

# **Seven Women Speak: Perceptions of Economic Empowerment Among Women in Cape Town**

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## **Abstract**

The research study described in this paper examines women's perceptions of their economic opportunities and sense of empowerment in Cape Town. Although the status of women in South Africa has improved since apartheid, there are still significant inequalities among women and men in the workforce. This gender discrimination has reverberating effects on the poverty and development of South Africa as a nation, as many argue that women's economic empowerment is directly correlated with the overall growth of a country. South African policymakers would benefit from comparing and analyzing women's views of their own economic opportunities, as this study highlights that women experience complex forms of discrimination based on their identities in society today. The participants of this small-scale qualitative research study are seven women of diverse races and ages. The synthesis of this cross-racial and generational research provides a non-representative sample of the concerns of women in Cape Town regarding economic empowerment. From these interviews it was found that cultural upbringing is a highly influential factor in women's economic success that can significantly limit or promote women's economic empowerment. This research also highlighted underlying insecurities that many women in the workforce feel regarding their professional abilities and value, an issue that results from intersectional oppressions experienced by women and from apartheid's legacies of patriarchal power dynamics. Overall, the findings of this study suggest that women's experiences with economic empowerment depend greatly on their unique culture and family structure, rather than purely racial and class distinctions. This research highlights the intersectional gender discrimination faced by women in Cape Town and emphasizes the need to address oppressive remnants of apartheid in South Africa today.

## **Author's Note**

Shanna Cole is a recent graduate from the George Washington University. She received her Bachelors degree in International Affairs, with a concentration in International Politics, and a minor in Women's Studies. Her undergraduate work has focused on international

development and human rights policy, Sub-Saharan African studies, and international security politics. This paper is the culmination of an independent field research project that Shanna conducted in the spring of 2014 in Cape Town, South Africa.

**Keywords:** Women's empowerment, Intersectionality, Patriarchy, Apartheid

## 1. Introduction

When apartheid ended in 1994, one of the South African government's first priorities was a human rights-based Constitution, passed in 1996. Among the comprehensive rights that the government guaranteed was equality between men and women in all areas of life, including equal payment and opportunity. As the late Nelson Mandela stated in his inaugural speech as President in 1994, "freedom cannot be achieved unless we see in visible and practical terms that the condition of women in our country has radically changed for the better, and that they have been empowered in all spheres of life as equals" (Mandela, 1994). Despite these impressive calls for gender equality, today there exists a vast difference in the economic opportunities for many women compared to men. This is a crucial issue in Cape Town and all of South Africa today because as the gap between rich and poor continues to expand, women who already often experience economic inequality face the threat of becoming even more financially vulnerable. This causes the potential for further deterioration of women's empowerment and status in society; as women lose economic independence, they become less empowered, which reverses the process for achieving gender equality (DAW, 2001). The economic disempowerment of women reinforces unequal gender roles and the subordination of women to men, a concept that the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) has correlated to an increase in poverty for both men and women (DAW, 2001). Therefore in a young democracy like South Africa, the inequality of women not only marginalizes a large portion of the population, but also jeopardizes the future growth of the country.

As one of the country's economic powerhouses, Cape Town is a critical area to analyze in this study. Cape Town offers both significant opportunities and obstacles for

women attempting to advance economically. Today and in the recent years, the Western Cape Province has had one of the lowest unemployment rates in South Africa, which has attracted many people to the area seeking work (Statistics South Africa, 2014, Table F). However, women often continue to struggle economically throughout all of South Africa. In all racial<sup>1</sup> population groups (black, coloured, Asian/Indian, and white<sup>2</sup>), women exhibit higher unemployment than men (Statistics South Africa, 2014, Figure 31). Employment also differs among the various racial population groups in South Africa, with the black and coloured populations having significantly higher unemployment rates than the white population (Statistics South Africa, 2013, Figure 18). Against this backdrop of the varying economic situations for black, coloured, and white South African women, it is clear that while women of different races face distinct economic opportunities, obstacles exist for all South African women to gain economic empowerment.

It is important to note that both the ruling African National Congress (ANC) government and provincial Western Cape Democratic Alliance-led (DA) government have focused heavily on promoting economic equality for women in post-apartheid South Africa, with policies addressing the issue published regularly. The government's history of policies promoting women's rights will be explored later in this paper, but there have been many efforts made to uphold the promises put forth in the 1996 Constitution. These policies address the socioeconomic and political call for women's empowerment, in addition to highlighting the cultural shift necessary to encourage women's equality. One such plan in Cape Town entitled "Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Policy" from 2010 acknowledges that "transforming gender relations

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<sup>1</sup> Despite understanding race as a social construction, I use the racial categories developed by the South African apartheid government because they still have a real impact on people's lives due to their all-pervasive impact. Race is thus still an important demographic to consider in any research in South Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Apartheid era legislation required that each South African be classified into one of four designated and socially constructed racial groups – 'European', 'Bantu', 'Asian/Indian', or 'Coloured'. 'European' referred to those identified as 'White'. 'Bantus' were 'indigenous Africans'. 'Asian' referred primarily to South Africans of Indian descent. People with a 'mixed' race, Malay, San, or other multi-racial heritages were classified as 'Coloured'. In contemporary usage, 'Black' is often employed to refer either to the former 'African' or 'Bantu', or as an inclusive term for all previously disadvantaged groups – African, Coloured and Asian/Indian. In this paper, 'Black' is used to describe people referred to as 'African' or 'Bantu' under apartheid.

requires a complete paradigm shift from what people are used to in their work as government, business, and civil society," and that "a key challenge is the adoption of new attitudes and behaviours by both men and women" (City of Cape Town Council, 2010). This recognition of and call to reform institutionalized gender biases against women is central in addressing the root causes of gender inequality. This effort, combined with appreciating the diverse concerns and experiences of women because of their marginalized identities in society, must be addressed in order to enhance women's economic empowerment.

The objectives of this paper are twofold: to compare the perceptions of economic opportunities of the diverse group of women who were interviewed and to explore the reasons behind the gender gap in economic empowerment in Cape Town today. In order to provide background information for this study, a significant section of this paper examines the historical context of women's status during apartheid, efforts by the government to address women's economic empowerment, the current status of women in South Africa economically, and several explanations for the underlying causes of women's marginalization within South African society.

My primary research question sought to identify the experiences women have had with attempting to overcome economic obstacles, both personally and from what they observe in their communities and the greater Cape Town society. I conducted my research in the neighborhoods of Bo Kaap, Langa, Oranjezicht, and Sea Point because these areas represent a wide range of women across the racial, generational, and socioeconomic spectrum. My original hypothesis was that the perceptions of economic opportunity for women in these communities would vary significantly and that any similarities would exist between groups that were of the same race or closer in socioeconomic status. However, my research indicated that this is not necessarily true; I found that the prevailing lines of distinction among women's economic experiences were those of culture and family structure (i.e. if a woman is or intends to be married and if a woman has or intends to have children), rather than race or class. This conclusion allows for an interesting analysis of social forces and identities that

ultimately impact women's opportunities for and perceptions of economic empowerment in Cape Town.

## **2. Methodology**

I conducted my primary research for this project through seven semi-structured interviews with women of different racial backgrounds and ages. All interviewees gave consent for their responses to be included in this paper and their names have been changed to protect their privacy. I chose to interview only women because the goal of my research was to understand women's perceptions of their personal economic opportunities and sense of empowerment. I interviewed three coloured, two black and two white women who live in Bo Kaap, Langa, Oranjezicht, and Sea Point, respectively. These communities all possess different racial profiles: Bo Kaap is a predominately Muslim, coloured neighborhood, Langa is an all-black township, and Oranjezicht and Sea Point are both wealthy suburbs that under apartheid were classified as whites only. Today Oranjezicht remains a predominantly white area, and Sea Point is still a predominately white area with some racial integration. The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. From these interviews I gained significant insight into the lives of and economic opportunities for women in Cape Town today.

I chose interviews as the most appropriate method for my topic because I wanted to learn about everyday women's perceptions of this issue in their own lives. I felt that these were essential perspectives to focus on in my research. These women live the experiences and policies that are made by others, and they therefore deserve to express their thoughts. When choosing whom to interview, I reached out to existing contacts in the Cape Town area. These women already knew me and were comfortable around me, and I felt that this would enhance the dynamic of trust during the interviews.

**Interviewees** (names have been changed)

1. Fatima (23 April 2014): a 36 year-old coloured woman who grew up and currently lives in Bo Kaap with her parents. She is a town planner and heritage/historical researcher, and she founded and now runs her own heritage resource management firm. She was interviewed at Barans Kurdish Restaurant in downtown Cape Town.
2. Jasmine (24 April 2014): a 48 year-old coloured woman who grew up and currently lives in Bo Kaap with her husband, son, and daughter. Her eldest daughter is married and does not live in the family house. Jasmine was 22 years old when she had her first child. She is a self-employed seamstress. She was interviewed in her home with her daughter.
3. Rashieda (24 April 2014): a 19 year-old coloured woman who grew up and currently lives in Bo Kaap with her mother, father, and brother. She is in her final year of high school and works at a part-time job selling magazines. She was interviewed in her home with her mother.
4. Nozipho (28 April 2014): a 25 year-old black woman who grew up and currently lives in Langa with her aunt and grandmother. She is a banking official at First National Bank. She was interviewed in her home in private.
5. Tandi (28 April 2014): a 62 year-old black woman who grew up and currently lives in Langa with her mother and niece. She is not married and does not have children. She is a pensioner and retired teacher, and she works part-time as a substitute teacher. She was interviewed in her home in private.
6. Allison (2 May 2014): a 48 year-old white woman who grew up in Newlands and currently lives in Oranjezicht with her husband and two sons. She was 34 years old when she had her first child. She is a textile designer at SK Textiles International. She was interviewed in her home in private.
7. Danielle (4 May 2014): a 38 year-old white woman who grew up in Muizenberg and downtown Cape Town and currently lives in Sea Point. She is not married and does not have children. She currently volunteers with several NGOs and is

seeking paid work. She was interviewed at Bootlegger Coffee Company Café in downtown Cape Town.

### **Ethical Reflexivity**

As I framed my interview questions, I was aware that many discussions that I had during my interviews involved addressing sensitive issues, such as gender equality and personal finances. I prefaced my interviews by informing the participants that they could share as much or as little as they felt comfortable with and I worked to establish a relaxed rapport with them. Throughout this study I acknowledged my possible 'Western' bias and personal views regarding the importance of gender equality. I was also cognizant of the potential unequal power dynamic that could exist between my participants and me because of my identity as a white, American student. Participants seemed to feel at ease talking with me and expressed their genuine thoughts, even on sensitive issues.

### **3. Limitations**

The main obstacles that I encountered during my research were a limited time frame in which to conduct my fieldwork, my recent exposure to interviewing, and my identity as a white American. The limited time frame of this research project posed difficulties, as it was challenging to complete a substantial study in four weeks. Furthermore, potential interviewees were not always available. Despite these challenges of complicated scheduling and limited time, I was able to speak with seven South African women. Lastly, I recognize that my sample size for this research was relatively small; thus my conclusions are based on these women's responses and are not meant to generalize the experiences of all South African women.

## 4. Literature Review

Although the empowerment of women in all spheres of life has been highlighted as a goal for post-apartheid South Africa, achieving true gender equality is a complex and ongoing process. The World Bank defines empowerment as “the expansion of freedom of choice and actions and increasing one’s authority and control over the resources and decisions that affect one’s life” (Dejene, 2007, p. 6). Social economist Naila Kabeer argues that in order for a choice to be empowered, it must “challenge rather than reproduce inequality” (Parpart and Kabeer, 2010, p. 17). By these definitions, an individual may possess relative economic success but be disempowered if he/she exists within or is unable to overcome an oppressive system. Scholar Jane Parpart argues that Kabeer’s binary measurement of empowerment oversimplifies societies’ complex conditions of power, access, and equality (Parpart and Kabeer, 2010, p. 21-22). In this paper, ‘empowerment’ refers to a combination of the aforementioned definitions. Empowerment in this context means possessing the freedom of choice, actions, and control over one’s life, including the potential but not the necessity to challenge oppression through choice. This interpretation reflects Parpart’s “nuanced” and multi-faceted view of empowerment as a continuum, with emphasis on the *potential* for empowerment (Parpart and Kabeer, 2010, p. 22).

### Historical Context Women Under Apartheid

Although the overwhelming discrimination mandated during apartheid was based on racial segregation, all women were significantly oppressed under the apartheid regime, which lasted from 1948 to 1994. Legal scholar Penelope Andrews (2001) explains in her article “From Gender Apartheid to Non-Sexism: The Pursuit of Women’s Rights in South Africa” how the violently masculine rhetoric and ideology of the militaristic apartheid state established structures that emphasized patriarchal attitudes and norms. Women of all races therefore remained marginalized under the patriarchy of apartheid (Andrews, 2001, p. 2). While black, coloured, and Indian



women's oppressions were compounded under apartheid because of their lower racial status, white women remained disadvantaged as well because of the patriarchal system. Andrews (2001) argues that white women were "conscripted into the maintenance of apartheid" because despite the system's oppression of these women, their white racial status protected and shielded them from further violence of apartheid (p. 2). The sexist foundations of South African society during this time institutionalized and intensified many gendered issues that continue to plague the country today, including violence against women, sexual subordination, and systemic economic dependency of women (Andrews, 2001, p. 2-3).

In terms of working conditions, most white, Indian, and coloured women during apartheid found employment in the clothing and food industries, while most black women did domestic and agricultural work. Women were often restricted to low-level positions and wages and endured poor, exploitative physical working conditions (United Nations Office of Geneva, 2004). Andrews (2001) illustrates that black women experienced the greatest marginalization largely because of the unjust 'migrant labor system', in addition to their classification as the lowest racial status in the hierarchy of apartheid. Black South Africans were denied the fundamental right "to travel freely to seek gainful employment" and were systematically forced into providing cheap, controlled, male-dominated labor for white-owned businesses (Andrews, 2001, p. 2). This system tore apart families, denied black South Africans their basic human rights, and trapped black women in a cycle of economic dependency and vulnerability (Andrews, 2001, p. 2). The migrant labor system was dismantled with the fall of apartheid, but it was not until the Labor Relations Act of 1996 that domestic and agricultural workers, who were primarily black, possessed legislative protections like those of workers in other industries (United Nations Office of Geneva, 2004). Therefore the end of apartheid offered women of all races and classes hope for improving their economic empowerment because of the new nation's emphasis on human rights and gender equality.

## **Women's Empowerment Policies in South Africa**

In a global context, the post-apartheid South African government has been a consistent supporter of international measures to enhance gender equality and increase women's empowerment. In 1995, South Africa ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and adopted the Beijing Platform of Action, both of which aim to bring an end to gender discrimination and improve the status of women internationally. The South African government has highlighted several tenants of the Beijing Platform on which to focus, including women's economic empowerment. South Africa also committed in 1997 to the Southern African Development Community's (SADC) Declaration on Gender and the subsequent Addendum on Violence Against Women, and thus has agreed to follow certain policies to enhance women's rights and eliminate gendered violence (City of Cape Town Council, 2010, p. 9). South Africa's involvement in these international agreements to promote women's rights and empowerment emphasizes that the government has begun focusing significant attention on this issue both in South Africa and around the world.

Notable domestic efforts to increase women's rights have been made by the South African government, beginning with the promise of gender equality in the 1996 Constitution. The first founding provision of the Constitution explicitly states that the Republic of South Africa is dedicated to upholding the value of 'non-sexism'. The Constitution later includes the rights of all South Africans to fair labor practices, in addition to equal opportunity and choice of occupation ("Constitution of the Republic of South Africa", 1996). The pledge by the government to protect these rights has been obvious in several policies aimed at promoting women's empowerment since the Constitution's adoption. The creation of the Gender and Women's Empowerment (GWE) Unit within the national Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) highlights the government's focus on improving conditions for women's economic success. This unit's understanding of empowerment should be noted; as of 2011 the definition proposed in a DTI report focused on the "ability of all women to fully participate in,

contribute to, and benefit from economic growth and development" (Department of Trade and Industry, 2011, p. 8). This definition varies from those previously discussed in this paper. The GWE Unit's mission is to support and enable women's enterprises, to establish sustainable women's participation in the South African economy, and to address inequalities of previous policies that hindered women's economic involvement. The GWE Unit has implemented programs aimed at improving women's marketable skills and encouraging female involvement in predominantly male fields; these initiatives have included furthering women's textile, craft, technology and business skills through education, in addition to promoting women's studies in engineering, science, and other disciplines of technology (Department of Trade and Industry, 2011). With the creation of the GWE Unit, the South African government has taken a major step in promoting women's economic empowerment. However the long term success of these policies to tackle the systemic causes of gender inequality remain to be seen.

In Cape Town there has been a significant effort by the city and provincial leadership to address the empowerment of women through various economic, political, and social policies. A brief released by the Cape Town City Council in 2010 included details for significantly increasing opportunities for women in local government and economic positions, in addition to addressing issues such as HIV/AIDS and violence against women. The report also began with the acknowledgement that despite South Africa's constitutional guarantee of gender equality, South African women still do not enjoy equal rights in society. This policy framework highlights the need for a shift in South Africans' attitudes toward gender and women's role in society (City of Cape Town Council, 2010). This report emphasizes the fact that although there has been progress made, deeply entrenched views of gender roles often still permeate South African society and may prevent women's opportunities for empowerment. The policy described in this report specifically highlights the government's commitment to improving the economic infrastructure and environment in order to encourage women's involvement and to combat the underemployment of women. (City of Cape Town Council, 2010). The multi-faceted approach of this policy brief recognizes Cape

Town and South Africa's progress in promoting women's empowerment, but also notes its struggles and advocates for further efforts.

The South African government's efforts to improve gender equality have had some success. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index of 2013, South Africa has the second-smallest gender gap of all African countries. This index measures the gender inequalities within countries based on "economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment" (Analo, 2013). The recent government policies to address women's empowerment display the incremental improvement of women's rights since apartheid. However, the economic statistics relating to South African women highlight the continuous challenges to achieving equality. The previously mentioned 2011 DTI report suggests that developing an updated definition of women's economic empowerment, properly balancing efforts for women-specific and gender-integrated economic development, and recognizing the diverse needs of South African women will propel the country closer to its goal of achieving economic equality for women (Department of Trade and Industry, 2011). These multi-layered recommendations emphasize that women's economic empowerment is a complex issue and addressing it requires critical thinking and community awareness.

### **Current Economic Status of Women in South Africa**

Despite the government's many policy commitments and goals of increasing women's empowerment and gender equality, women remain economically disadvantaged in South Africa. When analyzing the situation for women today, focusing on Cape Town is significant because it is part of the economically successful Western Cape province. The Western Cape boasts one of South Africa's largest economies. The South African Quarterly Labor Force Survey for Quarter 4 of 2014 shows that as of December 2014, this province exhibited the third lowest total unemployment rate in South Africa at 22.9% (Statistics South Africa, 2014, Table F). The average national unemployment rate as of December 2014 was 24.3%, with the highest unemployment in the Free State province at 32.2% (2014, Table F). However,

nationally the unemployment rate for women remained higher than the rate for men, with the unemployment rate for women at 26.6% and that of men at 22.4% (2014, Figure 31). Within this discrepancy, the data shows that women across all population groups face higher unemployment rates than men, regardless of the level of schooling they have completed (2014, Figure 14). Therefore although the Western Cape and Cape Town have enjoyed relative economic success in the recent years, women still remain at a disadvantage nationally in acquiring jobs.

For the purpose of this study, it is also necessary to examine the racial breakdown of unemployment. The Quarterly Labor Force Survey for Quarter 1 of 2013 illustrates that as of March 2013, the black population group had the highest unemployment rate nationally at 28.8%. This group had the highest unemployment rate consistently since March 2012. The coloured population had the next highest unemployment rate at 23.3% as of March 2013, and the white population had the lowest rate at 7.2% (Statistics South Africa, 2013, Figure 18). This data suggests that there is a correlation in some cases between racial group and employment status. This hypothesis lends itself to the concept that in post-apartheid South Africa, people's experiences continue to be significantly shaped by their specific histories with oppression. In Veronika Wittmann's article "Gender Empowerment in South Africa" (2012), she argues that issues of women's empowerment in South Africa depend greatly on women's individual social, political, and economic backgrounds; these conditions often include racial group. This theory will be explained in further depth later in this paper; however, the varying unemployment rates of different racial groups support the argument that race plays a factor in women's economic empowerment in post-apartheid South Africa.

The distribution of job types and comparison of salaries between men and women is a key measurement of women's economic progress. As of June 2011, the majority of South African women worked in elementary occupations (International Women's Forum South Africa, 2011). Elementary occupations include selling goods in public places, cleaning work, agricultural jobs, manufacturing, and food preparation (International Labor Organization, 2012, p. 37). The second and third most common

occupations for women as of June 2011 were as clerks and domestic workers (International Women's Forum South Africa, 2011). All three of these occupations often exist in the informal economy, while men hold significantly more jobs as managers, professionals, and in sales and services, all of which are higher-level positions and in the formal economy. The formal economy is defined as the official economy of a country that includes employee payrolls, benefits, and is taxed, regulated, and monitored by the government; the informal economy is the sector of a country's economy that does not include official employee payrolls or benefits, and is not taxed, regulated, or monitored by the government (International Women's Forum South Africa, 2011). Despite efforts by the South African government to include more women in the formal economy, women who are involved in the formal economy often are still restricted to low-level positions within organizations and stereotypically feminine occupations, such as those previously listed. Even in situations where men and women hold the same position, on average women earn less than their male counterparts (International Women's Forum South Africa, 2011). These disparities continue to illustrate the obstacles that often prevent women in South Africa today from possessing equal opportunities for economic advancement.

### **Linking Women's Economic Empowerment to National Growth**

In his article "Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment in Africa" Yeshiareg Dejene (2007) argues that efforts aimed at enhancing women's economic empowerment are proven to contribute to the overall development and poverty alleviation of a country. Dejene highlights the United Nation's third Millennium Development Goal (MDG) "to promote gender equality and empowerment of women", which is one of eight MDGs aimed at improving the lives of all people worldwide (Dejene, 2007, p. 3). He emphasizes that the UN views this goal as not only a singular objective, but also as a necessary step in order to fulfill all other MDGs (Dejene, 2007, p. 3). Dejene argues that efforts to increase women's empowerment are "instrumental" in the realization of universal primary education, lower mortality rates of children under the age of five, enhanced maternal care, decreased chances for HIV/AIDS

contraction, and many other development goals (Dejene, 2007, p. 3). By connecting these pressing issues, Dejene underscores the importance of women's empowerment in all countries, specifically those that face these social challenges. South Africa struggles substantially with the spread of HIV/AIDS and the disease's effects on social and economic factors. 2013 data from the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) shows that the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in South Africa remains at an alarmingly high average of 19.1% (UNAIDS, 2013). Further research from the South African National HIV Survey in 2008 illustrates that women and the black population are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS (AVERT, n.d.). Jocelyn Vass (2005) argues that the HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa will have highly negative effects on the development of human capital, the labor force, and overall economic growth (p. 4-6). This evidence supports Dejene's argument regarding the link between increased women's empowerment and national growth and proves that this concept is especially relevant to South Africa.

Dejene highlights the African Union's 2003 adoption of the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa as a significant step in establishing regional empowerment for women. This protocol is an addition to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and was ratified by South Africa and many other African nations in 2006. Dejene explains that the Protocol appeals for sweeping protection of women's rights in all sectors of society, including the economic and social protections of:

women's equal access to employment and equal pay for jobs of equal value, the right to inherit property, the right to equal share of matrimonial property at the time of divorce, ensur[ing] women's equal access to and control over productive resources and guarantee[ing] their property rights, promot[ing] and support[ing] the occupations and economic activities of women...establish[ing] system[s] of protection and social insurance for women working in the informal sector and tak[ing] necessary measures to recognize the economic value of women's work. (Dejene, 2007, p. 4)

The implementation of economic empowerment of women, Dejene argues, promotes financial independence and social mobility for women; this allows for the possibility of further education and to counteract the cycle of poverty (Dejene, 2007, p. 6). Dejene contends that although the rights protected by the Protocol are positive steps in the process of achieving gender equality, efforts for women's empowerment have not been properly or fully incorporated into the adoption and implementation of policies. He argues that "considerable gaps" still remain between men and women's economic opportunities, education possibilities, decision-making influence, and general welfare throughout many places in Africa, and that African nations must amend these discrepancies in order to expand their growth and alleviate other social obstacles (Dejene, 2007, p. 4). Post-apartheid South Africa's development policy begins to address this concept with its focus on women's empowerment, but further steps of policy implementation and recognition of underlying causes of inequality must still be taken.

The UN Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), which is now included under the entity UN Women, published a report in 2001 that also reinforces Dejene's claim for the correlation between improving women's status in society and poverty alleviation. This report encourages development policy to address the "multidimensional nature of poverty," which includes the empowerment of women through increased autonomy and opportunity (DAW, 2001, p. 4). The report argues that increasing employment opportunities for women will aid in alleviating poverty, if implemented correctly. It highlights that significant differences exist between men and women's access to the job market, and women's employment policies must address the specific concerns and situations of women; one approach does not fit all scenarios. Overall this report advocates for the economic empowerment of women within the context of globalization (DAW, 2001). The findings of my study, discussed later in this paper, focus on the recognition of the unique factors that inhibit women's economic empowerment in diverse cultural, socioeconomic, racial, and political environments.



## **Underlying Factors Contributing to Gender Inequality in South Africa**

In Wittmann's article (2012), she defends the notion that in all studies of gender empowerment in post-apartheid South Africa, one must recognize the conditions of women's lives in the context of their unique historical, political, social, and economic backgrounds. To properly compare and understand the diverse experiences and needs of South African women regarding their economic empowerment, she argues that it is crucial to first explore the racial circumstances in which women were raised and socially conditioned under apartheid and today. These racial conditions have created distinct power dynamics among women of different races, in addition to men and women of different races. Andrews (2001) expands upon this concept in her article "From Gender Apartheid to Non-Sexism". She argues that the violent and hyper-masculinity underlying apartheid society created institutionalized patriarchal and racial obstacles for women's empowerment, and that these legacies continue to exist and influence women today (Andrews, 2001, p. 7-8). Although the 1996 Constitution attempted to rectify the sexism of apartheid, the subordination of women and the devaluation of their work, agency, and bodies remains evident in South African society. Andrews highlights the government's "inaction" and the Constitutional Court's lack of interest in addressing domestic violence against women, an issue that is highly racialized and by which a large number of South African women are affected (Andrews, 2001, p. 8). This example illustrates government actions that contradict with policy commitments to women's rights, the Court's failure to uphold the constitutional promise of equality, and the broader influence of patriarchy in shaping women's status in South African society (Andrews, 2001, p. 8). Wittman (2001) builds on Andrews's claim and continues that power dynamics such as these impact gender relations today and heavily contribute to the challenges that women face in increasing their empowerment.

Wittmann (2012) argues that South Africa's post-apartheid society and economic structure are deeply influenced by the institutionalized racism and sexism that existed under apartheid. She asserts that the remnants of this discrimination have far-reaching implications for women's empowerment today; an example of this is shown by the aforementioned discussion of domestic violence. Wittmann argues that because of the racialization of society under apartheid, women experienced discrimination differently depending on their race and today occupy distinct places in society because of this. She continues that a woman's specific position in society significantly dictates her opportunity for any form of empowerment; this argument relates to the concept of intersectionality, which is explained below. Wittmann thus contends that South African women do not all have the same concerns because their societal positions cause different gender relations. She concludes that successful empowerment for South African women requires this acknowledgement of differences in addition to the subsequent acceptance of the commonalities of discrimination against all women (Wittmann, 2012).

As Wittmann explains, there are underlying societal and systemic factors that inhibit gender equality in South Africa. These root causes play a key role in shaping South Africans' perceptions of the expected role of women in society and in influencing women's views of their right to empowerment. Feminist and legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality can be used to explain the impact of South African women's unique positions within society on their resulting oppressions. In her 1989 article "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex", Crenshaw explains intersectionality as the systemic oppressions and discriminations that result from the confluence of people's multiple marginalized identities. Intersectionality addresses how power and structures work within a society to limit the rights of and discriminate against these people (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 149). Crenshaw describes the struggles of black women in order to illustrate this multitude of oppressions. Black women automatically experience several levels of discrimination or "double-discrimination" because of their identities as women and black (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 149). Crenshaw additionally argues that black women remain at a disadvantage for

many opportunities and advancement in society because of this combination of marginalized identities (Crenshaw, 1989, p.151-152). This situation and its ramifications are widespread in South Africa, in which women of all identities endure numerous intersections of discrimination. These oppressions consequently cause systemic obstacles to women's empowerment within society. As Sharon Groenmeyer (2011) argues in "Intersectionality in Apartheid and Post-apartheid South Africa", the country's complex history of race, gender, and class distinctions under apartheid reinforce intersectional discrimination today. She highlights that despite formal economic protections, women are often unable to practice their full rights because of "collective constraints", or other intersecting marginalized identities such as socioeconomic class or culture (Groenmeyer, 2011, p. 270-271). Therefore intersectionality is a constructive explanation for the systemic obstacles that women face in increasing their equality and empowerment.

In their 2014 article "The Confidence Gap", Katty Kay and Claire Shipman underline a pervasive discrepancy between men and women's confidence in their economic success within the workforce today. This phenomenon can be viewed as a result of the root causes of gender inequality previously outlined, including patriarchal legacies of apartheid and intersectional experiences of South African women. Kay and Shipman found that many women lack self-confidence in their work aspirations and devalue their skills, even when their capabilities are greater than those of their male counterparts (Kay & Shipman, 2014). This study displays the reverberating effects of the systemic and underlying factors that inhibit women's empowerment in all aspects of society. The 'confidence gap' theory introduced by Kay and Shipman relates to the struggle for women's economic empowerment and overall gender equality that Dejene and the UN Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) report discuss. Women are less likely to gain confidence and challenge traditional gender roles and constraints if the fundamental inequalities are not addressed. Both Dejene and the UN report maintain that women's empowerment is linked to poverty alleviation. Therefore women's continued systemic oppression in society, which contributes to their lack of confidence professionally, further hinders the growth and development of a country by

inhibiting women's economic progress (DAW, 2001). This concept of female insecurity illustrates the lasting remnants of gender relations under apartheid, as Andrews and Wittmann discuss. Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, combined with Groenmeyer's analysis of it in South Africa, further underline how the experiences of those with multiple marginalized identities can reinforce the very systems that cause oppression. This theoretical analysis proves that obstacles for women's economic empowerment are especially complex because of legacies left by apartheid and involve the intersectionality of race, gender, class, culture, and other identities within South African society.

## **5. Findings and Analysis**

### **5.1 Findings**

#### **Bo Kaap: Impact of Culture on Women's Opportunities for Independence**

The interviews that I conducted with Fatima, Jasmine, and Rashieda exhibited similarities because of these women's shared experience of growing up and currently living in Bo Kaap. But they also differed based on each woman's individual perception of women's economic opportunity and empowerment within Bo Kaap. Fatima, Jasmine and Rashieda all explained that within the Muslim community of Bo Kaap, women are expected to get married and start a family as soon as they can. Fatima explained how this cultural value is prioritized over receiving an education: "For many Muslim women, the job is a side thing – the priorities for women are to find a husband and have children, that's it. Girls growing up are encouraged to get the best husband over finishing school and getting a job." This cultural concept will be analyzed later in this section, as it is significant to my final conclusion. But it is important to note that both Fatima and Jasmine mentioned that when growing up, their fathers did not want the women in the household working outside the house. When asked why they work, both Fatima and Rashieda – unmarried women without children and part of the younger

generation answered that they want to earn money so that they do not need to rely constantly on their family and can be independent. Jasmine said that she works only because her family needs the money and because her husband cannot always find a job.

During my interview with Fatima, she indicated that she does not agree with many of the cultural values and expectations of the Muslim coloured community in Bo Kaap. She did not get married until she was 28 years old, which she noted is "quite late for a Muslim girl", and she has been divorced twice. However, Fatima said, after she got divorced "the marriage proposals came flowing in because the men here did not think that I could look after myself and believed that I needed a man. This is what our culture teaches." Fatima's younger sister did not finish high school because she got married when she was 16. But she is now divorced and struggles to support her children and herself, Fatima says, "because she did not finish school and because in our culture we do not get married through the state. We marry under Islamic law, so the man does not sign a prenuptial. The woman can get stripped of everything if the man leaves." After her sister got married, Fatima moved away from home and lived outside of Bo Kaap for several years. She eventually returned and today she supports herself economically but lives with her parents.

When asked if she knows many women in Bo Kaap who are the main breadwinners for their family, Fatima answered no. However, she aspires to support herself economically. During our interview, Fatima spoke about the constant competition and materialism that she observes within the Muslim Bo Kaap community. As she put it:

"There is a huge discrepancy between working really hard to make not much money versus just marrying a wealthy man. It's like the symbol of status is reversed - having a job is viewed as less than not having to work because your husband is wealthy enough. I don't aspire to have that husband or that kitchen. I love the independence of controlling and making my own money. It is empowering."

Fatima studied at University of Cape Town for her undergraduate degree in town planning, in addition to two masters degrees in planning and urban conservation. In order to afford school, Fatima had to work while taking undergraduate classes. She spoke about Muslim coloured women in her classes who were her same age and already married, and she remembered feeling frustrated that these women did not also have to work.

When I asked Fatima about her thoughts on the gendering of occupations, she said that engineering and construction are seen as more 'men's fields', and health, social work, and "softer things" are seen as 'women's fields'. Fatima described her experience searching for and in her current job in the following way:

"I applied to an organization that deals with people of colour, and my skin colour was my leg-up. There was a lack of coloured females, so they snatched me up. But then I left and started my own business. Most of the discrimination that I experience is in-office from coloured and Muslim men, not so much from black or white men."

In the three companies and one government job at which Fatima has worked, she has reported to women in three of those positions. She has a male coworker now who "begs me, please don't get married, you have too much potential." In terms of her view of men and women's salaries, Fatima talked about the expectation in the Muslim coloured community that men have to support their family and thus deserve to earn more money. She explained how a Muslim man in her office was satisfied with his salary until he found out that he was earning the same amount as a woman employee, who was more qualified for the position.

Fatima said that from what she has heard, women's experiences with maternity leave depend on the specific job; however, many of her peers have not returned to work after having their first child. A prevailing theme of our conversation was her frequent mention of the difficulty in finding support among other women in her field. Fatima felt that the competition and insecurity among women professionals poses a serious problem to women's increases in economic empowerment, saying, "It just gives

men the ammunition to make fun of us and think that we don't deserve to be there." She also said that women are conditioned from a young age to limit themselves to only certain jobs, which is another obstacle to empowerment. Fatima feels that since the end of apartheid, many doors have opened for women of colour. She conceded that, "I don't think I would have the opportunities I've had if I wasn't a person of colour," but she said that she continues to work hard to prove herself separate from her race and gender.

Jasmine had a different perspective than Fatima on many of my interview questions. She is married, has children, and is more than ten years older than Fatima. Before Jasmine was married, she worked as a self-employed seamstress and briefly as a temp in her sister's office while she was on maternity leave. Jasmine and her husband both contribute to their family's income – she said that the role of main breadwinner fluctuates because sometimes her husband earns enough to support the family, but other times he does not have work and Jasmine must contribute more. She spoke about how more women in Bo Kaap are beginning to support their families through means such as selling fabric and food, and the community accepts this – despite it conflicting with the cultural value that men provide for the family. Jasmine did not think that it was important to support herself financially as long as her husband was making enough money; if her family could afford it, she would not work, but if her immediate or extended family needed money, she would work. She explained, "In our culture, the woman usually stays at home," and she emphasized the cultural expectation for women to find husbands rather than employment.

Jasmine did not receive any formal training for her job; she grew up watching her grandmother sew and taught herself, as she "was just born with the talent." Like Fatima, Jasmine said that engineering, construction, and other fields involving physical labor are seen as 'men's work' and said that cleaning was considered more 'women's work'. She seemed to agree with these views. Jasmine also noted that men usually occupy higher positions than women in companies. When I asked her about her experience filling in for her sister in an office job, Jasmine admitted that she "didn't mind it" and would have liked to remain working in an office. But her father did not

want her to work outside the home, and "you don't disobey your father." Jasmine also noted that her experience working in that office was her first exposure to non-Muslim people, and she enjoyed meeting these different kinds of people.

In terms of maternity leave, Jasmine felt that the coverage that most employers offer is "quite good", but that most women do not wish to return to work. She continued that "financially it doesn't make sense to stay at home with children, but it is better to raise your own child." But despite this attitude, Jasmine felt that today more women in Bo Kaap are returning to work after having children. When I asked her what she believed were factors preventing women from becoming competitive job candidates, she pointed to a lack in proper education for women to be trained for specific occupations. In terms of improvement in economic opportunities for women post-apartheid, Jasmine felt that initially there were efforts to empower young people and women, but that these have decreased recently as there has been less work for all South Africans. She commented that "before and after for us [coloureds], it was the same. We've been the same in both. But the blacks, it has changed for them." This perception varied from that of Fatima, who felt that black and coloured women have enjoyed more opportunities since apartheid.

My final interview in Bo Kaap with Rashieda produced findings that were a combination of those of Fatima and Jasmine. It is important to note that Rashieda was the youngest participant in my research study, so she offered a unique perspective. When I asked her about the presence of female breadwinners in Bo Kaap and how they are viewed, she said that this role for women is normal today. But she continued that usually women resort to this position because their husbands have died and they must support their family. Rashieda felt that it was an important goal for her to support herself financially because "my parents aren't always going to be there and this way I don't have to worry where I am going to get money from." She also believed that in Bo Kaap young women are encouraged to become economically stable before starting a family because "one day you will leave the house and you should not leave with nothing." Rashieda believed that after graduating from high school, most of her female classmates wish to get a job immediately or after attending university. She



believed that women who do not work become dependent on men for an income; she explained this by stating, "Most of my cousins didn't finish school they made babies and now they can't get a job. So they either depend on their mommy or their husband." She expressed that this is a negative situation for her cousins.

Rashieda viewed building and other physical work as 'men's work' and secretarial jobs as 'women's work'. Although she has not had any experience with this, Rashieda said that she has heard that mostly men occupy high-level positions in companies and women are usually in the lower-level jobs. Rashieda agreed with Jasmine and thinks that it is difficult for women to have children and continue to work outside the home because they will have the responsibilities of both a mother and their occupation. When I asked her what she thinks of the employment goals for women her age, Rashieda said that she believes most of her cousins and friends would not work if they could afford to "they would be okay with depending on someone else, like their husbands, for money because they already do this." However, she continued, if they could get a job today, she thinks that most women would accept it because even if their husbands work, these incomes are not sufficient and women can use the extra money. Rashieda felt that most women her age in Bo Kaap did not have proactive attitudes regarding employment. She stated:

"Most girls would rather sit at home instead of look for work because they are not encouraged to work by their families. Their mommies have their own businesses, so many girls think they can live off their mommies forever. Today it's not like the olden days, girls are not raised that they have to stay at home and cook and clean like it's 'I'll just get a maid.' But some girls are lazy."

When comparing interview responses, it is interesting to note that Rashieda believed that the culture of Bo Kaap today is not as traditional as Fatima and Jasmine describe it. Yet Rashieda still feels that women her age are often unmotivated to look for jobs. Rashieda also highlighted that many girls she knows already have families at 15 and 16 years old, and this is an obstacle for economic empowerment. She explains, "They don't feel that they can have a life now after having kids. Man, I don't think I could

have a family already. How are they supposed to support their children, when the father is also young?" My interview with Rashieda concluded with her belief that since apartheid economic opportunities for women have greatly expanded and both husbands and wives are able to and must work in current South African society.

My three interviews with women from Bo Kaap conveyed concepts that I will later examine in combination with the responses of women from Langa, Oranjezicht, and Sea Point: the significant influence of a community's values—in this case Muslim culture—on women's opportunities for economic empowerment, women's lack of confidence in the workforce today because of intersectional social pressures and expectations, and the gradually shifting societal views led by the younger generation in South Africa today.

### **Langa: Encouragement by the Older Generation for Young Women's Empowerment**

During my interview with Nozipho, she stated that her motivation for having a job is to gain her own independence and earn spending money, in addition to contributing to her family's income because she still lives at home. Nozipho explained that she has been able to complete her studies because she has stayed at home, and therefore feels a responsibility to help provide for her family who has supported her. The main breadwinner in Nozipho's family is her aunt. Nozipho said that the existence of female breadwinners in Langa depends on specific family compositions; if a household has a single parent, which she said is usually a single mother rather than father, then a woman in the family must become the main breadwinner. Nozipho pointed out that today in Langa it is common for mothers to work because most people need the income. People within this community, she said, appreciate the security of having two incomes in the family in case anything happens to a family member earning money. For this reason Nozipho explained that if a household has both a husband and wife, both usually work. It is also plausible for the woman in a household to earn more than the man, which Nozipho said is viewed as normal by people in Langa.

Nozipho felt that it was important for her to support herself financially so that she does not need to depend on others and because "making your own money will teach you to make better financial decisions." When I asked her about when most women her age started families, Nozipho said that most women her age had children toward the end of their studies. She described to me that there is significant motivation from the older generation in Langa for the youth to become financially independent before starting a family. She continued by saying, "the younger generation wants it all to get a job, education, and have a family." This emphasis on the shifting attitudes of young women toward economic empowerment and independence highlights that this concept is present not only in Bo Kaap but also Langa. However, Nozipho also stressed that the extent to which young women are encouraged to succeed economically depends on the culture in which they were brought up.

For her current job at First National Bank, Nozipho completed a three-month long training program, in addition to previously earning her Bachelor of Commerce in Economics degree at the University of South Africa and working as a manager at another bank. She believed that people in Langa had similar views of 'men's' and 'women's' work to the interviewees from Bo Kaap, with the additions of bus driving, economists, and IT workers as 'men's jobs'. She seemed to agree with these views. Nozipho has observed that in banking women often do not hold positions higher than branch managers and that men usually dominate the top leadership. When talking about her experience getting jobs, she did not note any experiences with gender discrimination; however, she has heard that men earn higher salaries for the same jobs as women, although she could not say definitively. Nozipho said that many women at her work have children, but complain that employers do not offer helpful solutions for women attempting to work and raise children, such as company-sponsored daycares.

Nozipho viewed the upbringing of children and society's expectations for women as obstacles for women's economic empowerment. She specifically highlighted that women are expected by their families to both get a job and perform the "womanly" tasks of cooking and cleaning. She noted that, "men don't have any

responsibilities," and further argued how the burdens of a household should not only fall on women's shoulders but on both genders. Nozipho asserted that to combat these obstacles, people must raise their children in new ways. She praised her cousins, who "all have sons and now they have to clean the house, so it's not like only women do the housework." When I asked Nozipho her thoughts on post-apartheid changes to women's economic opportunities, she stated that education opportunities are more available than they were under apartheid through programs like Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment. But she explained that some people are still barred from these because their schooling background is not sufficient.

My interview with Tandi highlighted several similar concepts as that of Nozipho, but also revealed a new perspective of an older black woman. Tandi explained that although she is a pensioner, she still substitute teaches because she does not like to be restless and wants to contribute to her family's living "The cost of living today is high and money is never enough, so if I still have strength then I must still do something." Tandi is the main breadwinner in her household and has been for many years; she said that because of the situation in Langa where many households are only made up of women, the main income usually comes from women. She continued emphasizing the need for women to be self-reliant by saying:

"There are so many single women today, but they do wonders. Gone are the days now where women were dependent on their husbands. Women are working now, they are businesswomen, they have cars. Our women were abused by their husbands because they were dependent on them. Men tend to be useless."

Tandi also emphasized how women make sure to provide for their parents and extended family before they get married. She explained how she expanded her house for her parents to stay with her and has always supported them because "it is like this with us Africans, we support each other." The value of loyalty to one's family and community became evident through this interview.

Tandi completed a teacher's course for her professional training, in addition to a Bachelor of Education degree at the University of Cape Town. She stated that the community in Langa highly encourages women to succeed on their own, especially because of the unpredictability of circumstances "sometimes you get married, and then the husband dies. Then what? You've got to be independent." She listed the same professions as Nozipho that are considered 'men's work' and 'women's work', adding outdoor-cleaning for men and indoor-cleaning for women. However she pointed out that there are exceptions, and that a female construction worker built her garage "people were staring, but she did a good job". She therefore mostly agreed with these community-held views of men and women's work, but showed that her views are changing. Tandi believed that there are more men in leadership positions today, but that there are efforts aimed at balancing the numbers. She also admitted that she was very lucky and did not struggle to find employment. Tandi explained that maternity leave since the end of apartheid has significantly improved and that "then, you had to sit down at home if you had a child, but not today. Many women go back to work now." The obstacles for women's economic empowerment that she emphasized were under-qualification, a lack of family support, and unequal access to jobs. Tandi said that under apartheid, men prevented women from working out of jealousy and fear of losing power, but that today things have changed and "it is okay now."

The results from my interviews with Nozipho and Tandi significantly corresponded to each other and highlighted a cohesive view of women's economic empowerment within my small non-representative sample of this community. I found less variation between these two interviews than among the interviews of the coloured women in Bo Kaap, despite speaking with women of different ages in both communities. The findings from the interviews with women who lived in Langa also addressed similar concepts that were prominent in the Bo Kaap interviews and that I will discuss in further detail in the analysis section of this paper.

## **Oranjezicht and Sea Point: Legacies of Apartheid's Patriarchy**

Although my interviews with the two white women in my study were from different geographic communities of Cape Town, the findings still reflected certain similarities. During my interview with Allison, she explained to me that she works because she needs to have the freedom of earning her own salary and because she needs to help her husband pay for her children's upbringing. Allison's husband is a financial planner and the main breadwinner of the household. Allison said that within Oranjezicht there are many types of families, but the majority of her female friends have part-time jobs and their husbands provide the main incomes for the families. She stressed to me that she feels that her family is not upper class; she still must work to earn the lifestyle that she wants and she knows women "who just bridge, and lunch, and shop." Allison expressed that she and her community view the man as the main breadwinner, and she continued that "even though it is pretty old-fashioned, the man has to carry the load." However, she also mentioned that she thinks there are women who earn more than their husbands, but they are not the majority. Allison maintained that it is important for her to support herself financially she explained that she cannot constantly ask her husband for money and although "I don't do anything radical, but I wish I had the money to," she feels that she must have her own money for personal indulgences.

Allison had several jobs before she was married and had children, including working as a textile designer, professional hip-hop funk dancer, and aerobics teacher. She felt that within her community of Oranjezicht, women are encouraged to succeed on their own financially before starting a family. In terms of acquiring a job, she talked mostly about a racial rather than gender divide, saying, "I fear for us, the white people, because I think a lot of jobs will be taken from us." Allison said that it is not good for a woman to be totally dependent on a man, and she maintained that even "the other world" of very wealthy women who do not need to work have their own sources of money, like trust funds. But Allison admitted, "When I run out of money, my husband is my ATM." Her training for her past jobs included earning a diploma in

textile design at the Ruth Prowse design school in Cape Town, working for several different design companies, and earning a teacher's certificate for aerobics. Allison explained the difficulty in readjusting to the work environment today after leaving the workforce and having children. But she noted that she feels her current job is very rewarding:

"This job now has been a very big leap for me. I hadn't had enough experience on the computer, it's not natural for my age group. Even though I'm a white woman, I haven't gone and studied computer. So it's been a very big move for me to go into a company where I have to have skills, learn office rules. I love it though, I love it. This job feels like it gives me something important to do."

She said that she felt very lucky to have easily found her jobs in the past and that she is grateful for her current job. In terms of gendered occupations, Allison noted that today women work in many jobs that used to be dominated by men, such as accounting and financial planning; but she said that it seems that usually the head boss of a company is a man and women have senior positions below this. Allison viewed 'men's work' as managerial positions, physical labor, and outdoor-cleaning, while she saw 'women's work' as retail, sewing in textile factories, and indoor-cleaning.

Allison compared her experience of being a working mother with that of the women that she interacts with in textile factories. She said that only coloured women work in these positions ("you wouldn't see a white face there") and that although their lives are hectic, "They're happy to work and they never complain, they just survive. They all have children, they have babies, but they never leave early to fetch their children. That's why I never announce at work when I'm leaving to fetch my children." Allison said that she does not think that many jobs are reserved for men, but she expressed preference in having a male boss. In terms of salaries, she asserted that men definitely earn more than women because of the assumption that they are the sole breadwinners for their families "If I were to go to my boss and ask for a raise, I don't know what I would say to him. He might say, 'ask your husband.' But I want more money for me." Allison felt that there are sufficient maternity leave provisions for

women, but that women may not return to work after having children because they may not want to leave their children. When asked about obstacles that prevent women from gaining economic opportunities, Allison felt that a lack of education was the most significant barrier, followed by women's cultural upbringing and freedom to look for jobs. Since apartheid, she thinks that many more opportunities have been available to women, but she stressed that she feels there is a prejudice against white women seeking opportunities, saying, "they've pushed us out now."

My interview with Danielle was unique compared to my other six interviews because she is actively seeking a job and told me about the challenges of her experience. She is looking for employment because although "I don't have any economic pressure", she wants to find a job to feel a sense of purpose and keep busy. She said that not working "is driving me a little crazy" and she wants the sense of satisfaction that comes with working. Danielle said that while she was growing up her father was the main breadwinner of her family. Looking toward her future, she admitted that she does not know if she will provide the main income for her family because she wants to have children and sees that these two roles may conflict. She thought that within her community, the number of male breadwinners is slightly more than female, but that "this discrepancy is less than in other communities." When asked if she believed that it is important to financially support oneself, Danielle answered that it depends on one's circumstance. She said that she "would not have a problem with inheriting her money," but that if there was an economic need to work, she would surely support herself in her current situation, her parents do not support her but she is not struggling financially.

Danielle has worked since she studied in university, and she felt that there was an emphasis in her community for her to decide what field she was going to specialize and get a job in. She explained, "It's not common within the community to get married straight out of school. All of my friends were thinking, 'what is my career going to be?' People today who know that I am not working ask me what I'm going to do." When I asked if she thought that women who do not work become dependent on men for an income, Danielle said yes. But she thought that this dependence would feel



acceptable to her if she were contributing to the family in another way, such as by raising children or studying. She felt that "even though a lot of people within society see this division as clear cut, it is not black and white." Danielle believed that there are still gender roles and stigmas attached to people who break those roles, but that there are also stigmas attached to people who don't work "women are expected to work and not just sit at home". She emphasized, "Accepting that men and women are different is important."

In the past Danielle has worked in investments. Her training for this work included studying and participating in work-study programs run by organizations. Through her experience working in investment, Danielle observed that business jobs and positions on boards are more male-dominated, although she said that there is not a stigma attached to women in business or finance. The other fields that she and her community viewed as 'men's work' and 'women's work' were similar to those of the previous interviewees. When talking about the distribution of men and women across different levels of jobs, Danielle stated:

"Men and women are not even vaguely equally represented at all levels. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. If there are more men in certain roles, they will continue to hire men and it becomes a boy's club. Women that are highly successful in finance are very 'male'. These women maybe are willing to compromise their female roles to get jobs."

Like Allison, Danielle said that she has been very lucky in her experience of getting jobs and does not feel that she faced gender discrimination. She felt that she might be viewed more negatively during her current job search because she hasn't worked in several years. She also commented that "there is a saying 'Horses for horses' there's no denying that there are certain races and gender backgrounds that are fit for the job, but not always." Although Danielle did not know definite figures on wage comparisons, she said that within her Jewish and upper-class community, "women will fight for their equal salaries." In terms of maternity leave, Danielle believed that the laws protect women and that most women she knows return to work after having children,

especially if there is an economic need within the family. However, she highlighted that there is an expectation for women to stay at home if the man earns enough to ensure the family's financial stability.

When I asked Danielle what she believed to be the biggest obstacles for women's economic empowerment, she felt that "the biggest one would be a lack of belief that it's possible. In certain communities where you didn't see your mom work, you really have to expand your mind. But like in my community, I saw women working and was encouraged to work." Danielle also said that money, men's attitudes, the desire to have children, and "good old-fashioned fear" may also contribute to women's unequal economic opportunities. Danielle thought that there have been improvements in the economic opportunities for women since apartheid. She believed that this increase in women's economic involvement was related to the end of apartheid, but not necessarily caused by it. Danielle felt that apartheid ended around the same time that women were fighting for their economic rights, and that certain post-apartheid policies ended up benefiting women, such as Black Economic Empowerment, because women were classified in this policy as a previously disadvantaged group.

The findings from my interviews with Allison and Danielle highlighted the specific concerns of women with or intending to have children, the distinct influences of women's cultural upbringings, and various legacies of apartheid that impact social biases and identities today. I will further explore these distinctions in my analysis section and determine their role in the greater discussion of women's economic empowerment.

## **5.2 Analysis**

When conducting my study, my primary research question was to identify the specific perceptions of and experiences with economic empowerment that the various interviewees had personally and within their communities. My original hypothesis was that the perceptions of economic opportunities for women in the different communities throughout Cape Town would fluctuate depending on the women's race and class. However my findings highlighted that this was not fully accurate. I found

that each woman's unique cultural upbringing and family structure (i.e. if a woman is or intends to be married and if a woman has or intends to have children) were stronger determinants of the woman's perceptions of and actual opportunities for economic empowerment. My findings also highlighted that the women in this study experienced a significant amount of intersectional marginalization based on their unique social identities, which provided overarching obstacles for empowerment. Depending on their race, culture, and class, women experience specific discriminations within the dominant power structures. Additionally, this research emphasized the legacies of apartheid's patriarchal, racial, and social divisions in Cape Town today. My findings illustrated that as a result of these underlying factors, socially instilled professional insecurities often play a role in impeding women's economic empowerment. Finally, my research indicated that the attitudes of both younger and older women throughout the four communities in Cape Town that I studied are becoming more accepting of women's empowerment and efforts to increase their economic independence.

### **Cultural Upbringing and Community Influence**

After interviewing my participants, I found that cultural values and upbringing, in addition to the influence of one's community, seem to greatly shape women's perceptions of their expected and potential economic opportunities throughout their lives. By comparing the experiences of my interviewees, I learned that the varying levels of encouragement for versus opposition to women gaining financial independence from their families and communities plays a significant role in shaping the trajectory of women's economic prospects and desire for opportunities.

In Bo Kaap, this was evident as all of the women that I interviewed mentioned how the traditional values of their culture, whether or not they still exist today, discourage women from working outside the home and from having a significant job other than mother and homemaker. Fatima talked about the differences across cultures in terms of expectations for women. She said that she knows some Afrikaner women who are embarrassed about being stay-at-home mothers, but women in the

Muslim Bo Kaap community are proud to be housewives. To prove this, she couldn't think of any friends her age who are not married or do not have kids. Fatima also spoke about how most of the discrimination that she endures in a professional environment comes from Muslim men:

"I have had Muslim men call me on the phone and ask to speak to the director, and they are shocked when it is me. I find it is hard to approach Muslim men in the office. Muslim men at work will say things to me like, 'Why would you want to work if I could look after you?' or 'Marry me and we'll grow my business.' But I want to grow my own business."

Fatima explained that she attempts to resist the pressures of Muslim cultural values within her community that she feels limit women's empowerment. But although she has been able to surpass these obstacles in her own opportunities, she is still faced with what she views as the inherent discrimination of these values. In my interview with Jasmine, she acknowledged that women who do not work become dependent on men's incomes and justified that this principle is part of her community's interpretation of Muslim culture. She explained that even if a woman has her own money, she is not obligated to provide her family with it because "it is supposed to be the man who takes care of the family." This value of men's responsibility to provide for women may cause a lack of motivation for women to embark on their own economically because it is culturally accepted to rely on men for financial support. I do not wish to judge the merit of this value, only to conclude that it poses a large obstacle to efforts for encouraging women to gain economic independence.

Women outside of certain communities also seemed to notice that there are specific pressures and influences that shape women of other cultures' economic opportunities. During my interview with Nozipho, she commented on how a woman's upbringing and motivation (or discouragement) depends on the specific culture in which she is raised. She explained how she knows Muslim women her age with whom she studied that are married and economically dependent on their husbands. Both

Allison and Danielle also highlighted that women's specific upbringing significantly affects their possibilities for economic empowerment.

The backgrounds of my interviewees support this conclusion. The women living in Langa, Oranjezicht, and Sea Point all had similar upbringings in terms of motivation to receive an education and start a career. They were not expected to get married and have children right away—in fact, they were discouraged from this trajectory and were encouraged to become financially independent first. These women come from communities with different values than the women in Bo Kaap. The women from Bo Kaap all spoke about their community's strong cultural values of that prioritize women as wives and mothers over women as workers. Despite Fatima, Jasmine and Rashieda's various opinions of these values, they all stressed the influence that these pressures exerted on the economic opportunities for women in Bo Kaap.

This conclusion expands upon Wittmann's argument and illustrates the intersectionality of South African women's identities today. Wittmann claims that women's unique racial and socioeconomic class distinctions heavily influence the specific discriminations that they experience and the methods needed to increase their empowerment in South Africa today. She continues that efforts to improve women's economic empowerment must therefore recognize these differences (Wittmann, 2012). The findings from my research suggest that discriminations from racial and class experiences apply to women in Cape Town, as well as a diversity of culturally shaped social pressures. In my study, women with similar cultural upbringings had more beliefs and experiences in common than women of the same races or class. The perceptions of the interviewees from Langa were more comparable to those of women from Oranjezicht and Sea Point because the framework in which they were raised regarding women's empowerment was similar. These two communities possess significantly different socioeconomic class distinctions. The interviewees from Bo Kaap, a community with an average socioeconomic status that is between Langa and Oranjezicht/Sea Point, possessed specific perceptions of women's economic empowerment because of the influence of the Muslim cultural values. Therefore my

findings develop Wittmann's concept of race and class connections and exemplify Crenshaw's argument that systemic oppression is caused by many intersecting marginalized identities within the context of diverse power structures (Crenshaw, 1989). The women in my study all agreed that they faced barriers to enhancing their empowerment. These obstacles manifested their unique oppressions within the context of women's various identities, such as being influenced by specific cultural expectations and values.

### **Women's Professional Insecurities Caused by Patriarchal Legacies**

My findings illustrated that many women attempting to gain opportunities in the workplace face the obstacles of self-doubt and lack of confidence in their professional abilities. This concept can be viewed as a result of many of the underlying causes that have been previously discussed in this paper which inhibit gender equality. Specifically, women's self-confidence about their place in the work world can be seen as connected to the remnants of discriminatory gender and power dynamics under apartheid (Andrews, 2001).

Sentiments regarding women's insecurity in jobs outside the home were especially common in my conversations with the women from Bo Kaap. During my conversation with Fatima, she explained how at one past job she earned more than she thought she would and was uncomfortable with this:

"I was earning lots more than I believed that I should be and I felt like I should not be earning so much. But when I spoke to my boss about it, he insisted 'No, no, no, we feel that you deserve this much.' I realized that I had been conditioned to think that I should not make this much money."

After reflecting on her reaction to this situation, Fatima realized that she had been socially conditioned to believe that she should not earn an equivalent or higher wage than a man, despite her qualifications. When I asked Rashieda what she believes contributes to women not feeling competitive in the job market, she mentioned how

"most girls don't feel that they are qualified to work." Nozipho also mentioned this concept's application in her work experience. She explained that when dealing with problems in the workplace, many women employees at her job defer to men employees because they do not feel that are equipped or authorized to handle such situations. Danielle also said in her interview that women are conditioned by employment patterns not to apply to certain jobs. By explaining how certain male-dominated professions become "boy's clubs", she highlighted that gendered professions can foster a mentality that women "do not belong" in more challenging, competitive, technical fields. Allison also talked about how she has questioned her own skills and confidence in the workplace because she did not work for several years after having children. She noted that other mothers in her community worry about this concern as well. These responses emphasize that self-doubt seems to be pervasive among many women in diverse Cape Town communities.

The findings from my interviews highlighted several similar concepts that Kay and Shipman discuss in their article, including many women's acceptance of lower wages and lack of confidence in their professional abilities. My results also highlighted that often motherhood exerts a negative impact on women's professional self-confidence (Kay & Shipman, 2014). These insecurities convey that the effects of the power dynamics that were emphasized under apartheid's hyper masculine patriarchal system continue to affect society today. As Andrews (2001) explains, apartheid created institutionalized sexism through the structures of power and social advancement during this time. Highly gendered norms and restraints were consequently engrained in social mindsets (Andrews, 2001, p. 2-3). The trend of women lacking professional confidence illustrates the systemic marginalization of women being constrained to a lower status in society than men. Wittmann (2012) also underscores that the power dynamics that existed under apartheid, such as unequal gender relations, remain pervasive and influential in South Africa today. She argues that hierarchies of racial and gendered power continue to impact women's social interactions and limit their opportunities for empowerment (Wittmann, 2012). These underlying gender inequalities resonated in the responses of the women who I interviewed.

## **Changing Attitudes of Younger and Older Generations**

All of my participants agreed that there is beginning to be a shift in the expectations and desires of the younger generation of South African women regarding their empowerment and independence. My findings illustrated that change is most accepted by the younger generation; although the older generations in different communities also generally seemed to recognize and support this transformation.

Nozipho emphasized that the older generation of women in Langa want the young women to have better opportunities than they did. She said that older women may have been stuck in dangerous situations where they were completely financially dependent on men, and therefore could not leave their situations because they did not have an education or other skills to draw upon. As Nozipho explained, the lack of economic empowerment of older women "put them in very vulnerable positions," and therefore young women today are urged by the older generation to become financially independent rather than to immediately start a family. The older generation of women's support for the younger generation to receive an education and start a career before having a family is "kind of a preventative measure, to learn from their past experiences." Nozipho's response highlights that there is a shift occurring in the mindset of women in Langa because of the past experiences of older women, who according to Nozipho and Tandi's responses often suffered under restrictive conditions in their own lives. I found that there was significant praise for this new outlook on women's empowerment by several of the women that I interviewed, including women in different communities.

However, I found that the reasons behind this new motivation for women's independence depended on the women whom I asked. Rashieda explained, "Nowadays, I think most girls would rather get a job so they can have a car, especially the youngsters they want a car so they can be in the 'modern world'. Girls today are more interested in going to study so they can have money." This comment reflects the double-edged motivations of women in some communities today to gain economic opportunities. Rashieda's observation highlights a culture of materialism in Bo Kaap



about which she and Fatima explicitly spoke. For some Muslim women in Bo Kaap, Rashieda's responses suggest that the desire for material goods is a driving force in young women's efforts to gain economic empowerment to ultimately make money. This perceived materialism challenges social power dynamics by allowing women some economic independence. Although this motivation is different from that of the young women in Langa represented by Noziphlo, gaining economic freedom is a departure from the traditional feminine norms within Bo Kaap of men economically supporting women.

Older women who I interviewed acknowledged that women contributing to their family's income is becoming more accepted and promoted today. Jasmine explained that, "We don't rear our daughters to be independent, but the youngsters want to. Women working and earning money is becoming a norm, and even though it is the man's duty, we help." She also told a story of a woman from Bo Kaap whose family "had to go speak to her" because the woman was working in television and "as a Muslim woman she is not supposed to be out there, uncovered, doing that." Jasmine conceded that this culture is shifting to accept "the new Western world", but she emphasized that there are still very traditional and strict families in Bo Kaap who do not allow their daughters to speak to men and "must be covered". This evidence conveys that despite the changing environment for women's economic opportunities, some cultural values still remain entrenched in social expectations and gender norms.

Allison and Danielle's views regarding women's economic empowerment illustrated significant influences of traditional social values and gender roles. Although Allison has a job and feels that she must contribute to her family, she admitted to believing that her husband remains responsible for the economic success of the household. Yet despite these beliefs, she expressed openness to the idea of female-headed households and welcomed increases in women's independence, especially within the younger generation. Danielle maintained some of the same traditional gender values as Allison, but she strongly believed in women's ability to overcome barriers of economic discrimination. Danielle felt that the most significant obstacle for women is "a lack of belief that it's possible" and highlighted that women must

challenge existing patriarchal structures. She noted that the division between men and women's abilities and roles should not be "black and white", which illustrates a progressive mindset that is being pioneered by the younger generation. Despite Allison and Danielle's varying beliefs in traditional gender expectations, their openness to changing roles for women offer hope for a broader societal shift.

## **6. Conclusion**

In this study of women's perceptions of economic empowerment in Cape Town, I aimed to explore the parallels among the narratives of seven women living in different communities and of various races, socioeconomic classes, ages, and cultures. As shown through my findings and the literature on this topic, the dual concepts of intersectionality and apartheid's legacies of racialized patriarchy are significant challenges to increasing women's economic empowerment today. Through the research process, my understanding of women's economic empowerment increased as I became exposed to the specific experiences of my interviewees. The disproving of my original assumptions illuminated the complexities of this issue. The unique narratives of individuals and their varied intersectional identities most adequately express their true concerns and should be addressed in efforts for social change and development.

Cape Town includes many diverse communities, many of which I was not able to include in this study because of external constraints. Each community in which I conducted interviews possessed its own specific culture and values, which I found to greatly impact women's opportunities for economic empowerment. My study thus highlighted the opportunity for further research on the cultural factors affecting women's empowerment. Literature on this topic emphasizes that these influences, in addition to factors of race, class, age, education, and accessibility, simultaneously reinforce the various forms of women's marginalization. The intersectionality of women's oppressions within South African society today is evident from this study. As this country continues to grow and transition from its turbulent history, efforts to increase women's economic empowerment must recognize these intersectional

experiences and the enduring patriarchal legacies of apartheid in order to tackle the underlying causes of inequality.

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