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# Seven Women Speak: Perceptions of Economic Empowerment Opportunities Among Diverse Women in Four Different Cape Town Communities Today

Shanna Cole  
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**SEVEN WOMEN SPEAK:**

Perceptions of economic empowerment opportunities among diverse women in four different Cape Town communities today

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for: South Africa: Multiculturalism and Human Rights

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## **Abstract**

The research study described in this paper examines different women's perceptions of their economic opportunities and sense of empowerment in Cape Town today. Although post-apartheid South Africa boasts many more opportunities for women than under apartheid, there is still a large disparity in the treatment of women in the workforce compared to men – from the number of women employed to wage inequality to the levels and types of jobs to which women are constrained. This gender discrimination has reverberating effects on the poverty and development of South Africa the nation, as many argue that women's economic empowerment is directly correlated with the overall growth of a country. The research in this study is therefore relevant because South African development policymakers may benefit from comparing and analyzing women's views of their own economic opportunities today. The seven participants of this small-scale qualitative research study are women of diverse races and ages, and the synthesis of this cross-racial and generational research provides a non-representative sample of the concerns of women in Cape Town today regarding economic opportunities. I conducted my research through seven interviews with women who live in Bo Kaap, Langa, Oranjezicht, and Sea Point and who are of younger and older generations. From these interviews I found that cultural upbringing is a highly influential factor on women's opportunities to succeed on their own financially and can significantly restrict or increase women's economic empowerment. My research also highlighted the underlying insecurity that many women in the workforce today feel regarding their abilities, which reinforces negative stereotypes of women. Overall, the findings of my study suggest that women's unique experiences with economic opportunity depend greatly on their individual culture and family structure, rather than purely racial and class distinctions. This research provides valuable insight into the complex causes and details of the gender gap felt by women of different races, ages, and cultures in Cape Town today.

## **Introduction**

When apartheid ended in 1994, one of the South African government's first priorities was a human rights-based Constitution, passed in 1996, which on paper seemed to create the ideal country. Among the sweeping rights that the government guaranteed to people was equality between men and women in all aspects of life, including equal payment and opportunity. As the late Nelson Mandela eloquently stated in his inaugural speech as President in 1994, "freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression...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, there still today exists a vast difference in the economic opportunities for many women compared to men. Women's economic opportunities are 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 face economic inequality – face the threat of becoming financially vulnerable. This causes the potential for further deterioration of women's empowerment and status in society; as women lose economic independence, they become disempowered, which reverses the process for gender equality. The economic disempowerment of women reinforces unequal gender roles and the subordination of women to men, a concept that the United Nations has correlated to an increase in poverty for both men and women (Expert Group Meeting of the Division for the Advancement of Women, 2001). Therefore in a young and ambitious country like South Africa, the inequality and possible disempowerment 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 seeking to enter the workforce. Today and in the recent years, the Western Cape has had one of the lowest unemployment

rates in South Africa, which has attracted many people to the area seeking work (Statistics South Africa, 2013). However women often continue to struggle economically throughout all of South Africa; in all racial<sup>1</sup> population groups (black, coloured<sup>2</sup>, Indian/Asian, and white), women exhibit higher unemployment than men (Statistics South Africa, 2011). 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). Against this backdrop of the varying economic situations for black, coloured, and white South African women, it is clear that while women of different educations and races face distinct economic opportunities, obstacles exist for all South African women to become economically empowered.

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 African, 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 extensively address the socioeconomic and political application of women's empowerment, and some even touch upon the cultural shift necessary to encourage women's equality; one such policy from 2010 acknowledges that "transforming gender relations 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). However despite these measures taken by the government, there still exists a substantial gap in the opportunities for women's economic

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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> 'Coloured' is a South African racial construction for the population group of people who were not classified as black/African or white under apartheid; this classification includes those of 'mixed' race, Malay, and San descent among others.

empowerment in South Africa and Cape Town today. Throughout my time in Cape Time I have become interested in understanding this phenomenon through the eyes of South African women themselves.

The objectives of this paper are threefold: to compare the perceptions of economic opportunity of the diverse group of women with whom I spoke, to explore the reasons behind the gender gap in economic opportunity in Cape Town, and to identify solutions suggested by the study's participants to improve women's economic empowerment in Cape Town today. To begin I will analyze academic literature on the issue of women's economic empowerment and the history of efforts in South Africa post-apartheid. I will highlight certain scholarly theories that explain how this issue should best be addressed, underlying factors related to women's economic empowerment, and the implications of achieving this gender equality. Then I will justify my methodology, present my findings from the seven interviews that I conducted, and connect the scholarly literature with my findings to formulate informed and reasonable conclusions. To close I will consider the broader implications of my research in the context of South African women's future economic opportunities and the overall growth and development of South Africa, in addition to offering specific recommendations for further study on this issue.

My primary research question seeks 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 Bo Kaap, Langa, Oranjezicht, and Sea Point because this assortment of areas represents a wide range of women across the racial, generational, and socioeconomic spectrum. I wanted to be able to draw parallels among the main population groups in Cape Town today – coloured, black, and white – and these neighborhoods represent multiple generations of all of these populations. My original hypothesis was that the perceptions of economic opportunity for women in these communities would all significantly vary from each other 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. whether or not a woman is or intends to be married and/or has children), rather than race or class.

## **Limitations**

The main obstacles that I encountered in my research were due to the interview-based structure of my study, limited time frame, my recent exposure to interviewing, and identity as a white American. Because I depended so heavily on interviews as my primary sources, I relied on my interviewees being available to speak with me, and thus ran into obstacles if they were not available. The limited time frame of this research project also posed some difficulties. It was challenging to complete a substantial study in the four-week time period given, which also happened to fall during a period when many families go on holiday and are inaccessible. Because of this time constraint, I was unable to interview a white woman under the age of 30 – the age bracket of the coloured and black women who I interviewed – and instead, my respondent was 38 years old, but shared many characteristics with the younger participants in terms of her family profile and current job-searching status. Despite these challenges of complicated scheduling and limited time, I was able to speak with seven South African women who were willing and happy to be interviewed in depth. This was also my first experience with research fieldwork and incorporating interviews into academic writing, but I was still able to draw interesting and thought-provoking conclusions from my findings. An unexpected challenge for me was that I found it unfamiliar and difficult at times to discuss race so openly in my study and with my participants. Race is very candidly spoken about in South Africa, so being in this context as a white American woman coming from the United States, where race is not as publicly discussed and more of a ‘taboo’ topic, was a new and interesting experience for me. 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.

## **Literature Review**

Although the economic 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. Several factors, including the state of women in South Africa's economy today, the influences of the communities in which women are raised, and unequal power dynamics and insecurities among women greatly affect the different opportunities for women to succeed economically. This literature focuses on women's economic empowerment internationally, in South Africa, and in Cape Town and includes various government and agency reports, as well as academic articles. The reports included in this paper explain the historical context of women's rights in South Africa, in addition to laying out the current status of South African economic trends and the status of women in the economy. The academic articles also highlight current issues such as these, in addition to focusing on theories that attempt to explain the causes of and necessary action for women's economic empowerment today.

### ***Historical Context – Women Under Apartheid***

Although the overwhelming discrimination mandated during apartheid was based on racial segregation, all women were significantly disadvantaged under the apartheid regime. Women in South Africa began looking for work outside the home during the 1930s. Many white and coloured women obtained employment in the clothing and food industries, while most employed black women found jobs in domestic and farm work. The conditions in all of these sectors were relatively poor, and women were often restricted to low-level positions and wages. Domestic and agricultural workers were especially vulnerable; employers set their working conditions and wages, and it was not until the Labor Relations Act passed in 1996 that these occupations possessed legislative protection like that of workers in other industries (United Nations Office of Geneva, 2004). Therefore in post-apartheid

South African Constitution, women of all races and classes could hope for improvement of their economic opportunities because of the non-sexism of the new Constitution.

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

When analyzing the economic situation for women in South Africa today, focusing on Cape Town is significant because of the city's booming economy. As of March 2013, the Western Cape exhibited the third lowest unemployment rate in South Africa at 23.3%, and between March 2012 and March 2013 there was an increase in employment in this province. However, nationally the unemployment rate for women remained higher than the rate for men, with the unemployment rate for women at 27.5% and that of men at 23.4% as of March 2013. Within this employment discrepancy between genders, women face the largest gap in unemployment compared to men in the population that has completed secondary education, with the percentage of men unemployed at 23.7% and that of women at 31% (Statistics South Africa, 2013). Therefore although Cape Town has enjoyed relative economic success in the recent years, women still remain at a disadvantage in acquiring jobs. The gap in opportunity based on education level highlights the fact that even women who complete higher study often face more challenges in finding work than men with the same educational background.

For the purpose of this study, it is also necessary to examine the racial breakdown of unemployment. 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%, and the white population had the lowest rate at 7.2% (Statistics South Africa, 2013). This data suggests that there is a correlation in some cases between racial group and employment status. This hypothesis lends itself to the theory 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* published in 2012, she explores the theory 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 (Wittmann, 2012). This theory will be explained in further depth later in this paper; however the varying unemployment rates of different racial group supports the argument that race plays a factor in post-apartheid South African women's economic empowerment.

The distribution of job types and comparison of salaries between men and women exists as a crucial measurement of women's economic progress; as of June 2011, the vast majority of South African women worked in elementary occupations (Frontier Advisory, 2011). Elementary occupations include jobs such as selling goods in public places, cleaning, and other "simple" tasks (Major Group 9: Elementary Occupations, 2004). The second and third most common occupations for women as of June 2011 were as clerks and domestic workers. 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 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. Despite efforts by the South African government to include more women in the formal economy, women 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 (Frontier Advisory, 2011). These disparities continue to illustrate the obstacles that often prevent women in South Africa today from gaining economic equality with men.

### ***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 women's empowerment. In 1995 it

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 and economic empowerment. The post-apartheid leadership 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 in this region (City of Cape Town Council, 2010). Post-apartheid South Africa's involvement in this collection of international agreements regarding protecting and promoting women's empowerment emphasizes the government's commitment to this issue both in South Africa and around the world.

Domestic efforts to increase women's rights in South Africa today have been notably made by the post-apartheid 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 post-apartheid government to protect these rights has been obvious in several policies and actions aimed at promoting women's empowerment since the Constitution's adoption. The creation of the Gender and Women Empowerment (GWE) Unit within the national Department of Trade and Industry highlights that the government is focused specifically on improving conditions for women's economic success. This unit's mission is to support and enable women's enterprises, to establish sustainable women's participation in the South African economy, and to repair inequalities of previous qualities that hindered women's economic involvement. The GWE 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 technological disciplines (Department of Trade and Industry). The GWE is just one of the post-apartheid government's efforts to advance women's economic empowerment and illustrates the national dedication to this issue.

Specifically in Cape Town there has also been a significant effort by the city and provincial leadership to address the empowerment of women through various economic, political, and social policies. A policy 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 social 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 today. This policy framework highlights the need for a shift in South African people's attitudes toward gender and women's role in society (City of Cape Town Council, 2010). This 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 economic infrastructures and environments in order to encourage women's involvement in these areas and to combat the underemployment of women. (City of Cape Town Council, 2010). The approach of this policy brief recognizes Cape Town and South Africa's progress in promoting women's empowerment but also advocates for further efforts.

The South African government's measures to improve gender equality have had some success. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index of 2013, South Africa is ranked as having 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 previously listed reports display the improvement of the status and rights of women from during to post-apartheid South Africa; however the economic statistics of South African women also highlight the continuous challenges to achieving economic equality for women in the country. A report published by the Department of Trade and Industry in 2011 suggests that developing a national definition of women’s economic empowerment, properly balancing efforts between women-specific and gender-integrated programs, and recognizing the diverse needs of different South African women will propel the country closer to its goal of achieving economic equality for women (Department of Trade and Industry, 2011). These recommendations emphasize that women’s economic empowerment is a multi-faceted and complex issue to address.

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

In his article titled *Promoting Women’s Economic Empowerment in Africa* and published in 2007, Yeshiareg Dejene argues that women’s empowerment, especially economically, has been proven as a mechanism for improving the overall development and poverty alleviation of a country. He begins his claim by discussing the United Nation’s Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which form a significant part of the agency’s poverty-reduction and development strategies. The third MDG is “to promote gender equality and empowerment of women,” which Dejene emphasizes that the UN views as not only an objective in itself but also a necessity in order to fulfill all other MGDs. Dejene continues that data verifies the connection between success with women’s empowerment and realization of universal primary education, lower mortality rates of children under the age of five, enhanced maternal care, and decreased chances for HIV/AIDS contraction. (Dejene, 2007). By linking these prominent issues together, Dejene underscores the importance of women’s empowerment in all countries, specifically those that face these social challenges. South Africa grapples with at least one of the aforementioned concerns – the HIV/AIDS rate in South Africa today remains alarmingly high and

a large issue for the government – thus making Dejene’s claim about women’s empowerment relevant to the country.

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 was added as an appendage 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. He highlights the specific 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, ensuring women’s equal access to and control over productive resources and guarantee their property rights, promoting and supporting the occupations and economic activities of women, in particular, within informal sector, establishing [a] system of protection and social insurance for women working in the informal sector and taking necessary measures to recognize the economic value of women’s work. (Dejene, 2007)

The implementation of economic empowerment of women, Dejene argues, promotes financial independence and social mobility for women; this allows the possibility for further education, which likely will begin to counteract the cycle of poverty. Dejene contends that although the progressive rights of 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 or 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). Post-apartheid South Africa’s development policy addresses this concept with its large focus on women’s empowerment, which lends support to Dejene’s argument.

The UN Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)’s *Empowerment of Women Throughout the Life Cycle as a Transformative Strategy for Poverty Eradication* report from 2001 also reinforces Dejene’s claim for the correlation between improving women’s status in society and poverty

alleviation. This report points to the need for development policy to address the “multidimensional nature of poverty,” which includes the empowerment of women through autonomy and opportunity (Expert Group Meeting of the Division for the Advancement of Women, 2001). Since the late 1990s, international globalization heightened the urgency and need for the UN to seek new approaches to the increasingly complex situation of global poverty. Rapid globalization caused a significant increase in economic competition, which benefited those involved in trade but further marginalized those who were not; this UN report signifies that this economic boom bypassed many developing countries and that the situations of impoverished populations only worsened. The UN quickly garnered support for the theory that increasing employment opportunities for women would aid in alleviating poverty, if implemented correctly. The UN then examined the overall differences in men and women’s access to the job market and confirmed that women’s employment policies must address the specific concerns and situations of women. This reports advocates for the economic empowerment of women within the context of globalization and praises South African policies of this sort (Expert Group Meeting of the Division for the Advancement of Women, 2001). As a relatively young and economically promising country on the global scale, application of this theory in South Africa could be significant.

### ***Racial Influence of Community and Upbringing***

In Veronika Wittmann’s article *Gender Empowerment in South Africa* published in 2012, she defends the theory that in all studies of gender empowerment in post-apartheid South Africa, one must acknowledge and consider the specific conditions of all women’s lives in the context of their different 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 what she claims as racial circumstances in which women were raised and socially conditioned. Wittmann continues that these various racial circumstances created distinct power relations among women of different races, and diverse power dynamics between men

and women of different races. For example, she argues that the differences in the relationship between a white woman and a white man and the relationship between a black woman and a white man (and vice versa) resonate still today and affect gender relations. Wittmann continues that the challenges for women to gain equal opportunities in the South African economy heavily depend on these varying power relations, in addition to their diverse living situations and social conditions – which she also believes revolve around racial distinctions. She continues that the oppression and discrimination that women face in their specific living and social conditions are shaped by the distinct colonial histories of their ethnicity and race (Wittmann, 2012). The theory that Wittmann discusses in this article essentially focuses on the racial remnants of apartheid in South African society today; she argues that these distinctions among women are the most narrative and prevalent in South African women's experiences with economic empowerment today.

Through her research of this theory in the South African context, Wittmann concludes that the country'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 these discriminations have far-reaching implications in society today, especially when discussing women's opportunities for empowerment. Wittmann argues that it is crucial to recognize 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 women continue to hold these different socioeconomic positions, depending on race, and that a woman's specific position in society significantly dictates her opportunity for any form of empowerment. Wittmann arrives at the overall argument that the concerns of women throughout South Africa are not universal because these differences also cause different kinds of gender relations. She asserts that success for South African gender empowerment remains in this acknowledgement of differences but also the following acceptance of the commonalities of discrimination against all women (Wittmann, 2012). However, this

conclusion is somewhat contradictory to the rest of her article because she continually emphasizes the strength of the racial remnants and power relations of apartheid in South African society today.

### ***Women's Lack of Confidence and Insecurities in the Workplace***

Literature exploring the underlying reasons for economic inequality between men and women internationally points to the phenomenon of women's insecurities with their own economic success. In their 2014 article *The Confidence Gap*, Katty Kay and Claire Shipman underline what they argue to be a pervasive discrepancy in the confidence of women and men in the workforce today. Through analyzing studies of women's perceptions of their own success and comparing data internationally, Kay and Shipman found the trend that despite many women's actual achievement, they often lacked the self-confidence in their capabilities. They further found that this has stunted the progress of many women in the professional world. Kay and Shipman argue that empirical evidence proves that success "correlates just as closely with confidence as it does with competence." (Kay & Shipman, 2014) In other words, one's accomplishments may be based as much on self-assuredness as genuine capability. They further found that people who are less competent in a position tend to overcompensate and assert extreme confidence, versus those who are truly capable and do not emphasize their confidence; the authors argue that in these situations men are often less qualified but more confident and women are more skilled but less self-assured (Kay & Shipman, 2014). This theoretical framework identifies a key cause of women's economic inequality in the context of power dynamics and relates to my study's examination of South African opportunities and barriers for women's economic opportunities.

Kay and Shipman offer further support for their argument that women today tend to be insecure about their professional abilities in their international studies focused on women's self-perceptions of success and salary-negotiating patterns. They found that women are often less likely to seek positions and professions that they view as competitive or outside the traditional 'feminine' sphere, thus remaining in fields such as human resources, marketing, or other more administrative and lower-level

work. The authors assert that women's lack of confidence is present in many situations and even among women with high-level employment positions. In a 2011 survey that asked British managers how confident they felt in their occupations, half the female participants noted self-consciousness or doubt regarding their work, versus less than a third of the male participants. Additionally, studies from various business and economic institutes exhibit that "men initiate salary negotiations four times as often as women do, and that when women do negotiate, they ask for 30 percent less money than men do." (Kay & Shipman, 2014) The concept that women remain insecure in joining and progressing within the workforce remains as a large impediment in the empowerment of women in any aspect of society, but especially economically. This article discusses women's 'confidence gap' generally but focuses mainly on the United States; an aspect of my study is examining the applicability of this concept in a South African and Capetonian context.

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 DAW report discuss. If women's insecurity prevents them from aiming for higher economic goals, then they are less likely to gain self-esteem and challenge traditional gender roles and constraints. According to the theories presented by both Dejene and the DAW, which argue that women's empowerment is linked to poverty alleviation, women's lack of self-confidence further hinders the growth and development of a country (Expert Group Meeting of the Division for the Advancement of Women, 2001). This overarching concept of female insecurity also connects with Wittmann's discussion of the lasting legacy of gender relations under apartheid. Although she focuses primarily on the different power relations based on racial distinctions among women, Wittmann underlines the overall discrimination against and negative conditioning of women today because of the influence of apartheid. The relative agreement among these authors that obstacles for women's empowerment are complex social constructions provides the foundation for my study of identifying the specific obstacles and variety of experiences among South African women of diverse backgrounds.

## **Methodology**

I conducted my primary research for this project through a series of seven interviews, parts of which were formal and parts of which were guided conversations. The interviewees were all women of different racial backgrounds and of different ages. I chose to interview only women because the goal of my research was to understand women's perceptions of their own economic opportunities and sense of empowerment in Cape Town today. I felt that this method would be an interesting measurement of this issue because it would reflect the thoughts of women living through the experience of gender inequality. I thought that it would be interesting to compare the views of women of diverse races and ages and see how they were similar or different. Of the women I interviewed, three live in Bo Kaap, two live in Langa, one lives in Oranjezicht, and one lives in Sea Point. These communities all possess different racial profiles: Bo Kaap is a predominately Muslim, coloured neighborhood in Cape Town, Langa is an all-black township in the Cape Town area, and Oranjezicht and Sea Point are both wealthy suburbs of Cape Town that under apartheid were classified as whites only. Today Oranjezicht remains a predominantly white area, and Sea Point is still a predominately white area but with some racial integration. From these interviews I gained significant insight into the real conditions of and opportunities for women in Cape Town's economy.

I decided to rely on interviews for my research because I believed that this would be the most effective and candid reflection of different women's views of their economic opportunities in Cape Town. Interviewing was the most appropriate method for my topic because I wanted to learn about non-expert, everyday women's perceptions of this issue in their own lives. I felt that this was an essential viewpoint to focus on in my research because these women are living the experiences and policies that are made by others, and they therefore deserve to express their thoughts. I wanted to understand the perspective of women that was beyond the context of academic research. I chose to conduct one-on-one interviews in order to prevent participants from feeling influenced by anyone else.

My aim was to establish relationships of trust with my participants so that they felt comfortable discussing their personal information and opinions with me. I formulated a list of standard questions that I asked to all participants in order to create a standard for comparison of the later findings.

However I also asked follow-up and additional questions that were not standardized depending on the flow of the specific conversation in order to gain further insight into each woman's diverse experiences.

When choosing whom to interview, I decided to reach out to my previous homestay families in the Cape Town area. I asked my homestay mothers and any sisters that were older than 18 if I could interview them because I felt that they already knew me and were comfortable around me, which would benefit the dynamic of trust during the interview. I also already felt comfortable with them, which helped me feel at ease and less nervous about my first experience with in-depth interviewing. I was able to interview my mother and sister from both my Bo Kaap and Langa homestay families. I originally wanted to also interview my mother from my Stellenbosch homestay family, but she ended up not being available during the time period of my research. I then reached out to other contacts that I have in Cape Town in order to connect with two white women to interview. In addition to my Bo Kaap host mother and sister, I interviewed a woman who came to speak to our SIT class during the semester about her experience as a Muslim woman in Bo Kaap. I was intrigued by her story and decided to contact her for an interview as well because I felt her contribution would be valuable to my research. Regarding the length of my interviews, I told my participants that each one would take no longer than an hour. I asked each participant all of my prepared questions as a standardized time measure, but I also allowed conversation to flow and the interview to last for longer if we were having engaging dialogue and as long as the participant was comfortable.

Before and during my interview process, I completed secondary research on the recent history of South African efforts to promote women's economic equality, theories arguing for certain approaches to and benefits of women's economic empowerment, the current state of women in the

South African economy, explanations of women's frequent insecurity in the workplace, and other relevant issues. Through this research I gained a better understanding of the current situation in South Africa and scholarly theories addressing the root causes and ultimate value of women's economic empowerment. I utilized several agency and government reports in my secondary research in order to illustrate accurate statistics, conditions, and policies in South Africa and Cape Town today. This proved to be the most effective way to establish a framework through which to view the current situation and through which to formulate my interview questions and to later apply my findings. The scholarly articles that I analyzed address women's economic empowerment and overall gender equality, which is important because many underlying causes and factors for economic empowerment relate to those of gender equality. I also highlighted arguments from scholarly articles that address the structural obstacles for improving women's economic and leadership status, such as an ingrained lack of confidence in many women professionals; this discussion is crucial in order to fully understand the scope of deep-seated gender discrimination. I chose the academic literature in this paper with the intent of addressing the comprehensive issue of women's economic empowerment.

***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.

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 promotions. She was interviewed in her home.
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.
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.
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.
7. Danielle (4 May 2014): a 38 year-old white woman who grew up in Muizenberg and downtown 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.

### ***Ethical Reflexivity***

Many discussions that I had during my interviews involved addressing sensitive issues, such as gender equality and personal economic success, so I was very aware of how I framed my interview questions. I prefaced my interviews by telling the participants that they could share as much or as little as they felt comfortable with and I worked to form a relaxed rapport with them. At the beginning of this study I acknowledged my possible ‘Western’ bias of coming from the United States, where gender

equality is generally viewed as a critical issue and major cultural value. By acknowledging this potential partiality, I consistently checked myself during interviews and outside research to make sure that I was not projecting any of my own opinions onto my participants or findings; I made sure to go into every interview with an open mind. I was initially nervous that an unequal power dynamic would exist between my participants and me because of my identity as a white, American student, but our common identity as women seemed to surpass this problematic positionality. However, there were times when I felt worried that asking questions that were focused on women's empowerment would cause my participants to give me answers that they thought I wanted to hear. In order to alleviate this pressure as much as possible, I asked questions in a purely inquisitive manner and accepted the participant's answer, rather than approach them in a pejorative manner. In order to protect the integrity and identities of my participants, I informed them all that I would be using pseudonyms in my final paper, which I have done. It seemed like participants felt at ease talking with me and expressed their genuine thoughts, even on sensitive issues such as personal finances and gender inequalities.

## **Findings and Analysis**

Through this paper, I aimed to analyze my research findings using the academic literature regarding women's empowerment as a background and lens through which to analyze the interviewees responses. By interviewing seven different women living in Cape Town, I sought to compare the experiences and perceptions of women of various races, ages, socioeconomic classes, and cultures regarding their own economic opportunities. I also intended to explore the causes of the gender gap in economic opportunity in Cape Town and identify the suggested solutions and future of this issue based on the responses of the different women that I interviewed. In this portion of my paper I have first grouped my findings together by the specific communities of the women who I interviewed and then explained my analysis of noteworthy cross-community results.

### **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. When discussing each of their upbringings, Fatima, Jasmine and Rashieda all explained how 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 have independence. 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 now she is 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, but she eventually returned and today 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 over money and lifestyle. 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 UCT for her undergraduate degree in town planning, in addition to two masters in planning and urban conservation. In order to afford school, Fatima had to work while taking undergrad 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 was 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 on the salaries of men and women, 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 possessed higher qualification for the position than he did.

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 mentioning of the difficulty of finding support among other women in her field. I will discuss this concept later in the analysis section of this paper, but Fatima felt that the competition and insecurity among women professionals poses a serious problem to women’s attempts at 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 contributes to empowerment obstacles. Fatima feels that since apartheid, many doors have opened up 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 because she is married, has children, and is more than ten years older than Fatima. Before she was married, Jasmine 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 her husband 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 is important to support herself financially as long as her husband makes enough money; if her family could afford it, she would not work, but if her immediate or extended family needs money, she will work. In regard to her experience with economic empowerment, she explained, “in our culture, the woman usually stays at home,” and emphasized the cultural expectation for women to find husbands rather than employment. This concept will be later discussed in the analysis section of the paper.

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 viewed engineering, construction, and other fields involving physical labor as ‘men’s work’ and said cleaning was considered more ‘women’s work’; she 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 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 all women of colour 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 and view of female breadwinners in Bo Kaap, she said that this role for women is normal today but that often 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 felt that after 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 continued 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 that she thinks 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 that most of her cousins and friends would not work if they could afford not 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 states that

“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 that Rashieda asserted 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 highlights that many girls that 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 illuminated three 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, 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 her motivation for having a job is to have her own independence and spending money, in addition to contributing to her family's income because she still lives at home. She 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 Tandi. 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 not very common for mothers not 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 and it is possible that the woman earns more than the man, which she maintained is viewed by people in the community as normal.

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.” I will address this concept of the shifting attitudes of young women toward economic empowerment in my analysis section, but Nozipho’s mention of it emphasizes that it is present not only in Bo Kaap but also Langa. However Nozipho also stressed that the extents to which young women are encouraged to succeed economically depends on the culture in which they were brought up. I will also discuss this concept in more detail in my analysis section.

For her current job at First National Bank, Nozipho completed a three-month long training program, in addition to her previous acquiring of a Bachelor of Commerce in Economics degree at the University of South Africa and her experience as a manager at another bank. She 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’. Nozipho said that she has seen how 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 definitely. Nozipho related to me 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 house should not only fall on women’s shoulders but those of both genders. Nozipho declared 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 in 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 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. Ours 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 used the example of 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." This value of loyalty to one's family and community became evident through this interview.

Tandi's 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 as for men and indoor-cleaning for women; however she pointed out that there are exceptions and that a female construction worker built her garage and "people were staring, but she did a good job". Tandi recognized that there are more men in leadership positions today but 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 opportunities that she emphasized were under-qualification, lacking 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 corresponded significantly 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 difference between the two interviews of Nozipho and Tandi than among the interviews of the coloured women of 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 the three 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:***

Although my interviews with the sample of white women in my study were from two different geographic communities of Cape Town, the findings still reflected certain similarities, possibly because of the cultural and racial resemblances of the two interviewees. 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 in paying for her children's upbringing. Allison's husband is the main breadwinner of the household and he is a financial planner; Allison illustrated to

me that within Oranjezicht there are many types of families, but of the majority of her friends have part-time jobs and their husbands are the main incomes in 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 admitted 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 financially support herself – 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 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; she focused mostly on the racial rather than gender divide of acquiring a job, explaining that “I fear for us, the white people, because I think a lot of jobs will be taken from us.” Allison said that is not good for a woman to be totally dependent on a man and mentioned 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 include acquiring a diploma in textile design at the Ruth Prowse design school in Woodstock, working for several different design companies, and earning a teacher’s certificate for aerobics. Allison explained the difficulty in adjusting to the work environment today after leaving the workforce and having children but how rewarding she feels that this job is:

“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 just below this. Allison viewed 'men's work' as managerial positions, physical labor, and outdoor-cleaning, while she said 'women's work' usually includes retail, sewing in textile factories, and indoor-cleaning.

Allison offered the comparison of her own experience 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 places ("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 for the other reason of not wanting to leave their children. When I asked her about obstacles that prevent women from gaining economic opportunities, Allison felt that 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 now against white women seeking opportunities and that "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 described how not working “is driving me a little crazy” and she wants the sense of satisfaction that comes with working. Growing up Danielle said that her father was the main breadwinner of her family and looking toward her future, she admitted that she does not know if she will be the main income of her family because she wants to have children and sees these two roles may conflict; she said that she thinks within her community, the number breadwinners that are men is slightly more than women, but that “this discrepancy is less than in other communities.” When asked if she believed if it is important to financially support yourself, Danielle answered that it depends on your 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 definitely support herself – in her current situation her parents do not support her but she is not struggling financially.

Danielle told me that she has worked since she has been in school and that there was an emphasis on what field she was going to study and get a job in after school. She continued, “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 explained that she feels that this dependence would feel okay for her if she was 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, but there are also stigmas attached to people who don’t work – “women are expected to work and not just sit at home” – and she continued that “accepting that men and women are different is important.”

Danielle’s training for her work in investment included studying at the participating in work-study programs run by programs. 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 no stigma attached to women in business or finance; the other distinctions that she drew between ‘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 job, 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 because she hasn't worked in several years. She also mentioned 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 within her Jewish and upper-class community, “women will fight for their equal salaries.” In terms of maternity leave, Danielle believed that the laws are protective 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 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 said that she thinks there have been more improvements in the economic opportunities for women since apartheid, and she believes that these two situations were related but “not wrapped up in each other”. Danielle felt that apartheid happened to end around the same time that women were fighting for their economic rights 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, in addition to the distinct influences of women depending on their cultural upbringings. I will further explore these distinctions in my analysis section and determine their role in the greater discussion of women's economic empowerment.

### **Analysis**

When conducting my study, my primary research question was to identify the specific perceptions of and experiences with economic empowerment that the different interviewees had personally and within their communities. Certain results of my interview questions varied among the participants and others corresponded to each other. My original hypothesis was that the perceptions of economic opportunities for women in the different communities throughout Cape Town would fluctuate greatly depending on the women's race and class; I anticipated that any correlating responses would be among women of the same race and similar socioeconomic status. However my findings highlighted that this was incorrect; the differences and similarities of responses fell more often along cultural and family structure lines, rather than race or class. My findings also illustrated the significant role that women's employment insecurities often play in preventing women's economic empowerment. Although this section of the paper includes all the results from my interviews, a final noteworthy finding was that the attitudes of people throughout Cape Town's communities are beginning to gradually become more open to women's empowerment and expanding economic opportunities.

### ***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, significantly shape women's perceptions for their expected and

possible economic opportunities throughout their lives. By comparing the experiences of my interviewees, I discovered 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 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 she knows some Afrikaans women who are embarrassed about being stay-at-home mothers, but how 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 business.”

Fatima attempts to resist the pressures of Muslim cultural values within her community in Bo Kaap that disempower women; but although she has been able to surpass them 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 the Muslim religion and 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 economically on their own 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 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 who she studied with that are already 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 contribute to the support for 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, who all spoke about the powerful religious and cultural values of Islam 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 their influence on the economic opportunities for women in Bo Kaap.

This conclusion questions the strength of Wittmann's theory that the racial and class background of women are the most defining features of their specific discrimination and needs for empowerment in South Africa today. She argues that these distinctions are the lines along which women's distinct discrimination has been drawn. She continues that efforts to improve women's economic empowerment must therefore differentiate women into these groups (Wittmann, 2012). The findings from my research suggests that this is not accurate in Cape Town today, as women with similar cultural upbringings held more similar beliefs and concerns than women of similar races and class. The perceptions of the interviewees from Langa had more in common with those of women from

Oranjezicht, and Sea Point because the framework in which they were raised regarding women's empowerment possessed similarities; these two communities exist at the opposite ends of the socioeconomic class spectrum, yet my findings show these parallels. The interviewees from Bo Kaap, the community of middle socioeconomic class, possessed specific perceptions of women's economic empowerment because of the influence of the Muslim cultural values within their community.

### ***Women's Insecurities in the Workplace***

Through analyzing the findings from my interviews, it became clear to me that there is a systemic obstacle of self-doubt for women attempting to gain opportunities in the workplace. Sentiments regarding women's insecurity in jobs outside the home were especially present in the comments of the coloured women who I interviewed who live in 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 how 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 supposed to handle such situations. Danielle also mentioned in her interview how women are conditioned by the patterns in the employment not to apply to certain jobs. By explaining how certain male-dominated professions become like “boy's clubs”, she highlighted

how gendered professions can cause a mentality that women “do not belong” in more challenged, 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 reflected that this is a concern that other mothers worry about in her community. These responses prove how pervasive this self-doubt is among women in diverse communities in Cape Town today.

This finding that women often suffer from a lack of self-confidence in their employment abilities aligns with Kay and Shipman’s argument in their article. The results from my interviews highlighted several similar concepts that Kay and Shipman specifically discuss, including the acceptance of lower wages by women, women’s lack on confidence in their professional abilities and tendency to not break into more male-dominated and competitive fields, and the often negative impact of motherhood on women’s professional self-confidence (Kay & Shipman, 2014). This correspondence of the responses from my interviews with the scholarly literature reinforces the concept that women’s professional insecurities is a significant issue in the discussion of women’s economic empowerment in Cape Town today.

### ***Changing Attitudes of the 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 women’s empowerment and independence. My findings illustrated that change is most accepted in the minds of the younger generation, although the older generations in different communities also generally recognize and support this transformation.

Nozipho’s explained how the older generation of women in Langa wants the young women to have better opportunities than they did – she discussed how older women may have been stuck in dangerous or harmful situations where they were completely financially dependent on men and therefore couldn’t leave because they did not have an education or any other skills to fall back on. As

Nozipho said, 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 immediately start a family. The encouragement of the older generation of women for the younger generation of women to get 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 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. After analyzing my interview findings, I found that there was significant praise for this new outlook on women’s empowerment by both my interviewees of the younger and older generations of Langa.

However I found that the reasons for this shift 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 the culture of materialism in Bo Kaap today, also noted by Fatima. 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. Although this motivation is different from that of the young women in Langa represented by Nozipho, this mindset of gaining economic freedom is still a movement away from the traditional feminine attitude within Bo Kaap of being supported economically by a man.

Even women of the older generation that I interviewed acknowledged that women contributing to a family’s income is becoming more accepted and promoted today. Jasmine explained that, “We don’t rear out 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 boys and “must be covered”. This conveys how despite the changing environment for women’s economic opportunities, some cultural values – such as that of the Muslim Bo Kaap community emphasizing the expectation of men to be the financial providers for women – still remain entrenched in some people’s upbringings.

## **Conclusion**

When I set out to research women's perceptions of their economic opportunities in Cape Town and within their specific communities, 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. I initially anticipated that race and class would be the strongest determinants that influenced women's experiences with economic opportunity and I expected to find resemblances among the interview responses of women of similar racial and socioeconomic status. I assumed this because of my own ideas of South African societal divisions and as a result of exploring a breadth of literature on this issue. However after conducting my research, I realized that this initial hypothesis was incorrect. I found that there was more disparity in women's opportunities for economic empowerment based on each woman's unique cultural upbringing and family structure (i.e. whether or not a woman is or intends to be married and/or has children). My research findings also emphasized that a lack of confidence among many women in regard to their economic abilities often significantly hindered efforts for women's empowerment. A final discovery from my research was 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 opportunities.

Through the process of my research, 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, in addition to some major literature on this topic, illuminated the complexities of women's economic empowerment. Even though my interviewees all lived in Cape Town and shared various identities, including those of women and South African, my findings stressed that accepted social constructions used to segregate people, such as race and class, are not automatically the most descriptive factors of people's experiences; the unique narratives of individuals most adequately express their true concerns and should be recognized in efforts for social change and development.

## **Recommendations for future study**

After researching and establishing conclusions regarding the perceptions of economic opportunity among women in diverse communities throughout Cape Town, I believe that further cross-cultural research should be done on this issue. My findings illustrate the fact that in Cape Town there are many diverse communities, each with their own specific culture and values, which I found to greatly impact women's opportunities for economic empowerment. My study therefore exhibited a need for further research on this specific aspect of women's empowerment; because I was only able to interview seven women from four communities in Cape Town, there is still a plethora of communities and cultures that could be further researched. I also feel that due to the conclusion that perceptions of economic opportunity and empowerment do not fall strictly along racial and class lines, there is a need for future research and literature to address the intersectionality of social constructions and underlying issues of women's empowerment.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. To start off with, tell me a little bit about yourself: how old are you, where do you live, a little about your family?
2. Do you work anywhere for a wage, what kind of work do you do?
3. If you work, why do you work?
4. Who is the main breadwinner for your family? Do you think it should be you, or someone else? Why?
5. Are many women you know the main breadwinners? What do you think other people think about women being the main breadwinners?
6. Do you think it's important to support yourself financially? Why or why not?
7. Did you have a job before starting a family? If not, do you wish that you could have?
8. Do you feel that women are motivated/encouraged to succeed on their own before starting a family?
9. Do you think that women who don't work become dependent on a man for income? Do you have any stories you can tell about that?
10. What type of training did you get for your job? (on the job, diploma, degree, etc.)
11. What kind of work is considered more 'women's work' and what kind of work is more 'men's work'?
  - a. In your experience, are women and men equally represented in all sectors/at all levels of jobs? (i.e. do men and women hold both administrative and leadership jobs?)
12. What has been your experience with searching for and getting a job?
13. Do you think that some jobs are reserved for men?
14. In your experience, do men and women receive the same salaries for the same jobs?
15. What is maternity leave usually like?
16. What do you think are contributing factors to some women not receiving the proper education and skills necessary to be competitive in the job market?
17. Do you think that there has been a change since apartheid in how easy or hard it is for women to become economically empowered? (to get a job, to gain the skills necessary to be competitive in the job market, to support themselves financially)

## Appendix B: Consent Form



### CONSENT FORM

#### 1. Brief description of the purpose of this study

The purpose of this study is to examine how women in the Cape Town area today view their opportunities for economic empowerment and any obstacles that prevent women from succeeding economically on their own.

If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed about your experiences with economic opportunities as a woman in the Cape Town area. The interview will last no more than an hour. Even if you consent to this study, you may refuse to participate in this interview at any time during or before the interview process. You may skip any questions that you feel uncomfortable with or end the interview at any time. You must be 18 years or older to participate.

#### 2. Rights Notice

In an endeavor to uphold the ethical standards of all SIT ISP proposals, this study has been reviewed and approved by a Local Review Board or SIT Institutional Review Board. If at any time, you feel that you are at risk or exposed to unreasonable harm, you may terminate and stop the interview. Please take some time to carefully read the statements provided below.

- a. **Privacy** - all information you present in this interview may be recorded and safeguarded. If you do not want the information recorded, you need to let the interviewer know.
- b. **Anonymity** - all names in this study will be kept anonymous unless the participant chooses otherwise.
- c. **Confidentiality** - all names will remain completely confidential and fully protected by the interviewer. By signing below, you give the interviewer full responsibility to uphold this contract and its contents. The interviewer will also sign a copy of this contract and give it to the participant.

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Participant's name printed

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Participant's signature and date

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Interviewer's name printed

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Interviewer's signature and date