workers earned much higher wages than unskilled workers. In addition, Vandana (2012) found that women were discriminated against and, as a result, earned less than their male counterparts. The authors also found that working hours were not fixed, and harassment in the workplace was common. According to Aadyaad (2013), the construction industry offers job opportunities for an army of unskilled workers. Madikizela and Haupt (2010) found that the most significant number of construction companies employ an insignificant number of women, and these women are used to perform secretarial and administrative work.

Furthermore, Cottle (2015) revealed that the income of the construction workforce in post-apartheid South Africa had not changed substantially. As a result, the apartheid cheap labour system continues to exist. Reviewed literature also investigated women's position in the construction industry and discovered that they continue to be underrepresented in senior positions (Moodley 2012).

However, whilst these studies made an important contribution to the discipline of sociology, there is still a dearth of literature concerning the persistent challenges working-class women face. Importantly, none of the prior studies has paid attention to the industry's three constitutive sectors: building, manufacturing, and civil engineering. This study explores the leading salient features of working-class women's challenges in the construction industry and how women navigate and cope with such challenges. Thus the present study seeks to help close the existing gap in the literature, thereby contributing knowledge to the discipline of industrial sociology. To ensure a theoretical grounding of this study, a Marxist-feminist theoretical lens is used as the theoretical framework upon which the study is based.

## **2.2. Theoretical framework**

A Marxist-feminist lens is employed as the theoretical framework for this study. Marxist-feminism helps to explain how women are exploited and oppressed in a capitalist society (Gimenez, 2005). This theoretical lens provides critical insights regarding the challenges working-class women face. Such challenges include the persistent nature of patriarchal relations in the construction industry.

Further, this theoretical framework helps to locate patriarchal attitudes embedded in capitalist production. This study argues that a distinguishing feature of a Marxist-feminist lens is its capacity to move beyond philosophising about women to addressing how these challenges can be overcome, thereby adding to existing strands of thinking on feminist theories.

The Marxist-feminist theoretical framework helps get to the women's question's root. Moreover, it appreciates the value-producing labour linked with the waged economy and unpaid domestic labour (Ferguson 2008). This study argues that even such unpaid domestic labour is often executed by women who are at the same time needed to give birth to, feed, and nurture the present generation of workers and the children who will constitute the future workforce (Ferguson, 2008). The theory analyses how capitalism and the individual ownership of private property exploit women at the point of production and household. Against this background, based on this theoretical lens, capitalism requires reproductive and socially reproductive labour — the day-to-day reproduction of generations of workers — to ensure its redevelopment (Ferguson, 2008).

Further, as a result of this theoretical lens, capitalist relations of production are not only based on economic contradictions but also racialised, gendered, and legal contradictions also exist (Conaghan, 2017; Ferguson, 2016). Capitalist modes of production are dynamic and are made to be responsive to the passing of time and changes in institutions.

Importantly, this Marxist-feminist theoretical lens highlights that the fight for the total emancipation of women is not the fight directed at their male counterparts but rather against the sociological gender construction and reconstruction, which

offers a construction for the hegemony of men over women. The ideals of this study's theoretical framework should also be tested against the historiography of women in such a masculine industry.

### **2.2.1. Historiography of women**

The preceding section discussed the theoretical framework for this study. The Marxist-feminist lens provides the theoretical framework upon which this study is grounded.

Historiography helps clarify arguments advanced. According to the reviewed literature, the construction industry is a quintessentially masculine terrain (Bowen, Cattell & Distiller, 2008). Hatipkarasulu and Roff (2011) and Groenmeyer (2011) critiqued Bowels et al (2008) and presented evidence to support their stance. The section below seeks to do two things; present a brief overview of women's history and dispel the notion that the construction industry requires physical strength. In this instance, historians have shown that women are by no means newcomers to the construction industry (Hatipkarasulu and Roff, 2011).

Hatipkarasulu and Roff (2011) show that women have worked in construction since medieval times, if not earlier. This study traces the role and contribution of women in the construction industry from the 13th century in Spain (Hatipkarasulu and Roff, 2011).

The Industrial Revolution in the mid-18th century brought an economic boom to Europe (Roff, 2010). As a direct consequence of that boom, the labour market expanded, and women flocked to construction sites as labourers and tradespeople. Historians further revealed that women routinely worked as unskilled labourers on construction sites, performing tasks like excavating ditches for foundation walls, carrying water, thatching roofs, and mixing mortar (Roff, 2010). Also, certain strata of middle-class women worked in skilled building trades. Importantly, in the 19th century, women first emerged as engineers and architects.

During World War II, while thousands of men fought on the frontlines, women were called upon to work in industries previously thought incompatible with their physical and mental capacities. Women performed with distinction in positions like electrical engineers, welders in shipyards, mechanics and crane operators in factories (Ross, 2010).

Membership of trade guilds was limited to birth right based on patriarchal lines, cutting out wives and daughters who had previously been permitted to offer their skills to the family business.

Fundamentally, the prejudices concerning women in the construction industry spring from a deliberate impression created in architecture, construction, and related trades that women made virtually no contribution (Hatipkarasulu and Roff, 2011). This patriarchal attitude was informed by a system that made it generally deplorable to record women's labour as work, particularly work that might earn a wage (Hatipkarasulu and Roff, 2011). Hatipkarasulu and Roff (2011) further argue that women were judged to be bodily unfit for hard labour, and subjecting women to hard labour was seen to be decadent as the primary task of women was considered to be caring for their families.

The literature indicates that women were present in the construction industry during specific periods, including the medieval period, the Industrial Revolution, World War II, and currently. In this historiography, no fundamental evidence suggests that femininity impedes women from working in the construction industry. Instead, historians reveal a rich tapestry of the position and contribution of women.

Importantly, the historiography of women in masculine industries could also be better understood within the context of a better comprehension of significant concepts such as; masculinity and its hegemony in the construction industry, patriarchy, and femininity are elaborated.

### **2.2.2. Hegemony of masculinity**

This study argues that the industry's male dominance largely consists of two segments: on the one hand, the majority of Black male workers generally occupy unskilled and semi-skilled positions. On the other hand, there is a minority of White males who invariably occupy senior skilled positions. This study argues that such an arrangement represents what Von Holdt (2002) characterises as an apartheid workplace regime. Apartheid workplace regime constituted a racial division of labour - where Black workers were labourers or semi-skilled and unskilled artisan assistants. At the same time, their White counterparts monopolised the more skilled operating and artisan jobs and managerial positions (Von Holdt, 2002). In this set up, in construction companies where women feature, they are made consistently invisible and relegated to inferior positions.

A conceptual theory on masculinity in the construction industry must understand its meaning and implications for the industry and society. Thus, the hegemony of masculinity is elaborated, followed by a theory of femininity.

In construction, hegemonic masculinity has been made an acceptable industrial culture. This explains why and how men keep the overriding social position over women (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell (1995) described the hegemony of masculinity as a phenomenon bent to give meaning to the question of men's dominant position and justifying women's subordination. Therefore, understanding hegemonic masculinity is important as it seeks to explain why and how men keep marginalising women in a given society (Connell, 1995).

Reviewed literature indicates that historically, masculinity served as an instrument to explain men's power over women in gender studies dating from the 1980s (Jewkes, Flood and Lang, 2015). Therefore, in understanding gender, gender relations, or gender identities and inequalities, specificities such as masculinities and femininities form a vital study area (Martin, as cited in Benya, 2009). The concept of masculinity is briefly examined below.

Masculinity is linked to a person's gender identity, as it represents how the person sees themselves as 'masculine', where being a man is based on having a physically strong body (Burk, Stets and Pirog-Good, 1998; Spence, 1985). This study argues that masculinity gives birth to bullying and competitive, independent and aggressive behaviours (Ashmore, Boca and Wohlers, 1986).

Consequently, where masculinity is particularly hegemonic, it leads to displays of aggressiveness, point-scoring, overconfidence, game-playing, and vulgar language (Mjoli-Ncube, 2005). These traits are portrayed as major defining features of the construction industry. Such postures are used as instruments to re-assert not only the power of men and also mannish behaviours (Clarke, L. and Wall, C. 2004). Big business often uses the masculine bias in the construction industry as an excuse not to employ women (Fielden et al., 2001; EOC, 2005; Le Breton & Loevy, 1996). Thus, women are routinely relegated to the construction industry's clerical and other inferior positions.

However, there are important critics of the notion of the hegemony of masculinity. Such critics argue that the characteristics of the hegemony of masculinity remain vague (Edley and Wetherell, 1997). As such, the concept appears to be seeking to explain everything but, in reality, explaining nothing (Miller, 1998).

Hegemonic masculinity is neither a white nor heterosexual configuration of practice (Demetriou, 2001). Instead, it serves as a mixture that ties practices from various masculinities as a basis to defend patriarchal fortitudes. In essence, hegemonic masculinity was established as a basis to give an account of what the sex role framework left largely untheorized Demetriou (2001).

Therefore, if there are masculine traits, as stereotypically understood, there should be feminine traits too. The section below discusses femininity in the context of the construction industry.

### **2.2.3. Femininity**

Masculinity can be contended to be the antithesis of femininity; hence, this section briefly examines the hegemony of femininity. Connell, cited in Benya

(2009), argues that hegemonic femininity is invalid because women have fewer opportunities for institutionalised power relations over other women. In critiquing this line of thinking, Pyke and Johnson (2003) argue that the existence of hegemonic femininity is personified by White women who subordinate other femininities based on race. Essentially, the argument is that hegemonic femininity talks about power relations among women (Pyke and Johnson, 2003). This brings into context Von Holdt's theory of the apartheid workplace regime, wherein in this context, all White women occupy senior positions in the construction industry. Therefore, this study argues that the apartheid workplace regime is still prevalent in the construction industry. This is important because the apartheid regime as a system subjected women to oppression based on their race, gender and their economic position, meaning patriarchy was embedded in this system. This study exposes this contradiction of White women who subordinate their Black counterparts as a critical contradiction to be studied as it impedes the struggle against patriarchy.

The study defines femininity based on how people see themselves as feminine, given the basic features of being a woman in society (Burke et al., 1988; Spence, 1985). Women's femininity is entrenched in one's social identity beyond biological sex. A dominant narrative in large segments of society seeks to project femininity as subordinate to masculinity (Connell, 1995) and uncompetitive in physical activity (Van Zuydam, 2012).

Stereotypically, women are regarded as passive, cooperative, and expressive. They possess a degree of softness, domesticity, weakness, emotional labour, and nimble fingers (Elson and Pearson, 1981; Hochschild, 1989; Martin, 2001; Nkondo, 1990; Stets and Burke, 2000;). This study addresses how these stereotypes impact women and how they either conform to or resist them. Moreover, critically, it examines how men perceive women and the kind of duties expected to be executed by women.

Regrettably, this study could not delve into the deep theory of femininities due to the lack of sufficient theorisation of the concept itself. The study provides meaning and context by highlighting how women are perceived by the industry

and the impact and implications of this perception. Scholars such as Schippers (2007), Holmes and Schnurr (2006), Pyke and Johnson (2003), and Messerschmidt (2003) have acknowledged the insufficient theoretical data on femininity. It can also be argued that the existence of masculinity and femininity results from patriarchy. Thus, the section below discusses the notion of patriarchy.

#### **2.2.4. Patriarchy**

The section above helped to locate the context within which patriarchy is built and sustained. This section reflects on the meaning of patriarchy, how it manifests, and how women cope or survive in an often-hostile masculine industry environment.

In the reviewed literature, patriarchy is described as the oppression of women and their subordination to men (Bhasin, 2006). Numerous scholars have developed and argued this concept, each of whom provided different definitions of patriarchy. This study draws attention to definitions provided by Mitchell (1971), Walby (1990), Jagger and Rosenberg (1984), Bhasin (2006), and Benya (2009).

Mitchell (1971) argues that patriarchy is characterised as a system of kinship wherein men exchange women. Women are not only oppressed but also exploited (Walby 1990). Further, patriarchy builds social relations between women and men, establishing or creating hierarchical structures. (Jagger and Rosenberg, 1984) that builds solidarity amongst men as a basis to marginalise women. Patriarchy is defined as a system where men are dominant whilst women are subordinate to men (Bhasin, 2006). Women's subordination involves, discrimination, control, exploitation, oppression, and violence. These acts occur within the family, the workplace and broader society (Sultana, no date). Thus, Benya (2009) refers to patriarchy as a system in which power disregards and handicaps women while benefiting men.

In this study, "subordination" is used instead of "oppression". The intention is to draw on the interesting distinction made by Sultana, who uses the concept of

subordination to make a point that suggests that the concept does not have any bad intention; instead, it seeks to accommodate what appears as complicity between man and subordinate woman. Therefore, this theory seeks to assume the possibility of wittingly or unwittingly voluntary acceptance of the subordinate status in exchange for defence and privileges (Sultana, no date). Therefore, patriarchy is a developing concept that includes women's complicity. However, such complicity takes place either intentionally or unintentionally.

Further, this study brings in several strands of feminist thinking when discussing the question of patriarchy, such as radical feminism, socialist feminism, and Marxist feminism, as a means of locating the study's theoretical grounding in the theoretical framework section above.

Jone (2020) argues that radical feminism is a philosophy which describes the basic tenets of patriarchy rooted in the inequality between women and men. As a result, patriarchy fragmented societal rights and privileges such that men benefited whilst women suffered.

In the reviewed literature, socialist feminists regard the divide between men and women as not static but changing with changes in modes of production (Beechy, 1977). As argued in the theoretical framework section, Marxist-feminist theory appreciates the value-producing labour linked with the waged economy and unpaid domestic labour (Ferguson 2008).

In the final analysis, the study observes, based on the above definitions, men are accustomed to wielding power over women. However, this study argues that women are not born to be subordinates and men to dominate. Thus, the study uses Engels (1940) trace the root of men's dominance and subordination of women to the expansion of private property.

The manifestation of patriarchy in the construction industry takes many forms. The dominant form lies in placing women in inferior and secondary occupations or positions in the construction industry (Sultana, 2021). Against this background, femininity is being used as a convenient excuse to relegate women to inferior and peripheralised positions is another form. At worst, patriarchal practices mute the

voice of women and make women invisible (Salzinger, 2003). Critically, the very existence of patriarchy is the male dominance and subordination of women's labour per (Hartman, 1981).

Women use different strategies to survive or cope in a patriarchal society, particularly in the construction industry. One strategy involves resisting or accommodating masculine behaviour (Davey, 2008). Further, to survive, women are made to conduct themselves in a manner that suits their male counterparts (Chowwen, 2007; Du Plessis and Barkhuizen, 2012). Such conduct includes competitive interactional styles and aggressive male characteristics (Akingbade, 2010). As a result, such behaviour disregards the role of women. As a consequence of this, women do not get recognised. Thus, the section below reflects on the non-recognition of women.

#### **2.2.5. Non-recognition of women**

The section above helped to ground this section and other sections to follow on the meaning of patriarchy and how it manifests itself. This section, and other sections to follow, essentially serve to illustrate how patriarchy manifests itself.

Reviewed literature indicates that women's contributions in masculine industries are disregarded (Fielden, Davidson, Gale & Davey, 2001). One illustration of this disregard is the experience where women frequently encounter male instructors and co-workers who doubt their technical competence (Dainty et al., 2000). Thus, when it comes to promotions, women are frequently overlooked due to the prevalent patriarchal attitudes. The reviewed literature argues that even highly qualified women are expected to perform clerical and support work instead of more technical and physical tasks like their male counterparts (Fielden et al., 2001).

Further, it has been observed that informal recruitment processes and advertisements, unstructured interviews, and attitudes promoting masculine values and interests frequently discourage women from applying for further

training and promotion (Fielden et al., 2001). Thus, the construction industry's recruitment and communication channels tend to favour men over women.

In addition, previous research has demonstrated that the basic needs of women are disregarded (Olofsson, 2004). Many women complain that personal protective equipment (PPE) that does not fit properly endangers their safety (Olofsson, 2004). This study argues that the provision of such improper PPEs is on the basis that the construction industry never imagined a worker of a 'woman kind'. Also, precisely because women were judged to be bodily unfit for hard labour, subjecting women to hard labour was seen to be decadent as the basic task of women was considered to be caring for their families (Hatipkarasulu and Roff, 2011). This study further argues that the current participation of women in the construction industry and other masculine industries continues to be part of the broader struggle to dismantle patriarchy in the workplace. However, with patriarchy embedded in the capitalist mode of production, the participation of women was also made a new form of cheap labour.

In addition, it has been reported that the temporary sanitation facilities utilised by most construction companies are typically unisex, frequently lack privacy, and are poorly maintained, exposing workers to the risk of contracting diseases and urinary tract infections (Clarke et al., 2004).

The United States of America's occupational health and safety administration research indicates that most equipment, tools, and clothing are not designed to fit women's bodies (Occupational Safety and Health Administration, 1999). Thus, disregarding their needs demonstrates the lack of recognition of women in the masculine industry. Due to differences in time and context, these studies cannot be generalised to contemporary South African realities. Thus, this study investigates working-class women's challenges in the masculine industry. Therefore, the non-recognition of women's role and contribution is directly linked to the availability of opportunities for women or the lack thereof. In this context, the section below deals with the question of opportunities for women.

### **2.2.6. Opportunities for women**

The previous section dealt with the non-recognition of women. Therefore, this section builds on the previous section by looking at the opportunities for women, or lack thereof. This study argues that the opportunities are gendered and are only to some degree based on a woman's education, skills, or professional level.

According to previous studies, the level of education plays a role in career achievement for women in masculine industries (Betz, 2004). For example, it has been observed that a woman must have completed her tertiary education to assume a construction site engineer position (Sangweni, 2015). Therefore, women with better educational qualifications stand a better chance of accessing opportunities. Such opportunities relate to senior or skilled positions and, by implication, better wages or salaries.

This study argues that opportunities for men are not subjected to any level of education per se. Against this background, these gendered opportunities also re-enforce wage disparities between men and women. Unlike their male counterparts, women's skills are never upgraded to major skilled jobs like masons, bar benders, carpenters, plumbers, fabricators or painters, to mention a few. Women are only allowed to perform certain types of work (Anvekar, 2015). Thus, women join the industry as unskilled labour and remain in such positions throughout their lifespans (Barnabas, 2000).

Consequently, women are reduced to an army of semi-skilled and unskilled workers as either flag women or site clerks (Martin & Barnard, 2013). Sangweni (2015) adds that the leading positions most women occupy in the construction industry are secretary, clerk, and safety officer. This non-upgrading of women from unskilled to skilled positions keeps women earning lower wages than their male counterparts (Baruah, 2010; Jhabvala and Kanbur, 2002; Suchitra and Rajshekhar, 2006). The section below discusses the question of sexual harassment in the construction industry.

### **2.2.7. Practices of sexual harassment**

The preceding section reflected on the wage disparities between women and men and the reasons behind the disparities. This section discusses the question of sexual harassment.

Reviewed literature revealed that sexual harassment is one leading challenge facing women in masculinity industries (Anvekar, 2015). The insecure nature of sites, particularly for females, creates what Anvekar describes as a vicious trap for sexual harassment. Thus, the construction industry in its present form can be characterised as a breeding ground for sexual harassment (Bagihole et al., 2000; Hersch, 2011).

In addition, reviewed literature argues that incidents of sexual harassment in the construction industry are frequently under-reported (Botha, 2016; Ramakrishnam, 2019). This study advances several fundamental reasons for the under-reporting of sexual harassment in the construction industry. Such reasons include that women regard reporting as an overreaction to the incidents; perhaps it is better to keep quiet, it is embarrassing or difficult, or they may fear negative consequences (Macdermott, 2020).

Given the patriarchal nature of the construction industry, this study argues that there are women who would not report incidents, thinking that the conduct may not be severe enough to complain about since such behaviours are commonplace or an accepted reality in the masculine industry (Macdermott, 2020). The observation that the construction industry is much more than a breeding ground for sexual harassment may be made. Sexual harassment may be an ingrained form of the culture of the industry. Thus, the section below deals with macho culture in the construction industry.

### **2.2.8. Macho culture in a male-dominated construction industry**

The section above dealt with the matter of sexual harassment. This section interrogates the dominant subculture in the masculine industry and its impact on women.

Male dominance is displayed as macho culture. Macho culture is argued as relationships characterised by arguments, conflicts, and crises, amongst other things (Gale, 1994). Davey (2008) and Clarke and Wall (2004) found that, to assert their masculinity, men often use aggressiveness, point-scoring, overconfidence, game-playing, and vulgar language. Touching and spanking, amongst others, can be interpreted as a display of sexual interest towards a woman, which is prevalent in the developing macho culture in the construction industry. This stereotypical macho culture feeds into the stereotype that women are cooperative, passive, and expressive, whilst men are competitive, aggressive, and instrumentally oriented on the other hand (Stets and Burke, 2000).

Furthermore, the persistent perception of the construction industry as a tough job appears to be engrained in people's minds and re-enforces this sub- macho culture. The argument that the identity of a male construction worker is defined in relation to his manliness and that his manliness is defined in relation to his demanding job further compounds this perception (Ness, 2012). Connell (1995) argues that manliness is used as a basis to survive, oppress, exploit, and, above all, assert superiority over women.

Finally, in the reviewed literature, it was observed that for women to survive, they are made to either resist or submit to manly behaviour (Davey, 2008). As indicated above, this means that women must behave in socially unacceptable ways, such as shouting or engaging in aggressive behaviour, to appear like men (Chowwen, 2007; Du Plessis and Barkhuizen, 2012). Critically, with patriarchy entrenched in the industry, employers use this macho culture as a convenient excuse to block the entrance of women into the industry (Construction Industry Board Staff and Construction Industry Board, 1996; EOC, 2005; Fielden et al., 2001; Le Breton and Loevy, 1996). A reflection on the nature of the construction industry is important as a basis for comprehending the industry.

### **2.2.9. The nature of the construction industry in South Africa**

The preceding section dealt with the notion of cultural racism in the construction industry. The section discussed its impact on women and how women negotiate their survival in the industry. This section helps to locate the previous themes within the subject matter into context.

In the reviewed literature, construction may perhaps be a broad concept; however, in the context of South Africa, construction is a key sector of the economy dealing with and embracing, amongst other activities, civil engineering, building, and manufacturing (Oseghale, Abiola-Falemu and Oseghale, 2015). Major activities in construction include painting, sandblasting, water drilling, roofing, and installing floors (Vanags, Begec and Zarina, 2015).

In the reviewed literature, the construction industry refers to building design, maintenance, demolition of buildings, installing floors, roofing, walls, painting, plastering, plumbing, carpentry, and flooring. Civil engineering involves road construction, blasting, tarring, paving and road-marking, whilst manufacturing includes brick, cement, and slab making. Bowen, Edwards, Lingard & Cattell, (2014) argue that based on the nature of the industry, which demands physical strength from workers regardless of gender, not everyone can work in it. Bowen et al. (2014) further argue that this factor makes it worse for women, who are regarded as the weaker gender, making it more difficult for women to be accepted in the industry. It is argued in this study that such a posture is a reflection of the use of masculine lenses.

However, the sentiments Bowen et al. (2014) expressed ignore the heroic role of women in the construction space. Groenmeyer (2011) recognises that the industry is not unfamiliar terrain to women and points to their historic role in building sustainable homesteads. Groenmeyer's perspective is informed by the fundamental role women played in building huts (rondavels) in South Africa, which were crucial to sustaining rural lives. Moodley (2012) adds that most households in rural areas and squatter camps were built and maintained by women. As such, Hatipkarasulu and Roff (2011) described construction work by women as an occupation with a rich history.

The reviewed literature reveals that there is no consensus on the idea that the construction industry is only suited to those with physical strength. The notion of the masculinisation of the industry, and the relegation of women to inferiority, face critical contestation within academia. The intellectual contributions made by Moodley (2012), Hatipkarasulu and Roff (2011), and Groenmeyer (2011) can be viewed as outstanding, as they inspire confidence and give hope that no single narrow narrative should be allowed to contaminate the construction industry without critique. Therefore, masculinity cannot be used as a convenient excuse to undermine women.

This study recalls Von Holdt's (2002) theory of the racial structure of power in the workplace. This study builds on this theory to advance a theory of the patriarchal structure of power in the construction industry. This theory suggests that the construction industry is a terrain of men and men's power. On-site, women are made to understand that they operate in male territory.

#### **2.2.10. A gendered account of another masculine industry-mining**

The preceding section focused extensively on the nature of the construction industry as a basis to locate the nature of the construction industry within the context of the subject matter as investigated. It locates the position of women and how they entered the construction industry.

In this section, an attempt is made to briefly analyse and draw some lessons from other masculine industries, such as mining. The purpose is to establish the existence of the challenges found in the construction industry and how working-class women in the mining industry navigate or survive such challenges.

This study argues that the construction industry is not a unique industry regarding masculinity with persisting stubborn patriarchy- the mining industry is one other industry amongst many. In the mining industry, women are subjected to sexual harassment, are not taken seriously and respected, and are reduced to junior and peripheral positions (Benya, 2009; Kaggwa, 2020). Against this background, sexual harassment emerges as the biggest challenge facing women in the mining

industry, both on the surface and underground (Benya, 2017). In this study by Benya (2017), it is further argued that women are subjected to sexual harassment the moment they enter the mine shaft, in the cage going underground and when they are working underground. This study narrates such an experience that women are subjected to sexual harassment, particularly in the trucks or bakkies to work, at work and when coming back from work.

Further, women also lack career progression due to discrimination (Kaggwa, 2020). Benya (2009) found that women are treated as trophies and lazy and also slowing down the production processes. Thus women are seen as inferior in workplaces, which is heightened by male dominance (Gruber, 1998). Therefore, to survive, women in the mining industry are made to provide whatever they have, either sex, smiles or money (Benya, 2009).

Furthermore, this study argues that the design of PPE for women in the mining industry remains improper (Benya, 2015). Benya (2009; 2013) argues that PPE is designed for men or male bodies and thus does not fit the woman's body. Benya further argues that the current work suits in most mines are one-piece, and mines refuse to buy two-piece work suits for women citing costs as the reason. As such, women face challenges when they must use ablution facilities as they must be subjected to undressing, considering the belt tied to the waist.

Therefore, based on this brief account, this section concludes that the mining industry remains masculine, with working-class women facing multiple challenges. This argument is advanced by considering the ongoing transformation in the industry. The point, however, was to point out that the challenges women face and their coping strategies in the construction industry exist elsewhere, i.e. mining industry.

### **2.3. Conclusion**

The literature review gave a brief history of women in the industry and explored critical concepts to help us comprehend the industry's nature and existing construction sub-cultures.

In the historiography, women scarcely feature as workers deserving recognition. The focus on women's history exposes the industrial marginalisation of women caused by culture, behaviour, and social relations between men and women, highlighting the important and heroic role women played.

The reviewed literature confirms that women have been engaged in construction and building since the medieval period, if not earlier. The marginal number of females in the industry results from a deeply-entrenched culture of patriarchy and ineffective systems to address it. As the reviewed literature suggests, patriarchy is embedded in the capitalist economic system. Thus, this study argues that private property and ownership are basic tenets of capitalism. Furthermore, this study argues that in such a capitalist system, men will retain their privileges whilst women suffer. It is against this background that Bozzoli (1983) classified patriarchy as a synonym for a capitalist mode of production.

In the literature, a link is made to the implications brought about by the notion of the hegemony of masculinity in the industry. The implications are associated with introducing and retaining sub-cultures, such as aggressive behaviour and point-scoring.

As a result, women are often caught between resisting or accommodating the masculine behaviour imposed on them. This also revealed the material reasons for women's exploitation, oppression and subordination.

Chapter three presents the research methods employed in collecting and analysing the data.

## **Chapter Three: Research Methodology**

### **3.1. Introduction**

The previous chapter focused on the literature review. The first part of the chapter unpacked the theoretical lens employed in the study. It critically outlined the study's theoretical framework, drawing from literature on the hegemony of masculinities, femininities, and patriarchy. Chapter two also looked at the nature of the construction industry, its historiography, and how the industry has excluded women, the persisting challenges facing working-class women such as non-recognition of women, practices of sexual harassment, opportunities, wage disparities between women and men, and health and safety challenges. It also looked at the persisting sub-cultures in the construction industry, such as macho culture.

In this chapter, I outline the research approach and the methods employed to collect and analyse data. The chapter ends with the ethics and limitations of the study.

### **3.2. Research methods**

This study employed a qualitative approach. The significance of the qualitative method is its capacity to give complex textual descriptions of how individuals experience a given research matter (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, and Namey, 2005). Thus, the qualitative research method was used in this study because it helps us describe and understand women's experiences in the construction industry.

The study relied on focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with participants. Focus group discussions helped generate deep insights into the participants' experiences and beliefs (Mishra, 2016). They are important for obtaining an in-depth comprehension of social issues (Nyumba, Wilson and Derrick, 2018). They enable a researcher to systematically probe the participants' complex personal experiences, perceptions, and attitudes through their interactive nature. In-depth interviews are useful through their extensive

probing capacity to get a single participant to talk freely and express detailed beliefs and feelings on a topic (Webb, 1995). I chose to employ in-depth interviews because I wanted a deep comprehension of working-class women's challenges in the construction industry.

Themes were developed to guide focus group discussions (FGD), whilst an interview guide was used for in-depth interviews. FGDs were used as a first exercise, whilst in-depth interviewing was used for individual follow-ups.

FGD helped expose the participants' shared experiences and the unique ways some experienced masculinity in the construction industry. During the discussions, there were dominant participants and those who talked less. The remedy to this situation was the researcher systematically probing and encouraging every participant to talk and share their experiences freely.

I conducted five in-depth interviews: one with a trade union representative, one with the employer, and three with workers. In-depth interviews were used to follow up and probe for deeper insights on issues that emerged out of the FGD. The interview guide for the in-depth interviews was influenced by themes that emerged out of the FGD. Importantly, these in-depth interviews were also conducted with workers who did not participate in the FGD. Further, a representative from both the employer and the NUM participated in the in-depth interview to explore the challenges working-class women face.

Participants in this study can be broken down as per the tables below:

**Table 1: Focus Group Discussions**

<b>Component</b>	<b>No. of Participants</b>
<b>Manufacturing</b>	6
<b>Building</b>	7
<b>Civil engineering</b>	1

**Table 2: In-depth interviews**

<b>Component</b>	<b>No. of participants</b>
<b>Manufacturing</b>	2
<b>Building</b>	1
<b>Civil engineering</b>	1
<b>National Union of Mineworkers</b>	1
<b>Employer</b>	1

### **3.2.1. Access**

I gained access to the workplaces as I had worked in the industry as an organiser for the National Union of Mineworkers for five years prior to pursuing my studies. During this period, I constantly communicated with workers in the industry, which culminated in building relations. I was, therefore, not a stranger to the participants, and participants could trust me.

Further, it also helped with the question of trust. Trust in this context relates to whether participants were assured they would not be reported to the employer while discussing issues with the researcher. Guarantees of confidentiality were given prior to interviews.

Some participants chose to participate in this study after work, while others participated during their social time or break intervals in a private venue. Thus, a school in Phillippi was used for the first FGD, a parliamentary constituency office in Paarl was used for the second group, and a private space on-site in Brackenfell was used for the last discussion.

Follow-up interviews with either workers, the employer, or the trade union representative were held in private spaces at work or outside work.

### **3.2.2. Sampling**

The study employed purposive sampling. According to Sarantakos (1998), purposive sampling is beyond the selection of participants. It focuses on the time, place, type of events, and subjects under discussion. In essence, the selection of a conducive environment for data collection. Thus, the researcher selected participants from each component of the industry, viz. civil engineering, manufacturing, and building, the trade union and the employer.

### **3.2.3. Data collection**

The two data collection techniques of in-depth interviews and FGD were useful because the researcher wanted to bring women's challenges in the construction industry to the fore (Hamilton, 2013).

The interview guide allowed participants to reflect openly on their lived experiences. Importantly, all participants had a wealth of experience in the construction industry stemming from their four to more than ten years of experience in the industry.

The interview guide for the FGD was designed to ensure that the research results could answer the research questions and that the study's objectives were realised. The guide enabled participants to reflect on their experiences openly, as the questions were open-ended.

Participants shared their lived experiences openly because of the FGD's interactive nature and because they could follow up and enrich one another's statements. Thus, FGD can be characterised as a compelling data-gathering technique characterised by its live and dynamic interactive nature, allowing sharing of unfiltered experience and unearthing salient issues.

After completing the FGD, the researcher listened to recordings and perused field notes. This helped to shape the approach taken to the in-depth interviews. Therefore, the interview guide's framework was influenced by the general

outcome of the FGD, and I used it as an instrument to further probe issues raised in the FGD.

The in-depth interviews with women from the three constitutive components of the construction industry, the employer, and the trade union, gave further insights. These interviews helped me understand the role of both the union and the employer in responding to the challenges facing working-class women.

Furthermore, collective agreements reached with recognised trade unions and employers from the Building Industry Bargaining Council (BIBC) and the Bargaining Council for the Civil Engineering Industry (BCCEI) were used as secondary sources in this study.

#### **3.2.4. Data analysis**

This study employed thematic analysis using the six interrelated steps formulated by Braun and Clarke (2012). The six steps involved familiarising myself with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; redefining and naming themes, and ultimately producing the report. This analysis method was best suited to grasp the participants' experiences and enabled the researcher to learn the trends, patterns, and themes to accomplish the research objectives and answer research questions.

In analysing data, a blended approach combining both deductive and inductive coding was employed (Graebner, Martin, and Roundy, 2012). In deductive coding, the researcher employed a pre-defined list of codes created in a coding frame before data analysis started (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2013). In contrast, in inductive coding, the researcher developed new codes from data using phrases or terms often used by participants (Linneberg and Korsgaard, 2019). The codes or themes comprised the most frequently mentioned phrases or terms. Whilst the codes and themes do not necessarily mean the same thing, in practice, they overlap as some codes in this study became themes. For example, in this study, 'sexual harassment' was initially a code and remained a theme for the study. The coding and generating of themes comprised about four

codes and more as phrases or terms used by participants. As such, they were refined and guided by the reviewed literature and ultimately led to the six themes: non-recognition of the role of women; limited opportunities for women; wage disparities between women and men; intersectionality of gender and race; practices of sexual harassment; health and safety; and inappropriate PPE.

### **3.3. Ethics**

The important component of any research is protecting participants' safety and well-being. This study was conducted in ways that did not threaten the well-being of participants. However, to ensure the study's ethical grounding and compliance with the university's ethical code, the following measures were undertaken:

#### **3.3.1. Informed consent**

Consent is the process in which researchers educate potential participants about the study in order for the participant to voluntarily agree to participate in the study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Participants with decision-making capacity must be provided sufficient and easily understandable information to participate voluntarily (Manandhar and Joshi, 2020). Each participant was informed of the study's purpose prior to participation. Before data collection, participants were asked to read the information sheet and consent form, which detailed the purpose of the research and the potential risks and benefits of participation. This study's information sheets, and consent forms were written in simple language to facilitate comprehension. Each participant was asked to sign her consent form prior to data collection. The willingness to sign was facilitated by the researcher's assurance that the consent forms would be kept private and confidential. Participants were also made aware that participation in the study was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from it if they desired. The right to withdraw safeguards participants' freedom; indeed, the option to withdraw serves as an indicator of whether participation is voluntary (Gertz, 2008).

### **3.3.2. Privacy and confidentiality**

In order for confidentiality to be adequate, anything with the potential to show subject identities coming out of the research records has to be isolated (Berg, 2001). Thus, participants' real names and other identifying information were removed from the data.

Importantly, participants in the focus groups were encouraged not to share the information discussed in the sessions with anyone else. Furthermore, as part of the researcher's obligation to protect the participants' privacy, all interview transcripts were stored in a password-protected folder, and the password was made secret. The stored data will be archived after the submission of the study.

### **3.3.3. Potential benefits**

There is no 'direct' benefit to participants for playing a part in the study, but the information gained might help future research, which could be beneficial beyond the individual. The results of this study may contribute to designing and implementing policies that help challenge the prejudices and stereotypes against women and increase the participation of women in traditionally male-dominated sectors.

### **3.4. Limitations**

Due to the small and purposive sample, the results could not be generalised to all working-class women employed in the construction industry.

Significantly, qualitative research does not generalise results but delves deeply into the investigated phenomena (Patton, 2002). This study sheds light on the participants' perspectives and experiences in the construction industry.

Furthermore, because data collection was conducted by a male researcher and all the participants were female, participants may not have felt as comfortable sharing their experiences as they would have if the researcher had been female. Participants may have hesitated to speak openly about specific experiences,

such as sexual harassment, with a male interviewer. The researcher attempted to address this by developing rapport with participants and assuring them that their information would remain private and confidential.

Lastly, certain FGD and in-depth interviews were conducted in isiXhosa. In such cases, the author transcribed and translated the data into English. However, the author is not a professional translator; thus, errors may have occurred in the translation, which may have impacted the interpretation of results. However, proofreading was carried out thoroughly to overcome any possible errors.

The next chapter unpacks the research results and discussions, followed by the conclusion of the study and its recommendations.

## **Chapter Four: Presentation of results, discussions, and analysis**

### **4.1. Introduction**

The previous chapter focused on the methodology employed in collecting and analysing data. This chapter discusses and analyses the research results collected through FGD and in-depth interviews.

Thematic analysis was employed and yielded six themes: non-recognition of the role and contribution of women, limited opportunities for women, wage disparities between women and men, the intersectionality of gender and class, practices of sexual harassment, health and safety, and the provision of inappropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

The demographic profile of participants prefaces this chapter. The demographic profile is presented as a basis to represent the age, race, wage level, trade unionisation, and level of education of the broader population of women. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future studies and recommendations directed at construction firms, trade unions, and policy makers.

### **4.2. Discussing and analysing the demographic profile of participants**

Table 3 presents the profile of women participants in this study. It informs the reader of their age, race, level of education, wage level, and trade union affiliation. This section discusses and analyses each variable to evaluate its significance in the study.

**Table 3: Profile of participants (n=18)**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Age</b>	25-30	4 22%
	31-49	10 56%
	50 and above	4 22%
<b>Race</b>	Coloured	3 17%
	African	15 83%
<b>Education level</b>	Secondary	11 61%
	Tertiary	7 39%
<b>Wage scale</b>	R3,500-R8,000	17 94%
	R8,001-R15,000	1 6%
<b>Trade union</b>	None	7 39%
	NUM	11 61%
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100%</b>

Of the 18 participants in the study, slightly over half (56%) were 31-49 years old, while the others were split equally into younger (25-30) or older (50 or older) age categories. Most participants (83%) were African, and the others were Coloured. Most participants (61%) had a secondary education, while the others had a tertiary education. Almost all (94%) earned R3,500-R8,000 per month, with only one participant earning more. Most (61%) were NUM members, while others were not unionised.

### **4.3. Results discussion and analysis**

The discussion and analysis of the results in this study sought to address the research questions as outlined in chapter one. Through FGD and in-depth interviews, participants expressed their first-hand experiences about their challenges as working-class women in the construction industry. Importantly, these results are underpinned by the six themes that emerged from the data analysis.

#### **4.3.1. Non-recognition of women**

The women interviewed from both the FGD, and in-depth interviews indicated that they were not recognised. This claim was informed by two factors: a bullying tendency and a disregard for ideas from women.

##### **Bullying tendency**

All the women interviewed from both the FGD, and in-depth interviews described the construction industry as an industry marred with bullying. Such bullying manifests through (amongst other things) the issuing of instructions telling women what to do and what not to do at work. The excerpts below help to illustrate this experience:

‘Despite my 13 years working in the construction industry, there are male managers who still think and expect a woman to make a cup of tea or coffee for men and do the cleaning’ - Eva, focus group discussion, Brackenfell, 18 October 2019

A team supervised by a woman is marred with interference by a man who is a senior manager. Meaning she is not respected at all. As her subordinates, we get instructions from a man outside of our team without her knowledge’ - Kia, focus group discussion, Phillippi, 3 March 2019

The data suggest that certain men in the construction industry expect women to do specific tasks at work. Such tasks are made to define women and their roles. As indicated in the excerpt above, such tasks include making tea or coffee and cleaning, amongst other things. As one participant summed-up during the discussion, 'They [men] do not even ask politely; they instruct.' - Eva, focus group discussion, Brackenfell, 18 October 2019

As the data indicates, directing women to perform odd jobs outside their job description signifies the patriarchal nature of the industry. It epitomises an entrenched culture of bullying based on gender in an industry where women make up just a small group. In the reviewed literature, it is argued that in a traditionally male-dominated industry, women frequently encounter male instructors and co-workers who doubt their technical competence (Dainty et al., 2000). Therefore, making tea and cleaning are seen as jobs best suited to women. This is an expression of the power relationship whereby men dominate women (Bhasin, 2006) and further confirms the prevalence of patriarchy in the construction industry (Sultana, no date).

This study indicates that bully-ism is an added feature of the toxic masculine behaviour in the construction industry defined by aggressiveness, point-scoring, over-confidence, game-playing, and vulgar language (Davey, 2008; Clarke et al., 2004). It is such behaviour, which men use in masculine industries to assert their masculine identity, that force women to submit to making tea or coffee and obey instructions (Davey, 2008; Clarke et al., 2004). Such behaviour is fuelled by the belief that women are passive, cooperative, and expressive (Stets and Burke, 2000).

Therefore, as a consequence of bully-ism, amongst other things, ideas and views expressed by women get disregarded.

## **Disregard for ideas from women**

The interviewed women from both the FGD and in-depth interviews argued that space for their contribution is not provided in the construction industry. Instead, it is disregarded. The excerpts below illustrate the point:

‘When we give an idea or opinion, they do not take note of it but when the same suggestion is said by a man it is given attention. For example, as a quality controller, I once suggested that there should be something that would cut the brick if it is too big. But no one really showed any kind of interest in my suggestion but as the time went by, a male chap (colleague) made the same suggestion, and it was taken into consideration. I got upset because I came up with that idea first, but they took it lightly and that really broke my heart.’ - Nobuntu, 3 March 2019, Phillippi

‘Even if you come up with an opinion or solution [as a woman], it is sometimes too hard even for your male seniors or supervisors to take it. They take a view from women as a third or last option if they take it.’ - Pushy, 24 October 2019, Kuils River

‘Where I work, I sit in crucial meetings with clients of the company. The men I work with always make a joke of the fact that the architect is a woman and then when there is a design issue, they would say as a woman I will choose a particular colour because I am a woman, and would all laugh.’ - Joyce, 18 October 2019, Brackenfell

The interviewed women characterised the disregard of their views and ideas as non-recognition of their role in and contribution to the construction industry. Nobuntu's quote above suggests that women's ideas or views in the construction industry are helpful but ignored. Their ideas are ultimately only implemented if a man has presented them. Such is the manifestation of denialism by men that women can be innovative and think. The fundamental basis for such denialism is the doctrine that men are superior to women (Connell, 1995) and that women are subordinates of men (Connell, 2005). This mentality places women in inferior positions even at the level of thinking (Sultan, 2021). It does appear that the study also shows what Bozzoli (1991), in a study by Xulu-Gama (2017), describes as a lack of feminine solidarity amongst women in the construction industry. As per the excerpts above, major happenings in the industry required some degree of unity and solidarity amongst women.

Significantly, this study advances an argument that the continued inferiorisation of women has the potential to thwart their effective participation in the construction industry. Such an environment also thwarts any possible opportunities for women.

#### **4.3.2. Opportunities for women**

The section above shows that the contribution of women in the construction industry is not recognised.

This section deals with opportunities for women or the lack thereof. The data indicates a dialectic relationship between the recognition of women and their opportunities. The data further indicates that such opportunities, where they exist, require education and skills training.

## Education

The women interviewed from both the FGD and in-depth interviews indicated that opportunities are available, subject to the level of one's education. The excerpt below makes the point:

'There are opportunities in the construction industry for those with some level of education. However, those with qualification and relevant qualifications in particular stand much better chances.' - Rethabile, in-depth interview, 19 August 2019, Stickland

'Yes, I would say there are opportunities for women because judging from the people or managers that I have worked with they have always had that mind-set of wanting to help people grow and help them mature in their career. And therefore, for me, there has been a lot of opportunities. However, one must have relevant qualifications.' - Sandie, focus group discussion, 18 October 2019, Brackenfell

In the data analysis, it emerged that women with post-matric qualifications are the primary beneficiaries of opportunities in the construction industry. Thus, an individual's education level is crucial to their subsequent career achievement (Betz, 2004). Against this background, the participants' education level is telling, though it may not represent the totality of women in the construction industry. As such, from FGD and in-depth interviews, those with post-matric qualifications could relate their own experience in this regard. Rethabile recalled:

'I am able to say there are opportunities for women and particular those with post-matric, because I am a Health and Safety Officer because I am qualified.' -Rethabile In-depth interview, Stickland, 19 August 2019

Joyce also shared her own experience:

'This company was able to employ me as Quantity Surveyor because I am a qualified QS.' - Joyce, focus group discussion, 18 October 2019, Brackenfell

The data indicates that those with qualifications stand a better chance of getting industry opportunities. This study confirms the results of the related study by Sangweni (2015) that site engineers require completion of tertiary education. Also, whilst workers in general, and women in particular, enjoy opportunities due to their education, it is argued that inherently professional and skilled workers help boost the industry's productivity (Bandyopadhyay and De, 2015).

However, analysing the data, it appeared that the less educated a woman was, the more she remained in one position. It may be because even those with post-matric qualifications entered the industry already qualified, not that they obtained it in the industry. The women in the FGD and the in-depth interviews shared their experiences and the pain of remaining in one position. Such an experience is explained below:

'If you are a Black woman and start in the industry as a site clerk, you will be that forever. For example, I began in 2015 but up until today, I am still a casual and not permanent. I have had enough, I am looking for another opportunity elsewhere because I really thought it is a good industry since

it is worldwide, so, I really thought it was going to be fine for me, a place where there would be women empowerment. Because in my opinion, women can also be brick-layers.’ - Mafaku, focus group discussion, 2 August 2019, Paarl

‘I am the only woman in the company working on site and I have been in the same position for years now. There is no hope that will get another position above this one.’ - Vee, focus group discussion, 2 August 2019, Paarl

This section argued that a woman entering the job as a checker or site clerk could remain in that position for the duration of their employment in the company. This study's results corroborate the study by Barnabas (2000) that women join the industry as unskilled and semi-skilled workers and remain in such positions throughout their working life. In this context, women are reduced to an army of semi-skilled and unskilled workers as either flag women or site clerks (Martin and Barnard, 2013). Most women occupy positions such as secretary, clerk, and safety officer (Sangweni, 2015). The non-provision of upskilling programmes further compounds the problem.

### **Skills training**

In the section above, women shared their experiences of opportunities. In the data analysis, the need for skilled women and the impact of the lack of skills emerged. In this section, the interviewed women reflected on the extent to which training assisted them and whether the construction industry offered this training. The women in this study suggest a scarcity of skills development in the construction industry. Such scarcity of training and skills development is said to

be a leading factor contributing to the present position of women. This is expressed in the excerpts below:

‘There are no training opportunities, and there would never be one. The industry is male dominated and women are undermined as if they are not capable or cannot do anything that men can do and there is no growth because there is no training that can empower women.’ - Vee, focus group discussion, 2 August 2019, Paarl

‘Not only that I was never trained but also no one at work was ever taken for any sort of training.’ - Sisi, in-depth interview, 21 August 2019, Brackenfell

In analysing the data, it emerged that not a single interviewed woman had received industry-based skills development training. As such, their employers depend on what workers bring to the industry. The construction industry appears not to be investing in the development of women. According to the data, the industry does not appreciate that a professional and skilled workforce helps to boost productivity (Bandyopadhyay and De, 2015). It is also argued that the lack of a skilled and professional workforce negatively impacts productivity (Enshassi, Mohammed and Abushaban, 2009). Even the Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA) conceded that on artisan development, there is low uptake within the building and civil engineering sector (‘Construction seta 1’, no date).

However, a follow-up in-depth interview with a recognised trade union in the industry, the National Union of Mineworkers, through its Women Structure, was conducted to establish the trade union's role in the construction industry. In an interview with the NUM Women Structure Regional chairperson, it emerged that

the union had defined its role as a response to the skills shortage in the sectors it organises. The construction industry is one of those sectors. The excerpt below illustrates this:

'The NUM recently expanded the scope or operations of the Elijah Barayi College by launching an artisan academy. The artisan academy is meant to develop artisan skills for workers in the construction, mining, energy and metal sectors of South Africa's economy. Therefore, as the NUM WS in the Western Cape region we have identified more than fifty women to be sent to the academy for artisan skills development.' - Lathiswa Vato, 20 November 2019.

The trade union's introduction of the artisan academy could help the construction industry address the skills shortage. This initiative was commended by the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology, Bonginkosi Nzimande. During his visit to the academy in 2021. The Minister commended the NUM's vision and work in upskilling workers with critical skills required by the labour market.

Thus far, Elijah Barayi Memorial Training Centre Artisan Academy has produced 74 artisans since its opening in 2020. Of the 74 artisans, only 14 were women (10 electricians and four plumbers). However, the intake of women remains low according to the reported figures. Even though men remain a majority in the construction industry, skilling of women through the Elijah Barayi Artisan centre should top their list of priorities or they risk losing relevance.

Data analysis revealed that accredited trades at the Elijah Barayi artisan centre include boiler making, welding, plumbing, electrical and occupational health and safety. Therefore, the radical roll-out of women's skills development will make the declaration of the construction industry as a world for men a thing of the past. Women, too, will have great opportunities.

## **Opportunities only for men**

Participants from FGD and in-depth interviews indicated that men predominantly enjoy better opportunities than women. This experience is described below:

‘As a woman, you join the company as a clerk in the yard. A man joins as a general worker, after a few years you learn that the man is an operator or supervisor, and as a woman you still stuck as clerk - this is unfair.’ - Mafaku, focus group discussion, 2 August 2019, Paarl

‘Even if as a woman you worked for 10 years, there are people with 2 years of experience and operate on that machine. I wish the boss could think and say “Let me also put a woman there.” Because women are fit to do the same work too but instead of taking women, they only take men. It is only men that are trained to operate machines and the boss assumes that we cannot use it. Even the ones with 2 years’ experience have been taught how to use that machine so we could also learn because we already have an idea of how it works.’-Mamfene FGD, Phillippi, 3 March 2019.

The interviewed women stated that semi-skilled and unskilled men are continually trained and developed more than women in similar categories. Thus, women are likely to remain in similar positions while men advance upward due to new skills acquired through training and development programmes. This is concerning as Ahmed, Houqe, and Sobuz (2017) characterise a skilled worker as crucial for the

industry to thrive. The narrow bias favouring men in the construction industry represents institutionalised 'manpower'. Hence, women remain trapped in low-earning construction industry positions (Ndaweni and Ozumba, undated).

This study's results further suggest the inferiorisation of women in low-paying occupations. Such inferiorisation of women in low positions is confirmed in a study by Gupta, Turban, Wasti, and Sikdar (2009). They found that women are made inferior to men on abilities thought to be needed to thrive in the industry, and women's talents and skills are valued considerably less than men's. Therefore, the excerpts above suggest that upward mobility for men at the expense of women is a critical sign of unfair opportunities for women. This trend suggests that the participation of women in the construction industry is not viewed as equally important as that of their men counterparts (Madikizela and Haupt, 2010).

This section showed that women's limited, or lack of opportunities directly affects their wages vis-à-vis their male counterparts.

#### **4.3.3. Wage disparities between women and men**

The previous sections indicated the extent of non-recognition of the role of women and the extent to which opportunities are provided or not provided to women of different categories in the construction industry. This includes the disproportionate treatment of men and women, particularly in the semi-to-unskilled categories of the labour force. The interviewed women claimed that women earn lower wages than men in the construction industry. In the excerpts below, participants explain further:

'Men continue to be paid higher than women.' - Nosipho, focus group discussion, 2 August 2019, Paarl

'No, men get higher salaries because everything in the industry is about them.' – Sisi T, in-depth interview, Brackenfel 21 August 2019

'I refuse to dismiss the notion that we earn less than men because of the fact our earnings are made a top secret in this company. - Unathi, focus group discussion, 18 October 2019, Brackenfell

'I found that men are getting paid more than us women in this industry. - Joyce, focus group discussion, 18 October 2019, Brackenfell

The data from the interviewed women indicate that women earn less than men. All interviewees from both FGD and in-depth interviews shared this view. Vandana (2012) also found that female workers were paid less in the construction industry, giving further context. Vandana's research brings secondary data from the building and civil engineering sectors. The secondary data, as outlined in the tables below, demonstrate the present wage grades:

**Table 4: BCCEI wage and task grades (2018-2021)**

<b>Task grade</b>	<b>Occupational group</b>	<b>Job title/s</b>	<b>Hourly rate</b>
<b>1</b>	General worker	General worker and watchman	R39.82
<b>2</b>	Site support	Artisan aid	R40.80
	Construction hand Grade IV	Safety watcher, structures construction hand, premix paving checker/ tallyman	
		Steel bending machine operator, crusher assistant, civil construction bricklayer Grade II	
	Operator Grade V	Boom scraper operator, hoist/lift operator, pedestrian router operator	
		Material tester assistant	
	Checker	Checker	
	Chainman	Chainman/ survey assistant	
<b>3</b>	Construction hand Grade III	Shutter-hand Grade III	R41.88
		Concrete Grade II	
	Site support	Junior site clerk, semi-skilled, pipe-layer, storeman	
<b>4</b>	Operator Grade 2	TLB operator, dozer operator	R43.44

5	Construction hand Grade 1	Pipe layer Grade 1, extra heavy-duty operator	R49.16
6	Driver	Site clerk, assistant surveyor	R55.08
7	Site support	Plant serviceman, supervisor Grade 2, tester lab field	R63.92
8	Supervisor Grade 1		R71.66
9	Artisan	Diesel mechanic, filter and tuner, auto-electrician, boiler-maker, welder and spray painter	R81.00

**Table 5: BIBC Wage Schedule (2021)**

Labour category	Basic wages per hour
Labourer	R32.51
General worker and alternative building system installer 1	R42.26
Tradesman Class 4, manufacturing worker, waterproofing worker, scaffold erector, alternative building system installer 2 and banksman	R46.11
Tradesman Class 3, clerical worker, joinery assembler, aluminium manufacturing worker and alternative building system installer 3	R50.86
Tradesman Class 2, machine operator, glazier, assistant floor layer, carpet fitter, block layer, driver code EC1 and above, tower crane operator	R69.33
Drivers/Plant operators of motor vehicles that require a code C1 license	R57.88
Drivers of all other vehicles who require a code A, A1, or B license	R43.58

Artisan (including a bricklayer, stonemason, carpenter, joiner, tiler, plasterer, designated glazier, plumber, painter, aluminium installer /fixer, leading hand, and junior foreman	R92.86
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In analysing the data, it emerged that the leading contributing factor to the wage disproportions between men and women is the perpetual confining of women to inferior positions as unskilled labour (Barnabas, 2000; Martin and Barnard, 2013 Mathur-Helm, 2005). Women are concentrated in low-paying jobs, while men undertake better-paying jobs in the construction industry (Baruah, 2010). Low-paying and inferior positions include site clerks or flag women, while better-paying positions include artisan positions like machine operators and other senior administrative positions. Against this background, Jan (2009) characterised the wage disparities between men and women as problematic. In essence, women's low-level occupational position in the construction industry forces them to remain in low-paying jobs or positions.

Further, the theory that women receive less income than their men counterparts was also supported in a study by Grün (2004). In Marxist feminist terms, the existence of a division of labour is responsible for devaluing women's work in the construction industry. Thus women are located in unskilled, semi-skilled and junior or peripherised positions in the industry.

However, in the data analysis, it emerged that this does not mean that if a woman and a man occupy the same position, a man will earn more than a woman. This context is important in demonstrating some shifts in masculine industries despite the ongoing oppression of women. The wage agreement between employers and labour trade unions, either from the Building Industry Bargaining Council or Bargaining Council for the Civil Engineering Industry, sets flat wage rates (Bargaining Council for Civil Engineering Industry, Collective Agreement 2019; Building Industry Bargaining Council, Collective Agreement, 2018). Therefore, the study argues, the occupational position women occupy in the industry results in them receiving less income than their men counter-parts. Part of the reason is that women were not traditionally part of the public production sphere; thus, their

eventual inclusion led to them being allocated low-status jobs (Benya, 2009). Thus their jobs tended to differ from those of men, and they were introduced at lower levels with lower rates compared to their male counterparts (Bradley, 1989; Humphrey, 1987; Jacobs and Steinberg, 1995; Peck, 1996).

As argued in this study, patriarchy is embedded in capitalist production. Thus, a woman's positionality at the work place seeks to make her cheap labour. The historiography of women in the construction industry explained why women were drawn into the labour market and experienced particular forms of oppression and ghettoization (Beechey, Veronica, Class, 1977). Some Marxist-feminist scholars argue that part of the reason is that capital assumes that women do not necessarily rely wholly on their wages to reproduce their labour power (Beechey et al., 1977). Such a legacy persists today and must be dismantled.

In addition, the lack of skills development and education opportunities for women further compounds the problem. Such is a convenient excuse to position them in lower-paying positions than their male counterparts. The reviewed literature advances a strong argument that whilst women lose out for not being trained and therefore earning better wages, training and educating workers creates experts and increases productivity (Aguinis and Kraiger, 2009; Tabassi and Bakar, 2009;). Therefore, providing education and training would not only guarantee better-paying work for women, but it would also benefit the industry.

For working-class women, education and skills development play an important role in improving their wages and reducing income disparities between women and men (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2007; Frehill, 1997; Monks, 2000; Zhang, 2008). However, these studies argue that in any capitalist society, women are a convenient source of cheap labour subjected to lower wages than their male counterparts (Munoz and Woods, 2000).

In addition, discrimination in masculine industries appears to be rampant. According to the secondary data, the construction industry continues to use terms such as 'tradesman' and 'foreman'. These words remain discriminatory as they are not gender-neutral. Notably, such words mirror the present state of the industry, with apparent non-committal to change and a lack of appreciation of the

women in the construction industry. Therefore, such terms confirm the extent to which patriarchy is entrenched in the construction industry.

Essentially, the data of this study demonstrate that capitalist bosses in the construction industry continue to view and position women as mere instruments of production. Thus the study argues that their presence in the industry is undervalued. Further, the data analysis in this section and other preceding sections indicate that women are victims of a permanent state of subjection in construction.

#### **4.3.4. Intersectionality of gender and race**

The section above dealt with the wage disparities between women and men. The section described how and why women earn lower wages than their men counterparts.

This section deals with the intersectionality of gender and race. The interviewed women from both the FGD and the in-depth interviews indicated that White women are favoured for senior and better positions on the grounds of race. The excerpts below illustrate this point:

‘Offices are dominated by White women occupying senior positions-Sisi T, in-depth interview, 21 August 2019, Brackenfel.’

‘A white woman was employed in the company, and I was asked to train her and she later got a more senior position than me and higher salary.’ - Mafaku, focus group discussion, 2 August 2019, Paarl

'In the yard as Blacks we are checkers and clerks whilst Whites do senior administration as either Finance or Human Resources.' - Mafaku, focus group discussion, 2 August 2019, Paarl

'Here in the company, I do not remember seeing a single White person as either a site clerk or flag-woman but Blacks... I suspect, the ownership of the industry by Whites has a possible role to play.'- Push, in-depth interview, 24 October 2019, Kuils River

The results indicate that there are inequalities among women themselves. Such inequalities among women manifest through better treatment and elevation of White women at the expense of Black women. This is an expression of inequality within inequality (Naidoo, 1997). This is further compounded by the history of a privileged section of white women (Booyesen, 1999). Such privileging of White women still exists, the study argues. The study confirms what Von Holdt (2003) characterises as an apartheid workplace regime. Such an apartheid workplace regime manifests itself through racial division of labour embedded in structured management relations with Black workers, thus the theory of the existence of privileged White women (Webster and Omar, 2003).

A study by Brewer (1993) showed that white and African-American working-class women are divided on the grounds of race in the workplace. Brewer further argued in the study that even changes in the occupational structure historically tend to keep the racial division of labour intact. Therefore, as the analysed data shows, the present position of White women in the construction industry stems from this background, where they are more privileged than their black counterparts.

According to the analysed data, Black women experience multiple challenges, such as racial and gender discrimination (Dlamini and Shakantu, 2021). Therefore, the persisting inequality within inequality, as argued by Naidoo (1997), is also race-bound (Madikizela and Haupt, 2010).

As argued in previous sections of this study, Black women in the construction industry are reduced to junior and peripheral positions. They are made to occupy such low-level positions because they are Black women. This study recognises that women are not homogenous, and there is a privileged section of women in the form of Whites (Mathur-Helm, 2005). Therefore, the White section of women in the industry is not found in low-level positions such as site clerks. Instead, White women occupy better positions, such as senior administrative positions like Finance and Human Resource heads or site agents.

Essentially, Black women are made inferior, whilst their White counterparts are made superior (Webster et al., 1999). The low-earning workers are wage workers, while the high-earning workers are salaried (Standing, 2011). Salaried workers are characterised as that section of the workers occupying senior positions. Wage workers are that section occupying the unskilled and semi-skilled positions who are often alienated (Standing, 2011). The results of this study further corroborate the argument advanced by Von Holdt (2003) that there continues to be a set-up wherein Black and White workers were on separate payrolls with different rates and benefits. This once again explains the apartheid workplace regime. Further, the study confirmed the connectedness of women's national oppression and class exploitation in the workplace.

This study further argues that women face the challenge of sexual harassment in the construction industry.

#### **4.3.5. Practices of sexual harassment**

The interviewed women from the in-depth interviews and FGD unanimously reported on what they described as sexual harassment in the construction

industry. The excerpts below illustrate the circumstances under which sexual harassment occurs in the construction industry:

‘It is worse when you are wearing a tight jean...the chaps would do whistling and call you baby...baby and want to hug you against your will.’

- Julia, focus group discussion, 18 October 2019, Brackenfell

‘Men spank us as women, and we have to laugh even if it is not a laughing matter.’ - Sisi, in-depth interview, 21 August 2019, Brackenfell

‘Imagine, in many instances you find one or three women in the sea of many men be it in a truck to or from work and many of them want to touch you all the time. - Vee, focus group discussion, 2 August Paarl

‘You have to stay in the same house with men. If there are not enough bathrooms, you must share those bathrooms and toilets with men. They (men) would get into our rooms and go shower. And the worst part is that I am married so being in that situation where a male is going to come into my room and use the bathroom is quite awkward and deprives me of privacy and space” - Vee, focus group discussion, 2 August Paarl

‘When you work outside Cape Town, we as women are made to share accommodation with men. This is always an awkward situation as some

men will walk past half-naked.’ - Tania, focus group discussion, 18

October 2019, Brackenfell

The data indicate that sexual harassment by men takes place mainly on sites, during night shifts, and in the bakkies or trucks workers use to travel to and from work. In such environments, sexual gestures and comments abound (Quinn, 2002). Amongst other things, this is how men demonstrate their dominance and justify the subordination of women in the construction industry (Connell, 1995). This can be characterised as a function of men’s power over women (Jewkes et al., 2015). In the process, women are made to either submit or resist unwelcome sexual advances.

McLaughlin and Blackstone (2012) argue that men often view sexist comments and gestures as light-hearted and playful and are stunned when women take offence. This is an expression of insensitivity and indirect perpetuation of power, privilege and sex-based inequality (MacKinnon, 1979). Against this background, the offence taken by women cannot be easily dismissed because men could easily use such an environment to exploit women sexually (Walby, 1990).

In further analysing the data, the interviewed women argued that even when sexual harassment cases are reported to the bosses, they see no action. The excerpt below explains:

‘Uyakuquqa kwezo ofisi inyawo zibeshushu akukho nto izakutsitsa, uyoxela indoda kwenye indoda akukhathaliseki ukuba injani (you will go to the offices to report the matter ‘til you are tired because the big boss won’t take any action, maybe because he too is a man and might be seeing nothing wrong.’ - Sisi, in-depth interview, 21 August 2019,

Brackenfell

The excerpt above explains how meaningless reporting a case to employers can be. The women in this study argued that they did not recall consequences for perpetrators of sexual harassment. As such, women see no point in reporting them. Under-reporting sexual harassment cases have the potential to normalise sexual harassment. As such, men are made to feel even more potent as a consequence of the sexual exploitation of women. Studies carried out by Berdahl (2007) and Schultz (2003) found that, in certain respects, harassment is not only about sexual desire but also about power and subordination. If indeed such unwelcome behaviour is about power, these acts further condemn women to inferior and secondary positions (Sultan, 2021).

The interviewed women argued that reporting matters to law enforcement has its unintended consequences. The excerpts below explain the situation:

‘Opening a criminal case does not help resolve the problem instead I lose a day wage because I will have to go to courts and when I am absent I must take from my annual leave or book of off sick because the company does not support us. Cases in court take long and there are times with which they will postpone the case even before it appears before the magistrate...it is a tiring process.’ - Sisi, in-depth interview, 21 August 2019, Brackenfell

‘Reporting a case with the police makes you feel isolated in the company because both my colleagues and bosses do not support, instead they talk behind your back. At work you do not get special and full-paid leave to attend to your case...so it is better not to report to the police.’ - Vee, focus group discussion, 2 August Paarl

This study suggests that women must either stand firm and risk losing a day's wages or submit to the situation and not report sexual harassment cases. This is how women survive or cope in the present masculine construction industry. As the interviewed women argued, when a woman attends a court case, she must take days off her annual or unpaid leave. This discourages reporting cases due to economic implications, such as the loss in wages. It could be argued that both the attitude of the authorities in the construction industry and the criminal justice system are complicit in the under-reporting of cases of sexual harassment. This study's results corroborate the study by Ramakrishnam (2019), which found that sexual harassment in the construction industry is either under-reported or not reported at all. Such an environment makes the construction industry a breeding ground for sexual harassment (Bagihole, Dainty and Neale, 2000; Hersch, 2011). The results of this study show that the current state of affairs in the construction industry negates the Amended Code of Good Practice: Sexual Harassment (2005). The Amended Code of Good Practice: Sexual Harassment (2005) requires the industry to ensure dignity and a safe environment for women. Thus, the leading trade union federation in South Africa, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), describes sexual harassment as a form of gender-based violence (COSATU's manual for combating Sexual Harassment, no date) Providing support to victims of sexual harassment would be a starting point. However, according to the results of this study, this does not happen. Importantly, the same Act further stipulates that workplaces must ensure victims of sexual harassment know their grievances are not ignored or trivialised.

There should be a connection between health and safety, protection against sexual harassment, and the construction industry's provision of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE). The section below discusses the health and safety and the provision of PPEs to women in the construction industry.

#### **4.3.6. Health and safety and inappropriate personal protective equipment**

Occupational health and safety are an essential aspect of work for every employee. The women interviewed indicated that according to their experiences and observations, they do not believe that the construction industry complies with the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act 181 of 1993. They reported that women are working without overalls, masks, helmets, gloves, boots, and gumboots, amongst other things. Participants further indicated that even when they are provided with equipment, these are not suitable for them:

‘Our overalls, boots, gumboots and hand gloves are not of a quality suitable for the work we are doing. We get given boots to work in an environment where there is water, overalls are not warm, and both get torn apart very quickly. When they are torn apart, you wait for the next cycle of issuing of PPE.’ – Mamfene focus group discussion, 3 March 2019, Phillippi.

‘I am a woman who works with a crush operator, I work outside whether it is hot or cold, raining or not. Be it at night and that night breeze make us sick and when they give us rain suits, they are never strong, you wear them today and by the following day they are torn apart.’ – Ntsiki focus group discussion, 3 March 2019, Phillippi.

These quotes suggest that when PPE is worn through, women are left without PPE or are forced to improvise because many companies only issue PPE once a year. The majority of activities which are performed in construction include installing floors, roofing, water drilling, sandblasting, and painting, all of which require workers to be in PPE, even at their own personal cost (Vanags, Begec

and Zarina, 2015). Therefore, a woman not in PPE is a danger to herself. However, the non-provision of PPE presents a danger to workers and is not a priority to the owners of the industry on the basis that PPE is a cost to them, and such costs affect profit. Therefore, even though the construction industry never imagined the employment of women in the industry, women needing special or unique PPEs add a cost burden.

In this study, participants reported that the quality and kind of PPE they are getting in the industry have significant health implications. Health implications include increased vulnerability to influenza and abdominal pains, amongst other things. The excerpts below illustrate the point:

‘The kind and quality of both boots and overalls we are provided with by employer lead to womb pains because water easily penetrate to our bodies as those boots and overalls are ever tore apart.’ - Ntsiki, focus group discussion, 3 March 2019, Phillippi

‘I mix cement, water, and concrete... it is very hard and remember ndigcampuza emanzini oko (I am always working at a place where there is water and working with water) remember, we get issued with PPE once a year, this boss does not care. Every winter I book off sick because I always suffer from abdominal pains, flu and pneumonia.’ – Sisi T in-depth interviews, 21 August 2019, Brackenfell

The results of this study show that the inability to protect women from water, the cold, and other health hazards, can lead to ill-health for the workers. These results were supported by Oluoch, Njogu and Ndeda (2018), whose study

revealed that exposure to hazards in the workplace almost always causes injury, illness, or other health effects. In such an unsafe working environment, potential injuries include loss of hearing or eyesight and pneumonia (Ng'ang'a, Ngigi, Siboe, Ongundo, Wanyona, 2013).

Further, in the reviewed literature, it was found that dust generated at construction sites could affect the workers' lung function doing blasting, amongst other things (Bandyopadhyay and De 2015). This study reveals health hazards women are exposed to in the industry. The danger is the airborne silica dust generated during chipping or drilling into concrete, ripping up old concrete, and excavating sites with sandstone or clay. The percentage of crystalline silica in construction and building material is roughly comprised of sandstone (96-100%), calcium silicate brick (50-55%), aggregate concrete (30%), clay brick (15-27%), cement sheet (10-30%), and demolition dust (3-4%) (Bandyopadhyay and De, 2015).

Thus, this study argues that the inability to protect women from hazards is in contravention of the Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act 181 of 1993. The Act stipulates that every worker has the right to health and safety in the workplace. Thus, there is a reasonable expectation that all workplaces, including in the construction industry, comply with the Act. Health and safety requirements in the workplace are meant to save lives whilst encouraging production. Against this background, the results of this study confirm the legendary poet and musician Mzwakhe Mbuli's unique album commissioned in 2012 by the leadership of the NUM titled 'Aluta Continue-Artist in defence of mine workers thus 'Bosses prioritise profits than health and safety of the workers'.

The design of protective gear can also be a challenge. In this study, it was reported that both boots and overalls cause discomfort and fit inappropriately. The women interviewed decried the protective gear and overalls as unsuitable for a woman's body, as evidenced in the excerpts below:

'PPE such as overalls and boots are only designed for men's bodies as they do not accommodate our bodies whose major features include breast, bums and hips.' - Rethabile, in-depth interview, 19 August 2019, Stickland

'They (PPE) are meant for men because the trousers do not fit our bums and hips. This makes it even very difficult to walk properly and worse when one is supposed to climb on something like a bakkie. Actually, the zips of our trousers remain open because they cannot go up. You will then start hearing some funny comments from the boys.'" – Fani, focus group discussion, 3 March 2019, Phillippi

'I have never seen a suitable PPE for us as women, we are subjected to a one size fits all kind of a PPE design and this is bad for our natural body shapes.' - Pamella, 18 October 2019, Brackenfell

Critically, the PPE provided is uncomfortable and fails to cover a woman's body entirely. The current design is one-size-fits-all, as characterised by one participant. Benya's study (2009) also found that protective gear in the male-dominant industry was designed for men or male bodies and not conducive for women. The reviewed literature indicated that most PPE for construction is designed for males and does not accommodate female anatomy (Dropkin et al. 2016). The argument of this study is consistent with Barnard's (2013) view that the construction industry does not accommodate women's physiques. NUM Women Structure regional chairperson Lathiswa Vato confirmed the inappropriate nature of the PPE and the trade union's role against such injustice:

‘As a union, we fight with management, and we say they must give proper PPE e.g. safety boots must be Sisi brand not Bhova because Bhova is for men not abomama. We further demand slim t-shirts for women and on top of that women must be given light duties when they fall pregnant.’

The picture below demonstrates the difference between safety boots suitable for women in the construction industry as campaigned for by the NUM Women Structure. As Ms Vato indicated, the Sisi brand is more feminine.

***Figure 1: Sisi brand boots suitable for women (Lathiswa)***



***Figure 2: Bhova brand boots - more suitable for men***



Based on appearance, there is a difference between the two boots. The Bhova boots look harder and more robust, whilst the Sisi boots look more comfortable and appealing.

The NUM Women Structure chairperson further explained the kind of PPE women should get. The current PPE subject women to mockery, and thus as interviewee Vee indicated above, women prefer to wear their jeans rather than the company's overalls. Vee indicated that many workers do not have PPE in her workplace, as it is issued once a year. She argued that this might be because it is a small company. It is argued that the neglect of health and safety protocols is mainly found in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (Agumba and Haupt, 2018). This experience was confirmed by interviewee Sisi from the manufacturing sector.

***Figure 3: Construction worker on-site without complete PPE kit***



The picture above shows Vee, a site clerk, not wearing her PPE because the type and form of PPE her company provides are unsuitable for her as a woman. As described above, overalls are either too small or too big, making it difficult for women to perform their duties as they cannot climb over a wall or walk faster. At worst, overalls do not reach the waist, and thus zips remain open. The overalls women wear makes a mockery of the female body.

As a result of companies providing women with inappropriate uniforms, some women wear their own clothes. Companies generally provide safety boots and vests. However, safety boots and vests do not constitute the full PPE as required by law. Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act 181 of 1993 indicates a reasonable expectation that workers will wear protective clothing relevant to their enterprise or workplace. In terms of the construction industry in South Africa, PPE generally refers to masks, overalls, helmets, gloves, garments, or equipment designed to protect the wearer's body from injury or infection. However, to survive, women are made to improvise at their own cost. The excerpt below further illustrates the point:

'To wear a suitable PPE, I had to buy myself a jean trouser and boots and of course wear a reflective jacket. - Vee, focus group discussion, 2019, Paarl

As a result, the women in this study reported that workers get sick regularly and some become ill years after retirement. Sisi's quote below explains:

'Mqwathi our former shop steward got sick and he suffered from TB. There is no doubt, he did not enjoy his pension. I do not know whether he is still alive by now or not.'

Though there is limited research on the workers who get sick and die after retirement as a consequence of either the dust, tar or watery environment, Sisi, Joyce, and Tamara pointed out that many who enter the industry without tuberculosis (TB) die of TB after some years in the industry or upon retirement. Such a situation is prevalent in the mining and coal sectors, and women are the most vulnerable (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, 2020).

'Proper masks are not provided so that we can be safe from inhaling the dangerous dust. If provided, it is only changed if it is missing or completely torn apart.' - Mamfene, focus group discussion, 3 March 2019, Phillippi

Mamfene stated that often not even masks are provided to protect workers from the 'dangerous dust', as she described it. Health and safety regulations are not complied with often. This puts the health of workers at risk. Preventing the

inhalation of dust is critical because dust can contain a considerable amount of silica, the most prevalent type being quartz (Lumens and Spee, 2001). It is further argued that exposure to asbestos, silica, and a mixture of dust, fumes, gases and vapours can lead to chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (Wang, Dong and Welch, 2016). Not all diseases or their symptoms surface whilst a worker is still active in the company, and as a result, companies can escape responsibility. Herbert and Landrigan (2000) argue against the existence of occupational diseases citing that even scientists still find it difficult to distinguish most occupational diseases from non-occupational diseases because lung cancer caused by asbestos exposure does not have a unique pathology that differentiates it from lung cancer caused by cigarette smoking. However, evidence shows that women working in construction in many industrialised countries are victims of occupational illness and injuries (Ringen and Seegal, 1995).

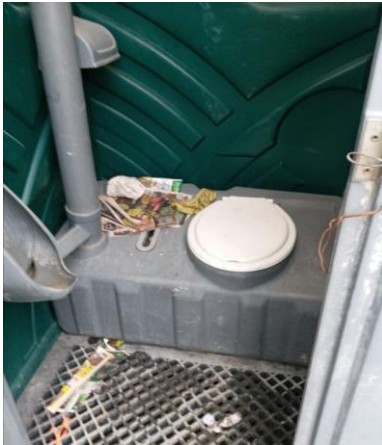
Current data suggest that workers' health is at risk, possibly on multiple fronts. Even ablution facilities were described by participants as 'health hazardous'. Vee pointed out the toilets female workers use, and the picture below demonstrates the state of the facilities. She had this to say:

'There is only one toilet on site and it is used by both men and women and there is no one employee to clean it. I always avoid using it because of fear of infection.' - Vee, focus group discussion, August 2019, Paarl

Anvekar (2015) found that in the construction industry, there are no separate toilets to use at job sites and most of the time, women have to share with men. Due to these unisex toilets, Tiwari and Ganopadhyay (2011) also point out that women often get sexually transmitted diseases. The fundamental basis for the continued sharing of toilets by men and women is informed by two reasons, the cost factor and the fact that women were never imagined in the industry. As

argued above, the essential source of contradiction concerning buying toilets is that what is health and safety for women workers is a cost for the construction owner—a cost which employers always seek to minimize.

**Figure 4: An on-site "unisex" toilet**



Chapter five presents the conclusion and recommendations of this study. The chapter contains the significant results of this study and gives recommendations for future studies, policy makers, construction bosses, and the labour movement in the industry.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **5.1. Introduction**

Chapter four above presented, discussed and analysed the results of this study. The results section covered a brief profile of participants based on their age, wage level, education, race, and unionisation. It was followed by the substantive results, which formed six major themes. These themes were then discussed and analysed.

This chapter concludes the study by summarising significant research results based on the research objectives and questions. The chapter also makes recommendations for future studies and policy direction for employers and trade unions in the industry.

### **5.2. Conclusion**

The study examined the challenges working-class women face in the construction industry. The results suggest that oppressive patriarchal and exploitative relations perpetuate women's marginalisation in the industry. Results illustrate that women experience many problems, not only from men as an expression of a patriarchal culture but also through the entrenched structural and systemic features of capitalist exploitation, subordination and marginalisation within the industry. This study shows that women remain peripheralised, relegated to junior roles with low wages, and subjected to dehumanisation and sexual harassment. The study does concede that skilled workers earn higher wages than unskilled workers. In this context, women constitute the bulk of the unskilled and semi-skilled labour in the industry. Due to their low-level positions, women's voices remain muted and their roles invisible. Thus the study advances a theory of the patriarchal structure of the capitalist workplace. This means that the construction industry remains male-dominated, built on "manpower".

Further, this study's results show the existence of a small privileged White section of women. Unlike the vast majority of Black women who are the low-level unskilled and semi-skilled positions, this White section is located in the administrative component occupying senior positions as part of the salaried section of the workers. As argued in the preceding chapter, this setup confirms what Von Holdt describes as an apartheid workplace regime whose basic tenet is the racial division of workers.

This study further shows what is described as the complicity of South Africa's justice system in the persisting sexual harassment and its under-reporting. According to this study's results, women cannot follow through with their cases running in courts as the implications lead to losing wages.

To cope in the industry, women use different strategies to survive. This could involve either resisting or accommodating masculine behaviour (Davey, 2008).

This study encourages scholars and policymakers to conduct deeper analyses into the issues identified to bring about behavioural and systemic changes that will ensure substantive inclusion and empowerment of women.

This study was able to fill research gaps previous studies did not fill, such as focusing on the three constitutive sub-sectors of the construction industry - civil engineering, building, and manufacturing. As indicated in chapter one, previous studies did not even recognise the existence of the three constitutive sub-sectors of the construction industry. This study shows that each sub-sector has its own statutory body, such as the bargaining council BCCEI for civil engineering and the BIBC for building, whilst the manufacturing sub-sector bargains at a company level. As such, construction workers' employment conditions differ from sub-sector to sub-sector. The conditions of women working in the building and civil engineering sectors are better than those in the manufacturing sector. This implies that where collective bargaining is centralised, basic conditions of employment are better off than when it is decentralised as it is the case in the manufacturing sector of the construction industry.

The second central argument relates to the intersectionality of gender and race. A White woman is seen as elite and occupies a more privileged position than their Black counterparts, despite also being a victim of patriarchy. The study also shows that White women are exclusively found in senior support positions and less in the production component of the industry unless they are site agents. As argued above, this study confirms that the apartheid workplace regime remains intact in the construction industry.

This study was able to locate the theory that women earn less than their male counterparts in its proper context. The study argues that women earn less than men because they constitute the unskilled, semi-skilled and juniorised army of labour. Women in the construction industry predominantly occupy low positions, such as site secretaries (Haupt and Madikizela, 2009).

Several questions on working-class women's challenges in the construction industry remain unanswered. These questions fell beyond the scope of the current study. However, this does not suggest that those questions are less important. Hopefully, the current study's findings will help future researchers comprehend the major challenges working-class women confront in the construction industry.

Therefore, this study calls for a deeper comparative study the basic employment conditions for women in the building, civil engineering, and manufacturing components. Of these sub-sectors, only civil engineering and building are covered by statutory bodies such as a bargaining council, whilst the manufacturing component has no bargaining council, as indicated above. It would be interesting to see the state of the basic conditions of employment in the manufacturing sector as to whether these conform to the Department of Employment and Labour's requirements. The need for such a comparative study is clear.

Another critical area for future research is the question of sexual harassment in the industry. This study could not delve deeper into this question; however, it has flagged the prevalence of sexual harassment.

The challenge of occupational culture in the construction industry also requires further exploration.

This study recommends that trade unions in the construction industry establish effective and functioning worker-oriented Health Safety Committees as important platforms to address health and safety challenges, such as PPE and health screening of workers. Further, this study recommends that employers and industry trade union movements establish adequate and functioning Employment Equity and Transformation Committees. These committees must drive workplace skills development and transformation of the industry so that Black working-class women can also occupy senior and critical positions.

It is further recommended that programmes focusing on Black working women are established by law-makers, owners, and the labour movement. In this instance, the Construction Charter should serve as that programme, therefore, it must be redeveloped. Skills development and enrichment programmes for women should form part of a culture based on feminine values and caring masculinity in the construction industry.

A manufacturing bargaining council must be established to ensure that workers in the manufacturing sub-sector are protected from exploitation. Alternatively, a single central construction bargaining council merging the three constitutive sub-sectors, civil engineering, manufacturing and building, must be established. Such will require agitation from organised labour in the form of recognised trade unions in the industry.

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## **ANNEXURES**

### **Annexure “A”: Research questionnaire guide**

**Investigating the challenges working-class women face in the construction industry-RSA.**

**Researcher: Benson Ngqentsu**

**UCT Masters student in Industrial Sociology**

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Facilitator’s welcome, introduction and instructions to participants

Welcome and thank you for volunteering to take part in this focus group. You have been asked to participate as your point of view is important. I realize you are busy, and I appreciate your time.

Introduction: This focus group discussion is designed to assess your current thoughts and feelings about your experience of being a woman in the construction industry. The focus group discussion will take no more than two hours.

May I tape the discussion to facilitate its recollection?

**Anonymity:** Despite being taped; I would like to assure you that the discussion will be anonymous. The tapes will be kept safely in a locked facility until they are transcribed word for word, then they will be destroyed. The transcribed notes of the focus group will contain no information that would allow individual subjects to be linked to specific statements. You should try to answer and comment as accurately and truthfully as possible.

I and the other focus group participants would appreciate it if you would refrain from discussing the comments of other group members outside the focus group. If there are any questions or discussions that you do not wish to answer or participate in, you do not have to do so; however please try to answer and be as involved as possible.

## **Ground rules**

The most important rule is that only one person speaks at a time. There may be a temptation to jump in when someone is talking but please wait until they have finished.

There are no right or wrong answers

You do not have to speak in any particular order

When you do have something to say, please do so. There are many of you in the group and it is important that I obtain the views of each of you

You do not have to agree with the views of other people in the group

Does anyone have any questions? (Answers).

OK, let's begin

Warm up

First, I'd like everyone to introduce herself Can you tell us your name?

Where one works?

What one does?

How long one has been working in the current job?

Introductory question

I am just going to give you a couple of minutes to think about your experience working in the construction industry as women. Is anyone happy to share her experience?

Demographic data

How old are you?

What is the highest grade/standard of education have you completed?

How much do you earn monthly/ fortnightly (R3500-R8000 or R8000-R15000)?

Do you belong to any trade union?

How long have you been working in the company and trade?

Please tell me about your work and trade background?

How did you come to work in the construction industry?

What do you enjoy the most about your job?

What do you dislike about it and why?

How is the environment for women in the work-place?

What are the attitudes of you and other women workers working in a male dominant environment?

What is your experience on the question of health and safety at work?

Are there women in management positions at your workplace and why that?

What recognition do women enjoy in the industry or company?

Do you think your employer would ever consider having a female co-manager, supervisor or forewoman or site-manager? yes or no and why that?

What opportunities does your workplace present for women?

What challenges do you face in your workplace?

Why do you still work here?

How do you cope with the challenges you have noted above?

How far is where you live from your workplace?

How do you travel to and from work?

When last did you attend a skills training programme?

Concluding question

Conclusion

Thank you for participating. This has been a very successful discussion

Your opinions will be a valuable asset to the study

We hope you have found the discussion interesting

If there is anything you are unhappy with or wish to complain about, please speak to me later

I would like to remind you that any comments featuring in my research report will be anonymous

Before you leave, please hand in your completed personal details questionnaire