

**An exploration of women experiences in student  
leadership in the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of my research is to explore the experiences of women in student leadership at the University of KwaZulu- Natal (UKZN). My research tries to understand challenges that are faced by women who are in student leadership positions and to understand obstacles that hinder women from participating in student leadership

The research answered three critical questions: How do the women students describe their leadership experiences? How do the women students learn to lead? How does the environment in which the women lead and learn to lead, affect their leadership experiences?

To achieve the above I have drawn on the theory of oppression to understand women student leaders' experiences as outlined by Young (2000) and Hardiman & Jackson (1997). Young and Hardiman & Jackson suggest that a group of persons are oppressed on the bases that they are different from other groups. The dominant group is privileged in the process while the subordinate internalise their subordination and perpetuate it by conforming to it.

The study is qualitative. I used semi-structured interviews as an instrument for data collection. I used purposive sampling. I interviewed women student who have been leading in the SRC in the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal. Findings for study revealed that women student lead and learnt to lead under the oppressive environment. Although the environment where women learnt to lead is oppressive women were able to learn to lead. Further more the environment where women lead had a negative impact on women leadership experiences. Some women chose their traditional gender role over leadership positions. Some because of the hostile environment in the SRC internalised their subordination and became silence. Some women student leaders became aggressive.

The study thus recommends the following strategies to be employed by the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal to enhance women participation in student leadership. (1) Leadership program to be included in the curriculum. (2) There should be leadership development program for all first year women students across all faculties. (3)

Student parliament to be revived and be monitored. (4) Review of the SRC constitution regarding gender representation

# Declaration

I, Fisani Digracia Shabalala, declare that this work is my own and that all sources used have been acknowledged.

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Fisani Digracia Shabalala

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **List of abbreviations**

ANCYL:	African National Congress Youth League
AZASCO:	Azanian Student Convention
BEC:	Executive Committee
BGM:	Branch General Meeting
BWC:	Branch Working Committee
CSRC:	Central Students Representative Council
DASO:	Democratic Alliance Student Organization
HC:	House Committee
INDIV:	Individual members
JEC:	Sport Union Joint Executive Committee
LSRC:	Local Student Representative Council
MSA:	Muslim Students' Association
PASO:	Private Accommodation Students' Organization
PASO:	Principled African Students' Organization
PYA:	Progressive Youth Alliance
RLO:	Residence Liaison Officer
SADESMO:	South African Democratic Student Movement
SALSA:	South African Liberal Student's Association
SASCO:	South African Students' Congress
SCF:	Students Christian Fellowship
SM:	Socialist Movement
SRC:	Students Representative Council
UKZN:	University of Kwazulu Natal
UN:	United Nations
YC:	Youth Council
YCL:	Young Communist League

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# **CHAPTER 1**

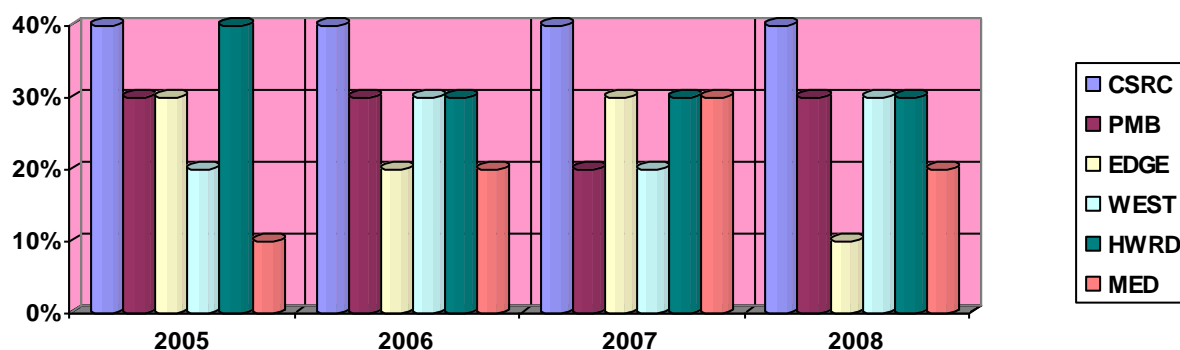
## **1.1 Background**

Women are largely absent from decision making bodies around the world. Although there are policies that enforce gender equity such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) for gender equality (UN Goal 3), and affirmative action, the world economic gender gap index however suggests that South Africa ranks 20<sup>th</sup> in the gender equity survey (Gender gap index, 2007). South Africa ranked number ten in political empowerment, 65<sup>th</sup> in health and survival and 85<sup>th</sup> in economic participation and opportunity (Gender gap index, 2007). Seemingly, participation of women in leadership positions is minimal. Although the progress in political participation, including the representation of women in parliament is reported, women are still largely absent in decision making positions (Gender gap index, 2007).

This is also an issue in student leadership. I joined the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN) in 2004. I started to participate in student leadership in 2005 and was elected as a member of the Students Representative Council (SRC) on the Central Students Representative Council. During this period, I observed that there were few women who participated in student leadership. Some of the women who were elected resigned after few months. Others served office for a term and then did not make themselves available for another. This has made me wonder why women were not interested in leadership and why the few who participated resigned or withdrew.

## **1.2 Participation of women in the SRC**

The graph below shows the participation of women in the Students Representative Council (SRC) between 2005 and 2009.



**Figure 1 Participation of women in the SRC 2005 to 2008**

According to the SRC Constitution definition, Local Student Representative Councils (LSRC) refers to each campus-based Students Representative Council with ten members. The local SRCs represent students in campus-based issues such as faculty boards, faculty subcommittees and others. The Central Student Representative Council (CSRC) refers to the University of KwaZulu Natal students Representative Council which consists of ten members directly elected and five LSRC presidents, who are ex officio, meaning they do not have voting powers in the CSRC. The Central SRC represents students in all university committees such as Council, Senate, College Boards and so on. The SRC refers to the University of KwaZulu Natal Students Representative Council which consists of 60 members; 50 members from the LSRC and ten members from the CSRC. In 2005 the SRC was elected through an interim constitution, which stated that the SRC should be elected through faculties. Each individual faculty had two representatives on the LSRC and two on the CSRC, with the exception of the Edgewood campus and Medical School which are faculty based campuses. The Edgewood and Medical School campuses elected ten members for the LSRC and two to represent them in the CSRC. The SRC had 66 members, with 16 in the CSRC and ten per campus. Of the members, 17 were women and 49 were men.

After the constitution was approved in 2006 the CSRC was elected through organizations. Individual student organizations contested for the CSRC. In the LSRC, 50% were elected through organizations and 50% as individual candidates. Generally

candidates who contest SRC elections are from student organizations with the exception of the few who contest independently. Organizations deploy 50% of their members to contest as individual candidates and 50% to contest under the organization logo. In 2006/7 the combined SRCs had 17 women. One of the elected women was from the Edgewood campus but she resigned at the beginning of the year. In 2007/2008, 17 women were elected. One from the Pietermaritzburg campus and one from the CSRC resigned at the beginning of the year. Accordingly, the SRC was left with 15 women. In 2008/9 the SRCs had 17 women as shown in figure 1.

### **1.3 SRC Representation per organization 2006-2008**

Organization	Howard	PMB	MED	WEST	CSRC	Edgewood
<b>2006/7</b>						
SASCO	70%	70%	40%	70%	100%	80%
SADESMO	0%	10%	0%	0%	0%	10%
SALSA	30%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
SCF	0%	0%	30%	20%	0%	0%
AZASCO	0%	0%	30%	0%	0%	0%
SM	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
MSA	0%	10%	0%	0%	0%	0%
INDIV	0%	10%	0%	10%	0%	10%
<b>2007/8</b>						
SASCO	85%	70%	70%	60%	100%	90%
SADESMO	0%	10%	0%	0%	0%	10%
SALSA	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
SCF	5%	0%	30%	40%	0%	0%
AZASCO	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
SM	10%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
MSA	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
INDIV	0%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<b>2008/9</b>						
SASCO	100%	70%	60%	60%	100%	60%
SADESMO	0%	30%	0%	0%	0%	20%
SALSA	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
SCF	0%	0%	40%	40%	0%	0%
AZASCO	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
SM	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
MSA	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
INDIV	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%
DASO	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%

## Figure 2. SRC Representation per organization

Since 2006 the CSRC has been 100% consisting of the Progressive Youth Alliance (PYA) (consisting of the South African Students Congress, African National Congress Youth League, and Young Communist League alliance). At UKZN the PYA use any one of their banners to contest elections. Sometimes they contest using the SASCO or the ANCYL banner. For consistency in this study I will use SASCO to represent the PYA.

In 2006/7 the SRC at Edgewood campus was constituted entirely by SASCO with 80% of seats, SADESMO (South African Democratic Student Movement) with 10% and individuals with 10%. Pietermaritzburg campus SASCO consisted of 70% SADESMO, 10% MSA (Muslim Students Association) and 10% individual. Westville campus consisted of 70% SASCO, 20% SCF (Student Christian Fellowship) and 10% individual. Howard College campus consisted of 70% SASCO, 30% SALSA (South African Liberal Student Association) and Medical School campus consisted of 40% SASCO, 30% AZASCO (Azanian Students Convention) and 30% SCF (Student Christian Fellowship).

In 2007/8 the SRC at the Edgewood campus had 90% SASCO and 10% SADESMO. Howard College campus had 85% SASCO, SCF 5% and 10% SM (Socialist Movement). Westville campus had 60% SASCO and 40% SCF. Medical School campus had 70% SASCO and 30% SCF. Pietermaritzburg had 70% SASCO, 10% SADESMO and 20 individual candidates.

In 2008/9 Edgewood had 60% SASCO, 20% SADESMO and 20% DASO (Democratic Students Organization). Howard College had 100% SASCO. Medical School had 60% SASCO, 40% SCF. Westville had 60% SASCO and 40% SCF and Pietermaritzburg had 70% SASCO, 30% SADESMO.

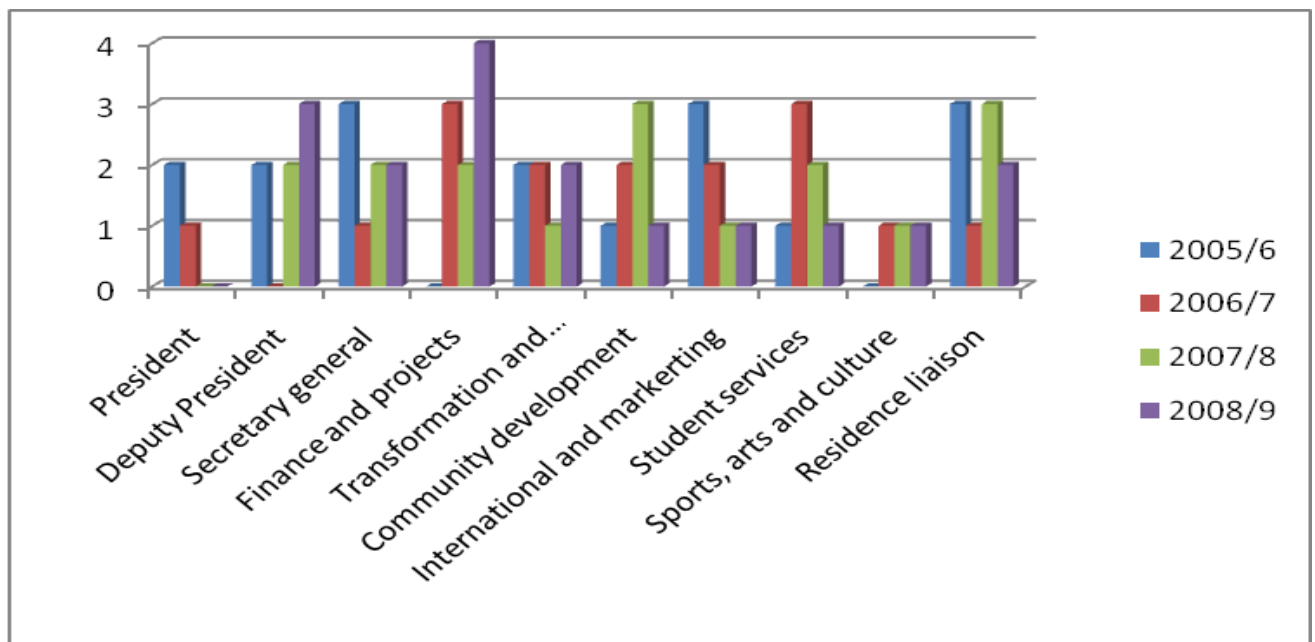
The SASCO constitution states that in all its leadership structures there should be at least 40% women (SASCO Constitution, 2007), while the YCL constitution states a

representation of 30% (YCL Constitution, 2007) women. The ANCYL constitution, article I, states that

In the endeavour to reach the objective of full representation of women in all decision-making structures, the ANCYL shall implement a programme of affirmative action, including the provision of a quota not less than 40% in all structures to enable such effective participation (ANCYL Constitution, 2004, p.4).

Looking at the leadership trends it is clear that the PYA has been the ruling party for the past three years in all campuses and in the CSRC. Yet the PYA is failing to meet their constitutional obligation regarding the representation of women in leadership structures. I am focusing on the PYA structure since it is the only student organization so far at UKZN which has a specific requirement on gender representation. Again for in recent years they have been the majority in the SRC.

#### **1.4 Women participation per portfolio in the UKZN SRC**



**Figure 3: Women representation per portfolio in the UKZN SRC from 2005 to 2009**

Looking at the data trends, in 2005 and 2006 women were appointed as SRC presidents. From 2007 onwards, women were not given the portfolio as president. In 2008 women were given the positions of deputy presidents. During 2006-2009 there have been few women who have held the finance or project portfolios. This is despite the fact that there was an increase in the number of women in the 2008/9 SRC. The data in figure 3 shows that there were also few women allocated the sport, arts and culture portfolios. These portfolios have been held by men.

### **1. 5. Rationale for the study**

According to Astin & Astin (2000), leadership means the critically important civic work performed by those individual citizens who are actively engaged in making a positive difference in society. A leader therefore is an agent of social change. Institutions of higher learning should develop leadership programmes in their curriculum as a compulsory module for all students. This is also reported by Astin & Astin when they state that the challenge for higher education is to “empower students, by helping them develop those special talents and attitudes that will enable them to become effective social change agents” (2000, p. 2). Astin & Astin observe that “students are not likely to commit to making changes in society unless the institutions in which they have been trained display similar commitment” (2000, p. 2). They argue that if the institutions expect to produce students who will improve society the institution should be engaged in the work of the society and the community. They should model effective leadership and problem solving skills and they should demonstrate how to accomplish change for the common good (Astin & Astin 2000). This could be achieved through the inclusion of community based projects in the curriculum and co-curriculum.

The research has shown that college or university campuses can be a “powerful learning ground for students to experiment with and develop their leadership capabilities” (Astin & Astin, 2000, p.3). Students participating in student leadership gain in-depth course concepts through practical application and experiences that are directly applicable to employment. At the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN) for example, students could



obtain such skills through participating in students' organizations, sports union, faculty committees, house committees, class representatives or SRCs. Furthermore, Astin & Astin suggest that "leadership skills are increasingly among the qualifications needed by employers of all kinds, from private corporations and non-profit organizations to government agencies and academic institutions" (2000, p.31).

The aim of my research is to explore the experiences of women in student leadership at UKZN. My focus will be on the Student Representative Council (SRC) since it is an umbrella body as per University of KwaZulu Natal student governance model (SRC Constitution, Clause 7.3.1). Again I focus on the SRC because the involvement in positional leadership roles (election to a particular office) is the strongest extra curricular predictor of leadership ability for students (Dugan, 2006). Although the SRC electoral policy allows 50% of candidates to run as individuals, most candidates are from or have been leading in clubs, societies and organizations

My research tries to understand the challenges facing women who are in leadership experience and the barriers that hinder women from participating in student leadership positions. My long term objective is to see more women participate in student leadership and occupy key positions in clubs, societies, and organizations and in the SRC. I believe that to change the status quo, challenges faced by women who are already in leadership have to be explored and must be dealt with before recruiting new women into student leadership.

My research is motivated by three reasons: Firstly, affirmative action is compelling organizations to place previously disadvantaged people, including women, in leadership positions. Therefore women need to obtain leadership skills as part of their qualification. Secondly, leadership skills are among the qualifications needed by employers. The more women obtain the necessary skills, the fewer will be the number of unemployed female graduates. Since the former University of Durban-Westville merged with the University of Natal to form the University of KwaZulu-Natal, women students have made up more than 50% of the total number of graduates (UKZN Annual report, 2008). Thirdly, women

students who have participated in student leadership positions understand community and societal needs and they can play a critical role in student governance. It is therefore important for all students especially women, as they are in the majority in the institution and as citizens of the country to understand the challenges of their communities.

### **1.6. The structure of the study**

In chapter one I have outlined the rationale of the study. My study explores women's experiences in student leadership. I will be answering the following critical questions:

1. How do the women students describe their leadership experiences?
2. How do the women students learn to lead?
3. How does the environment in which the women lead and learn to lead, affect their leadership experiences?

In chapter two, I will review the literature relevant to my study. I will also cover the theoretical framework for my study. I have drawn on the theory of oppression to understand women student leaders' experiences. Following this, I present the literature review. I have structured the literature into three themes, that is, women experiences of sexism, marginalisation of women, and politics in student leadership.

In chapter three, I present my research strategy. For my methodological approach, I have used feminist research methodology. Feminist methodology "is challenging objectivity and refusing to see experiences as unscientific; it is concerned with ethics and in particular not treating women as research objects and seeing research as a political activity" (Stanley & Wise, 1990, p.38) . I used this method since my research aim is not merely to understand women's experiences but to come up with practical recommendations as a way of changing the status quo.

In chapter four I will present findings and the data analysis. The data collected was organised into categories. Themes emerged from those categories. I then used those themes to organise and analyse the data.

In chapter five I will discuss the findings and provide some recommendations that can, it is hoped, help to improve the maximum participation of women students in student leadership positions.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Literature review and theoretical framework**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I will firstly describe the theoretical framework used in my research. The framework for research “provides guidance for the researcher as study questions are fine-tuned, methods for measuring variables are selected and analyses are planned” (Liehr & Smith, 2000, p.17). My research explores experiences of women in student leadership at UKZN. The research tries to understand challenges that are faced by women who are in leadership positions and to understand obstacles that hinder women from participating in student leadership positions.

I have placed my research within a critical paradigm since my intention is not merely to understand women’s experiences but to change the situation. Since my research is done by a woman for women I have decided to place it within a feminist framework. I also used the theory of oppression as a way of grounding my research. The theory of oppression will be used to understand the relations between men and women in student leadership and how women experience their roles as women leaders.

Following this discussion, I will describe the literature reviewed in my study. A literature review is the useful evaluation of selected documents on a research (Lie, 2008). Its purpose is to give the theoretical background, clinical practice, methodologies, previous findings, the rationale and relevance of the current study (Lie, 2008). In my study the literature will be used to examine the findings of other researchers and to discover variables relevant to the topic. Findings from the literature survey will be used to identify patterns and themes and to understand similarities and differences from UKZN context. As the aim of my research is to explore the experiences of women in student leadership, the findings will highlight factors contributing to the shortage of women participating in student leadership, such as their experiences of sexism and marginalisation, the shortage of role models and the politics of student leadership.

## **2.2 Paradigm**

A paradigm, according to Guba and Lincoln, is “the basic belief system or world view that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways” (1998, p.195). Frame (2003) defines ontology as the nature of reality. A researcher should understand participants’ definitions of reality, what they define as the truth or facts in their situation. Epistemology, on the other hand, is defined as the nature of knowledge. The epistemological assumption of critical theory is that knowledge is socially constructed (Frame, 2003). We get introduced to what the society of which we are part defines as reality and knowledge. Social life could therefore be understood better by understanding the point of view of the people who are part of that society. My study tries to understand women’s experiences in student leadership at UKZN. Participants were selected on the basis that they have experienced the life of being a women student leader and they are part of UKZN society. They can be able to share what they see as their realities and truth.

The ontological position of critical theory is that social reality is historically created and it is produced and reproduced by people (Denscombe, 2003). As will be seen, a patriarchal norm in UKZN student leadership is historically constructed and is reproduced by the current student leaders through either colluding with it or by not challenging it. Critical theory therefore is seen as one of social critique, whereby the restrictive and alienated conditions of the status quo are brought to light (Denscombe, 2003). People are made aware of their current situation. Critical theory is explicitly prescriptive and normative, entailing a view of what behaviour in a social democracy should entail. Its intention is not merely to give an account of society and behaviour but to realise a society that is based on equality and democracy for all its members. Its purpose is not merely to understand situations and phenomena but to change them. In particular it seeks

to emancipate the disempowered, to redress inequality and to promote individual freedoms within a democratic society. It holds up the lights of legitimacy and equality and raises the issues of repression, voice, ideology, power, participation, representation, inclusion and interests. Its intention is transformative – to

transform society and individuals to social democracy or egalitarian society in which individual and collective freedoms are practiced, and to eradicate the exercise and effects of illegitimate power (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p 26).

Habermas (in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007) suggests four stages that need to be addressed when undertaking critical research:

Stage 1: Description and interpretation of existing situation, a hermeneutic exercise that identifies and attempts to make sense of the current situation.

Stage 2: Penetration of the reasons that brought the existing situation to the form that it takes.

Stage 3: Formulating an agenda for altering the situation, in order for moves to an egalitarian society to be furthered.

Stage 4: Evaluating the achievement of the situation in practice. (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p.28).

In line with critical theory, my study will be a way of enlightening women students about their current situation. I will explain reasons for their oppression and I will provide recommendation that could be utilised by the University to alter their situation.

### **2.3 Frames of enquiry**

Feminism is an intellectual commitment and a political movement that seeks justice for women and the end of sexism in all forms (Harman, 2003). Feminism is grounded on the belief that women are oppressed or disadvantaged by comparison with men, and their oppression is in some way illegitimate or unjustified. Feminists are of the view that oppression also extends into the structure of our society and the content of our culture, and permeates our consciousness (Harman, 2003)

Both women and men students have colluded with their situation because of their socialisation. One's sex plays a large role in determining how one is treated people make invidious distinctions between the sexes on the basis of their background understandings of what is appropriate treatment. Women, as a group, experience many different forms of

injustice, and the sexism they experience interacts in many ways with other systems of oppression such as racism, classism and ageism. Feminist objectives are not merely to understand women's oppression but to end sexism and all other forms of oppression as well.

#### **2.4 Theory of oppression**

In line with feminism, I will also draw on the theory of oppression as outlined by Hardiman & Jackson (1997) and Young (2000). I will do this as a way to ground how women experience student leadership. The theory of oppression will be used to understand the relations between men and women in student leadership and how women experience their roles as women leaders. Hardiman & Jackson (1997) define oppression as a systematic phenomenon that involves ideological domination, institutional control and the promulgation of the dominant group's ideology over the culture of the oppressed. It is a system of domination with many interlocking parts. Concurrently Young (2000) defines oppression as a systemic constraint on a group that is not necessarily the result of the intentions of a tyrant, in other words, it is structural, rather than the result of a few people's choices or policies. It refers to the vast and deep injustices some groups suffer.

Both Young (2000) and Hardiman & Jackson (1997) put strong emphasis on social groups. They suggest that a group of persons are oppressed on the bases that they are different from other groups. Young (2000) defines social groups as a collective of persons differentiated from at least one other group by cultural forms, practices, or way of life. Members of each gender group have certain affinity with others in their group because of what they do or experience, and differentiate themselves from the other gender, even when members of each gender consider that they have much in common with members of the other, and consider that they belong to the same society. Hardiman & Jackson (1997) suggest that oppression exists when the following conditions are realized:

1. The dominant group has exclusive power to define and enact reality. The dominant group determines what is normal, real and correct.

2. Genocide, harassment, discrimination and other forms of differential and unequal treatment are institutionalized and systematic.
3. There is psychological colonization of the oppressed group, whereby the oppressed internalize their own oppressed condition and collude with their oppressors.
4. The subordinate group's culture is eradicated, misrepresented or discounted and the dominant culture is imposed ( Hardiman & Jackson, 1997, p. 2)

Individual members of both the dominant and subordinate group have a role in supporting the continuation of the oppression through their individual behaviours, actions, attitudes and beliefs and by fulfilling their prescribed roles as dominant and subordinate. The subordinate generally concentrate on basic survival needs, yet tend not to take open, self-initiated action on their behalf. They display classic victim behaviour, such as withdrawal, aggression, have a sense of powerlessness, are unable to see options and choices, and use self put downs. They absorb untruths about themselves (from the dominants) and internalise them as true. Subordinates also feel tension and ambivalence regarding myths that the dominant group promotes and their internally felt truths.

On the other hand, oppressors are also dehumanised because they have engaged in a process of stealing the humanity of others. They may not always be aware that they oppress and even if they become aware, this realisation does not necessarily lead to solidarity with the oppressed. They are frequently unaware that they are members of the oppressor group. Hardiman & Jackson (1997) argue that the dominants are also subject to being psychologically colonised because once the oppressive structures are in place, oppression becomes normalised and succeeding generations of oppressors learn to accept their inherence of oppression as normal, as the way things are and always will be.

Young (2000) suggests that we know that a group is oppressed if they experience one of the following conditions:



### 1. Exploitation

The injustices of exploitation consist in social processes that bring about a transfer of energies from one group to another to produce unequal distributions. It is the way in which social institutions enable a few to accumulate while they constrain many more. Women as a group undergo specific forms of gender exploitation in which their energies and power are expended, often unnoticed and unacknowledged, usually to benefit men by releasing them for more important and creative work, enhancing their status or the environment around them, or providing them with sexual or emotional service .

### 2. Marginalisation

Marginalisation is an oppression whereby the whole category of people is expelled from the useful participation in social life and thus potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination. Even if marginals are provided a comfortable material life within institutions that respect their freedom and dignity, injustices of marginality would remain in the form of uselessness, boredom, and lack of self respect.

### 3. Powerlessness

The powerless are those who lack authority or power even in this mediated sense, those over whom power is exercised without them exercising it. The powerless are situated so that they must take orders and rarely have the right to give them.

### 4. Violence

Members of a subordinate group live with the knowledge that they must fear random, unprovoked attacks on their persons or properties, which have no motive, but to damage, humiliate, or destroy the person.

### 5. Cultural imperialism

Members of the subordinate group experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it as the other. The group defined by the dominant culture as deviant, as stereotyped other, is culturally different from the dominant group, because the status of otherness creates specific experiences not shared by the dominant group and because culturally oppressed groups are often socially segregated. ( Young, 2000,p.43)

## **2.5 Women's experiences of sexism and marginalization**

Sexism is defined as the oppression of people based on their gender. It is a cultural, institutional and individual set of beliefs and practices that privilege men, subordinate women, and denigrate the values and practices associated with women (Adams, Bell & Griffin, 1997, p.117). Oppression on the other hand is a hierarchical relationship which one group is granted benefits and privileges at the expense of other groups. Due to the patriarchal system in our society, males are still dominant and as a result they benefit from the system while women's values and practices are disparaged. Leadership on its own is stereotypically associated with the male personality. Men are viewed by the society as born leaders. This is due to the patriarchal system. Males are head of their families and most leadership positions in government and in private sectors are male dominated.

Miller & Krause (2004) report that women are still underrepresented in student governance. According to them, women often do not get elected even if they do run for elections, as both male and female students do not trust women leaders. They argue that, owing to patriarchal tradition, higher education continues to marginalize women at every turn as students, administrators, faculty and athletic leaders. Whether the bias is conscious or unconscious, women are penalized consistently for their gender.

Whitt's (1991) findings in her ethnographic study on student leaders in three women college in the United states of America, suggest that women go to college already differing considerably from men in self rated emotional and psychological health, test scores, GPA's, political attitudes, personality characteristics, and career plans, and most of these differences widen during the undergraduate years. Whitt (1991) argues that sexism is institutionalised by universities. Conditions do not favour women who are interested in participating in student leadership. She reports that:

1. The campus climate is not conducive for women. In coeducational institutions there are academic structures and traditions that affirm and reinforce the masculine qualities of objectivity and separate knowing. Further, institution leadership positions dominated by

men demonstrate that women are outsiders or marginal to the male dominated world of academe.

2. Sexism is institutionalised by universities. Conditions do not favour women who are interested in participating in student leadership. Structural obstacles of college environments hinder participation and reinforce rather than counter gender stereotypes.
3. Male students are given more attention in lecture halls compared to female students and their views are taken more seriously. What men say often carries more weight.
4. Women students experience micro inequalities such as sexist humour, disparagement outside the classroom. Less time is given to women students by faculties and administrators. Women also experience subtle and overt communication of stereotypical assumptions and expectations about them as well as sexual harassment outside the classroom.
5. Women students are not encouraged by faculties and management to participate in student leadership. There is an absence of encouragement, a “null environment”.
6. Stereotypes about women persist, as do ‘can’ and ‘cannot’ and ‘should’ or ‘should not do’ messages about women’s abilities, talents and achievements. Self doubt is a contributing factor in the lack of self esteem and aspiration in women students. (Whitt, 1991, p.206).

Women are not perceived as people who can contribute positively to leadership structures. Bjarke also report his experience at the University of Turfloop in Limpopo. He observed that:

Many of the female students who were actively involved in the SRC campaigns were dressed up in ways that were highly sexualized. For example, four female (political organization) supporters had torn their T-shirts in front of their breasts and went around handing out leaflets. The male (political organization) members stated in triumph: "Our female comrades are going to seduce the male voters (Bjarke, 2008, p12).

This illustrates how sexism has been institutionalized by the organization (SRC). Women’s roles have been reduced to seduction rather than a positive and meaningful contribution to the organization. Bjarke in his study further reports that:

While this is clearly also a festive celebration of a colourful campaign, it is somehow telling that I never heard one single political speech made by a female student politician during my six month stay at Turfloop. In the sphere of student politics there seems to be an implicit understanding that they [women] are simply not able to make rational contributions to the campaign and struggle, and thus they have to use their bodies and charms to fight for the worthy cause instead (Bjarke, 2008, p.12).

Trinidad and Normore (2005) on the other hand view women's leadership style as one of the causes for women to experience sexism. Women student leaders, as a result of socialisation, mostly embrace a feminine leadership style. Women are socialised to show their emotions, feelings, compassion, patience, and intuition, to help and care for others, to judge outcomes based on their impact on relationship and to lead complex settings in continuous change. Since institutions of higher learning still have stereotypical expectations of women, women who are in leadership positions and who are leading in a feminine style get labelled as failures and get disparaged. Henking (2008) reports the horizontal oppression that women in leadership experience with other women. Horizontal oppression according to Hardiman & Jackson (1997) occurs when a member of a target group oppress a member of her group based on their internalised oppression. This is as a result of a horizontal dynamic where women oppress other women because they internalise the gender stereotypes and socialisation in a sexist society. Since leadership positions are seen as male terrain, women who are already participating are discouraged by their male colleagues and by the management. They get negative comments and attitudes. Okech in her study reports her conversation with a women leader. Reporting her experiences she said that:

‘As a woman , you have to work twice as hard as the average man, you know when you go to congresses men will say the most stupid things, but people will laugh and clap hands anyway, if it were a woman it would be so embarrassing to her. Like you may be having serious discussion on a political matter and they will be joking about it. It isn't something that is valuable in terms of enriching the discussion, but because it comes from a man somehow is excusable. The moment a woman makes a mess up, immediately they will say this woman

needs political education or they need to go through some empowerment programmes (Okech, 2007, 3).

Such comments have a negative impact on women's self esteem and it decreases their ambitions to lead.

## **2.6 Politics in student leadership**

Student politics, according to Iqbal (2008) play two very crucial and positive roles. Firstly, student unions do not only engage in politics, they organize a range of activities. The managerial and organizational experience that student office bearers and activists acquire is equal to the learning from lecturers and books. The political experience that they acquire is critical in creating future leaders. Secondly, student union activities, including politics, allow this energy to be channelled into positive ends (Iqbal, 2008). Student's activism in any university campus across the globe may be linked to how students are treated by universities (Bjarke, 2008). The harsher the treatment students get from the university, the stronger the student activism. Student leaders' actions respond to the challenges they encounter at the university. Student unions however are currently faced with the influence of outside politics which pushes women students to the margins. Iqbal argues that:

For more than two decades, student politics has been subjected to demoralization by growing intolerance and rampant violence perpetrated by unscrupulous activists of most political parties. Student fronts have made it more difficult for female students to participate actively in politics, let alone to make their meaningful presence at the policy making level felt. (Iqbal, 2008, p.1)

The environment in the SRC is still not conducive for women to participate effectively in structures of governance. They are still tokens, their roles in SRC structures are only as additional members or they occupy less significant positions in those structures (Centre for Policy Development, 2007).

Bjarke, in his ethnographic research on how gendered discourses of struggle and liberation play a vital role in student politics in Turfloop campus at University of the

Limpopo, suggest that male student politicians draw on struggle history and revocations of African traditionalism as ways to keep themselves in the centre of student politics, while female students are kept at the margins (Bjarke, 2008). His findings suggest that the former student challenges are much the same as their current challenges. Students are still faced with a shortage of accommodation, high tuition fees and a shortage of funding. Most students who take part in student activism are from lower middle class and working class backgrounds. Bjarke further argues that:

The fact that student politics draw so heavily on discourses of the struggle against apartheid and the necessity of class tend to marginalize the position of women in the struggle matrix. It is widely known that discrimination is often organized along the divisions of race, class and gender, and in this case of student politics gender remains the uncontested field. This could partly be due to the fact that traditional class analysis tend to marginalize women, since they have traditionally been seen as belonging to the domestic sphere and thus outside the formalized public sphere of production (Bjarke, 2008, p.11).

Male students easily identify with their struggle heroes who gave their lives in the struggle against oppression. Men have been seen as both the agents of class and the holders of class power due to their dominant positions. The university class struggle therefore has to be fought by men.

Students claim that they have inherited the struggle from their struggle heroes and they have to finish it. They claim that “they will fight to their last drop of blood” (Bjarke, 2008, p.7). Bjarke (2008) further reports the influence of political formation on student politics and how students’ organizations make reference to the struggle of their organizations. Quoting from posters and t-shirts distributed to supporters of students organizations, he argued that student leaders put an emphasis on their willingness to bleed for their students and that they establish a connection between the bloody struggle and their organizations. The military jargon used during SRC elections, such as “general”, “commander”, “colonel” and “lieutenant”, the violent metaphors and allegories when speaking of wars, bombs, bullets, fights, revolutions, killings and

oppression and liberations, and the language used in the mass meetings such as *Amandla* (power to the people) are often intimidating to women interested in student politics.

Iqbal's survey (2008) suggests that student unions are based on students' day-to-day issues and academic problems and were later co-opted by ideological groups to revert back to the politics of revolution. The colloquium report also suggests that SRCs have become too political, to an extent that students' concerns are not addressed (Centre for Policy Development, 2007). Student leaders spend most of their time on outside politics and forget about day-to-day student issues. Political leaders are investing a lot in student unions which result in the situation where student politics lose direction and focus on outside politics.

Iqbal (2008) reports that the dominance of men and masculinity in student politics has led to the subservient role of their female counterparts. Male students keep themselves at the centre of student politics while female students are marginalized. Even though female students have always struggled on the front line along with their male counterparts their efforts are not appreciated or rewarded (Iqbal, 2008). Female students do not get the positions they deserve due to the politics in student leadership. They get undermined by their fellow leaders. To reiterate, they are not elected to leadership positions because political heroes in the past were men and therefore politics is seen as male terrain. Rather, women are given the role of supporters, not of leaders or deputies (Okech, 2007).

## **2.7 Shortage of role models in the institutions of higher learning**

One of the reasons women pursues leadership positions is because they have seen other women who has been in a leadership position. Role models boost women's self confidence, create motivation and develop leadership aspiration. Whitt argues that, "Dynamic female role models force people to see things; it is an awareness of what women face and expand the image of what women can do" (1991, p.204). The shortage of women role model in leadership positions is one of the reason women are not participating in student leadership. Boatwright reports a shortage of female professors in leadership position in the university system. They argue that "the absence of female

professors in the University system who hold professional and familial leadership positions has an impact on women's interest on running for leadership positions" (Boatwright & Egidio, 2003).

At universities where there are no women professors in leadership positions, women students tend to think that leadership positions are male terrain. They do not think that they can also lead. Similarly, Whitt's (1991) findings also suggest that the relatively small proportion of women in student leadership is due to the insufficient number of female role models at colleges and university. Miller & Krause (2004) further report that women do not run for leadership positions because they do not have female mentors that serve as role models of leadership and provide encouragement.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

This section has addressed the theoretical framework I have used to map out my research. My focus is to investigate the obstacles faced by women who are interested in leadership. In line with my research questions I have placed my research within a critical paradigm that acknowledges that knowledge is socially constructed. In the interviews women students explained their experiences in their terms. This draws also on a feminist framework. Feminists assume that women are oppressed and disadvantaged on the basis that they are women. My research aims to contribute to the emancipation of women leaders at UKZN. The theory of oppression will also be used to understand the roles played by the both the subordinate and the dominant group within student leadership at UKZN. The literature review suggests that women who are in leadership, and those who have ambitions to be in leadership, face challenges. This is due to the fact that leadership positions are seen as men's terrain.

The influence of external politics in student politics has been reported as a contributing factor to the low participation of women in leadership. Student politics has become violent and overly political, and as a result, women students find it hard to participate. The military jargon used by male student leaders further intimidates and marginalises women. Women who participate in student politics are frequently faced with negative



and sexist comments. Findings suggest that women use their bodies to campaign for SRC elections instead of contributing in a more meaningful way (Bjarke, 2008). The campus environment is not conducive for women interested in leadership positions; they are given less time by management compared to their male counterparts, resulting in women becoming disparaged. In conclusion, student politics on campus reinforces rather than challenges gender stereotypes about women.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Research design and methodology**

#### **Introduction**

My research aim is to explore women's experiences in student leadership at UKZN. It tries to answer the following critical questions:

- How do the women students describe their leadership experiences?
- How do women students learn to lead?
- How does the environment in which women lead and learn to lead, affect their leadership experiences?

To answer my research questions I used a qualitative method, with semi-structured, in-depth interviews as my data collection strategy. In-depth interviews allowed the participants to speak freely. Based on my research questions, I used purposive sampling to locate participants who have been in leadership positions at UKZN.

#### **3.2 Qualitative research**

This study examines the challenges faced by women who are in leadership positions and attempts to understand the obstacles that hinder women from entering into student leadership positions at UKZN. The aim of the research is not merely to understand the experiences of women in student leadership but to change the situation. Qualitative research is an inquiry approach useful for exploring and understanding a central phenomenon (Cresswell, 2008). It is usually used "when the object of study is some form of social process or meaning or experience which needs to be understood and explained in a rounded way" (Cohen, et al. 2007, p.26). Qualitative research allowed me to have face-to-face conversations with the participants in order to understand their perspective. Based on the assumption that knowledge is socially constructed, and that reality is historically created, produced and reproduced by people (Denscombe, 2003), qualitative research is a suitable method of inquiry for my study.

In addition, qualitative methods are appropriate when doing feminist research as it is concerned with consciousness rising as a way of seeing and as a methodological tool

(Stanley and Wise, 1990). As mentioned, my research is about women and for women, and is done by a woman who has participated in student leadership. Feminist researchers “see gender as a basic organising principle which profoundly shapes the concrete conditions of our lives” (Lather, 1991, p.71). Cohen et al (2002) argue that quantitative methods are unsuitable for feminists because they neglect the emotions of the people under the study. It is because of that reason I chose qualitative research, as women student leaders’ emotions, beliefs and attitudes were also explored. Through doing so, my intention was to gain a deeper understanding of women’s experiences.

### **3.3 Research design**

Research design refers to the plan and structure of the investigation used to obtain evidence to answer the research questions. It describes the procedures for conducting the study including when, from whom, and under what conditions the data is to be obtained (McMillan and Schumacher, 1993, p.31). It answers the following questions:

- What data does the researcher collect in order to answer the research questions?
- What instruments does the researcher use to collect data?
- From whom will the data be collected and when?
- What will the researcher do with the collected data and how will the data be analyzed to make meaning? (McMillan and Schumacher, 1993, p.31)

### **3.4 Sampling and context**

I used purposive sampling since “it is used in order to access those who have in-depth knowledge about particular issue” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p.115). I chose ten women from UKZN, two from the Pietermaritzburg campus, two from the Edgewood campus, two from the Westville campus, two from the Howard College campus and two from the Medical School. I interviewed women students from all five campuses because my aim was to understand women experiences at UKZN generally, not at the level of individual campuses. Again each campus has its own dynamics as is outlined in Figure 1. Some campuses have been led by women and others have never been led by women. In addition other campuses such as Medical School and Edgewood are faculty based and have smaller populations as compared to the Westville, Howard and Pietermaritzburg

campuses. I trusted that all women who participated in student leadership at UKZN had the information I needed for my study. I invited all women student leaders to participate in the study through e-mail and through telephone calls. Women who were willing to participate indicated their availability and I contacted them. An interview schedule timetable was constructed in line with their availability. Ten participants were chosen for their availability and convenience during the period of my study.

### **3.5 Data collection**

Bertram defines data as “the evidence that a researcher collects in order to shed light on the particular question he or she is asking” (2004, p.79). I used the interview method. An interview is a conversation between the researcher and the participants. It is an interchange of views between two people. Unlike day-to-day conversation, interviews are done for a specific purpose and are questioning based (Cohen et al., 2007). Cresswell (2008) suggests that in qualitative research an inquirer asks participants broad, general questions, collects detailed views of the participants in the form of words and analyses the information for description and themes. Through interviews I sought to understand women’s experiences in student leadership and was able to get first hand information from women students themselves.

I interviewed ten women who are and have been in leadership at UKZN to find out their experiences of leadership and how they dealt with challenges. I allowed participants to speak freely without interfering. Participants were allowed to use the language of their choice, language that allowed them to express their feelings and emotions. I did that so that women’s words will not be distorted. As Cohen, et al (2007) have pointed out, in feminist research there must be a process of conscientization, not research solely by experts for experts, but research to empower oppressed participants. Interview questions were designed to conscientise participants about the current situation, and participants were also allowed to suggest ways to alter their current situation.

Cohen, et al. (2007) state that there is a division among feminists, between those who believe in closeness in terms of the relationship between researchers and the researched,

and those who believe in distance. However, I am of the view that a close relationship, if well handled, could be appropriate in doing feminist research. Oakley state that, “the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his/ her own personal identity in the relationship” (1981, p.41). In my research, I used semi-structured schedules to structure the interview and as a way of assisting me in controlling and directing the conversation. Since participants and I have a common experience of having been leading at UKZN, the non-hierarchical relationship was best achieved.

Bhopal (2000) further suggests that researchers ought to tell interviewees about their own experiences so that the encounter becomes a mutual cooperative event. However I am of the view that when a researcher narrates her experiences to the interviewee, the interviewee might be tempted to sympathise with the researcher and give similar responses which may compromise the validity of the research. In my research, therefore I allowed the participants to share their experiences without sharing mine with them. Bhopal further cautions researchers whose sample is from the same social structure by writing, “when the researcher and the researched operate from shared realities, there may be the tendency to take too much for granted” (2000, p.74). To guard against taking things for granted semi-structured interviews schedules were used as a guideline for controlling and directing the conversation.

According to Cohen and Manion, “the unstructured interview is an open situation, having greater flexibility and freedom” (1980, p.270). Furthermore, Cohen and Manion point out that in the “less formal interview the interviewer is free to modify the sequence of questions, change wording, explain terms or add to them” (1980, p.271). The interview process in my study was done in a way that will allow participants to speak freely. Questions were modified and reworded during the process. Since the research is feminist in nature, the semi-structured, in-depth interview allowed a less formal environment and the interview became more of a “woman talk” (Bhopal, 2000).

I visited participants on their own campuses. Five interviews were done in the women's residence rooms and four were conducted in the SRC offices. The environment where interviews took place was acceptable to participants since they were the ones who organised venues.

The questions asked were open-ended. According to Cohen, Manion & Morrison have said, open-ended questions "enable the interviewer to test the limits of respondents' knowledge and allow the interviewer to take a truer assessment of what the respondent really believes" (2000, p.275). Through probing I was able to gain a deeper understanding and clear up misunderstandings. Participants were also able to ask questions in return and they were able to show their emotions. Furthermore, Cohen et al. caution researchers about open-ended questions and suggest that, "open-ended situations can result in the unexpected or unanticipated answers which may suggest unthought-of relationships or hypotheses" (2000, p.275). During my conversation with participants, I was cautious about ambiguity. Although our conversations were less formal and more like "women's talk", participants were able to stick to the point without rhetoric.

All interviews were conducted by me and they were all face-to-face interviews. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Cohen et al (2007) argue that when interviews are recorded data is likely to be lost, distorted and then further reduced during transcription. They suggest that when doing transcribing the following should be recorded: what is being said, the tone of the voice of the speaker, the inflection of the voice, emphasis placed by the speaker, interruptions and any other events that were taking place at the same time that the researcher can remember"(Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p.368). As stated, interviews were conducted in participants' rooms and in the SRC offices. Since my interest was not only to listen to what participants had to say but also to observe their emotions I noted voice inflection and the emphasis placed by the speaker. At times, there were interruptions and these were recorded on the transcripts.

### **3.6 Limitations of the study**

My study was limited by the availability of the participants for interviews. All women students were currently students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and some were still participating in student leadership. My original plan was to interview ten women, two from each campus. Due to the Medical School time table it was difficult to arrange time with one of the participants. Some participants were interviewed during the day in between lectures and as a result time was limited. Participants suggested times and venues that were convenient for them, whether this was ideal for the research or not. Participants interviewed in their rooms had their TV on during the interview session which resulted into distraction, which was a threat to the findings' reliability. Some participants were interviewed in the SRC office and we experienced interruptions during the interview session.

### **3.7 Data analysis**

Cohen et al. (2007) suggest five ways of organising and presenting the analysis. According to them, data can be organised and presented by group, by individual, by issue, by research question or by instrument. After transcription I organised and presented the data by research questions. I identified patterns from the research questions. The emerged themes from was used to analyse and discuss data.

### **3.8 Validity and reliability**

My aim was to explore women's experiences in student leadership at UKZN. My participants were all women who participated in student leadership. In order to understand their experiences I had a conversation with them through interviews. To enhance reliability I tape recorded and transcribed all interviews. I noted and recorded their facial expression, pausing, gesture and any other incidents that happened during interview sessions. Validity, according to Cohen et al. (2007) is a degree to which the results can be generalised to the wider population, other cases or situations. They report the following as a threat to validity of data:

The attitude, opinions and expectations of the interviewer, a tendency for the interviewer to see the respondent in his or her own image, a tendency for the

interviewer to seek answers that support preconceived notions, misperceptions on the part of the interviewer of what respondent is saying, misunderstandings on the part of the respondent of what is being asked (Cohen et al., 2007, p.150).

My study attempted to understand the leadership environment in which women students lead at the UKZN. Participants were UKZN women student leaders. The study therefore could not be generalised to other South African universities since it only addresses the challenges faced by women student leaders at the UKZN. However, due to the number of women student leaders who participated in leadership positions at UKZN and due to the number of the interviewees, the research findings can be generalised for UKZN.

### **3.9 Ethical issues**

Participants were requested to sign an informed consent form. They were told that their participation was voluntarily and that they were free to withdraw at any time. All participants were adults and the research questions were impersonal. Participants were asked questions about their experiences in student leadership. They were also informed that interviews were to be tape recorded and transcribed and would be used for the purpose of my Masters dissertation. For privacy and confidentiality names of the participants were changed. Ethical clearance for my research study has also been granted by the university: Ethical Clearance Approval Number HSS/0769/08M (Appendix D).

### **3.10 Conclusion**

In this chapter I set out the approach used and research design of my study. I answered the following questions:

- What data does the researcher collect in order to answer the research questions?
- What instruments does the researcher use to collect data?
- From whom will the data be collected and when?
- What will the researcher do with the collected data and how will the data be analyzed to make meaning? (McMillan and Schumacher, 1993, p.31)

I then described the limitations of the study, ethical issues and validity and reliability of the study.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Presentation and analysis of findings**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I present the data analysis and the discussion of my findings. McMillan and Schumacher (1993) define data analysis as “a process whereby a researcher organises, analyses and interprets the data” (p.486). In my study I organised and presented data by teasing out each research question. From the research questions I identified patterns which were used as themes (see below for an example how I categorised the data into themes). In addition I have used the Five Faces of Oppression as outlined by Young (2000) as a lens to interpret the data. As such, I have explicated the following themes: (1) Role conflict (2) Exploitation (3) Violence (4) Cultural imperialism (5) Powerlessness (6) Marginalisation (7) Male hegemony (8) The quota system (9) Lack of support (10) Where learning took place (11) Withdrawal (12) Internalisation (13) Hostility.

#### **4.2 Data presentation**

<b>Research question</b>	<b>Data</b>	<b>Themes</b>
How do women students describe their leadership experiences?	Thandi: It was the worst experience I have ever had but I learnt from it. In the organization we didn't always agree on things but we had to work together. The SRC members had their own agenda. I had to deal with their dirty politics and sometimes I was manipulated. I learnt things that I did not know but all in all I grown as a leaders even though it was difficult. Zinhle: It was good in the organization.	Powerlessness

	<p>In the SRC I had a problem with the office in which I was deployed in did not allow me to be effective as I could have wanted. The office was limiting.</p> <p>Tina: I enjoyed the most of it. I think it is because basics were laid. I firstly lead in the ANC .It was my first time to lead in the structure but fortunately I had a goal to achieve using that position. In the SRC it was different. My colleagues were lazy. I worked on a number of documents but when I had to be rewarded about my work it became an issue. I never had support. It was disturbing to see people reporting on your work because they did not do any thing.</p> <p>Tumi: Leading in the SRC was very challenging. I did not get support. I was looked down upon but I survived.</p> <p>Happy: It was tough. I had to be three people at once. I had to deal with my responsibilities as a girlfriend, I had to deal with my academic work and I still had to deal with my leadership responsibilities. It has been so difficult and absolutely undoable. There was no single day when I was happy and relaxing. I always had something that I had to deal with.</p> <p>Lerato: Women want to participate in</p>	<p>Powerlessness</p> <p>Powerlessness</p> <p>Exploitation</p> <p>Exploitation</p> <p>No support</p> <p>Marginalisation</p> <p>Role conflict</p> <p>Role conflict</p>
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	<p>student leadership. They want to engage issues that concerns them but opportunities and guidance are lacking. Personally as much as I had people to groom me but it was not like there was a manual that I had to use to guide me. I had ideas which were not always correct and I was criticized negatively. Some women were discouraged at an early stage of their leadership. As a woman you are constantly proved wrong. Sometimes it is hard to stand the heat. Sometimes you cry and they label you as a crying baby. When men want to make you lose focus they will personally attack you and make you cry.</p> <p>Dineo: Honestly speaking, lot of males who were around me were challenged. I stood my ground. I debated issues. I was not intimidated. I contested positions of leadership against males. Attempts were made to suppress me. I observed that males do not accept to be lead by females. I had to fight against men and I was sabotaged. Generally I had a good working relationship with my male colleagues.</p> <p>Senzi: My leadership experiences were not good. Men perceived politics as their territory and they do not want to</p>	<p>No support</p> <p>Violence</p> <p>Violence</p> <p>Violence</p> <p>Male hegemony</p>
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	give space to women. If I was male I would be president by now.	
How do the women students learn to lead?	<p>Senzi: women have passion to lead. They listen to good leaders.</p> <p>Dineo: Women learn from organization. They go through ranks. Starting from being a branch general member and then you become a branch executive member. We also learn from other women. The organization gives you basics and it is up to an individual to read documents and to listen to how people talk and debate issue.</p> <p>Lerato: I learnt to lead by participating in clubs and societies and by reading documents to find out issues. If you are not reading a lot you would lack confidence to participate in discussions. I also think there must be a programme to develop women. I think those programmes should talk about our problems as women. We must at the end draft a programme of action as a way of solving our problems. Men have to be included in the process because at the end of the day we as women do not operate in the vacuum.</p> <p>Lihle: Women learn to lead by attending workshops such as induction workshops. We also learn by reading</p>	<p>Where learning took place</p> <p>Where learning took place</p> <p>Where learning took place</p> <p>Where learning took place</p> <p>Where learning took place</p> <p>Where learning took place</p> <p>Where learning took place</p>

	<p>documents and by interacting with other comrades.</p> <p>Thandi: we learn to lead at an early age. At home I was doing everything for my siblings. They were fully depending on me. I was like their mother. My siblings were like my followers and I was their leader.</p> <p>Happy: we learn by observing others. At times we lead in bad ways because people who lead in that way.</p> <p>Tina: There is no formula for learning to lead. But we mostly learn by what we see and what we think we can do. At home I was responsible for my siblings. I believe that you cannot be responsible for someone if you cannot lead them. Most girls that I know participate in leadership positions because they have students at heart. Personally I wanted to make sure that students were assisted.</p> <p>Zinhle: We mostly learn by observing other women that are leading before us. We sometimes depend on them because it is hard to be in leadership if you are woman. It is really hard.</p> <p>Tumi: We learn from people that lead before us I have got people that I can quote who were my role models.</p>	<p>Where learning took place</p> <p>Where learning took place</p> <p>Where learning took place</p> <p>Where learning took place</p> <p>Where learning took place</p> <p>Where learning took place</p> <p>Where learning took place</p> <p>Where learning took place</p>
How does the	Tumi: it depends. Some women leaders	

environment in which the women lead and learn to lead, affect their leadership experiences?	<p>were successful in their leadership. They are now government officials. Some cannot say they were leaders. They lead one term and when they were deployed for the second time they refused. They actually withdrew from leadership. Women in the SRC are treated unfairly. They live with fear. Fear for negative criticism and the fear for the fact that they were asked for sexual favours.</p> <p>Happy: Women had to deal with hostile environment. The SRC environment makes us to doubt ourselves. We are not sure whether we can make a good decision or not because if you happen to make one mistake that mistake you will be judged by one mistake that you have made for the rest of the term. The environment is very restrictive. Sometimes you feel that you have this brilliant idea and you would become scared to raise it because people that you are leading with are not happy with your leadership anyway. You become scared because you think these people are going to kill me.</p> <p>Zinhle: If you are a woman people use your personal life against you. Men do that intentionally so that we resign in the SRC. It is like everybody is</p>	<p>Withdrawal</p> <p>Powerlessness</p> <p>Cultural imperialism</p> <p>Violence</p> <p>Hostility</p> <p>Marginalisation</p> <p>Violence</p> <p>Marginalisation</p> <p>Violence</p> <p>Violence</p> <p>Marginalisation</p>
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	<p>watching you; they look for your weak points. You are always criticized. Even students sometimes I felt as if they forget that I am also a student. I had to deal with my academic work as well. Students in the AGM always look for things that they can use to attack you.</p> <p>Tina: SRC is the harshest environment in which you can lead in. You lead one term and when it ends you do not want anything that concern leadership. In the institution of higher learning the environment is too hostile.</p> <p>Lerato: The environment is demotivating. Some people choose to be reserved and just do their own thing or to forget about leadership issues. Some women think a man should be president and they must be deputies. In discussion men do not recognize women. As women we constantly have to prove ourselves. Women who succeeded in leadership are only those who were stubborn.</p> <p>Senzi: There are few women who still want to participate in leadership. That is because of the way in which they were treated. Women were put into leadership positions for quota. Sometimes male comrades are calling us Affirmative Action comrades.</p>	<p>Powerlessness</p> <p>Violence</p> <p>Hostility</p> <p>Hostility</p> <p>Withdrawal</p> <p>Male hegemony</p> <p>Hostility</p> <p>Withdrawal</p> <p>Quota system</p>
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	<p>Dineo: women are seen as quota and they are not taken seriously. As a woman you get disheartened. Your politics become petty and we end up fighting each other as women. We sometimes lose interest to seek to be developed because people are not interested in giving you the opportunity to be developed as a leader. Women as a result use their womanhood to seduce men to get where they want to be. The SRC is still male dominated. Women are still undermined. If for an example you discuss issues of student funding with management if you are a woman you always get a lesser package whereas if male were saying the same argument they would get more.</p> <p>Lihle: When you lead in the male dominated environment you get restricted. Males exclude you from decision making debates. Males are still having stereotypes about females. They do not see us as good leaders, they actually doubt our leadership. In the SRC I experienced sabotage. I felt unwelcome.</p> <p>Thandi: In the student leadership the environment is restrictive to women. We have allowed men to dominate us and currently it is difficult for them to</p>	<p>Quota system</p> <p>Internalisation</p> <p>Withdrawal</p> <p>Internalisation</p> <p>Male hegemony</p> <p>Marginalisation</p> <p>Male hegemony</p> <p>Marginalisation</p> <p>Cultural imperialism</p> <p>Marginalisation</p> <p>Cultural imperialism</p> <p>Male hegemony</p>
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	accept us as leaders. They always look at you to check if you are able to do your work. They expect us to do things in their ways.	Powerlessness
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### **4.3 Data analysis and discussion**

#### **4.3.1 Role conflict**

The findings suggest that one of the reasons for women having negative experiences of student leadership was because they had many conflicting responsibilities. They had to deal with academic work, leadership and their responsibility as girl friends and or as fiancés. Miller & Krause (2004) argue that women's family responsibilities have been found to affect their political ambitions and the kinds of political activism they pursue. The findings of the study suggest that in UKZN some women student leaders experienced difficulties in leadership because of family responsibilities. For example Happy had to deal with her leadership responsibilities, her gender-traditional role as a girlfriend and her academic work. She reported that playing a multiple role was difficult and completely undoable. She then resigned from the SRC. Thandi also reported that her experiences in leadership were affected by her role as a fiancé'. According to her:

*Thandi: Women play different roles. They can do multitasks, for example, me for instance before I was committed working in (name of the organization) and SRC but towards the end I had other commitments as well. I was starting a family. I was trying to be a good mother, a wife a good fiancée or whatever. At the same time I had to balance with my role as a SRC member, it ended up being difficult to manage.*

Even though Thandi did not resign from the SRC she reported her frustration in trying to balance all her roles. Whitt's findings (1991) suggest that women were not participating in student leadership because they had fear of risking their non-traditional roles. In my study findings suggest that although women did risk these non-traditional roles by

participating in leadership, women's gender socialization had an impact on their leadership experiences. Women leaders had to carry out their domestic chores such as taking care of their fiancé, cooking for them and so on. Findings suggest that women opt for giving up their leadership so that they will be able to be good fiancés rather than continuing with their leadership duties.

Smith (2008) defines gender as a social construct. It refers to the dominant norms and expectations that a society or group has of girls and boys, women and men. Societies are expecting girls to behave in a certain way. Each gender has role expectations. Women are expected to do domestic chores while men deal with leadership roles. This relationship, according to Hardiman and Jackson (1997), places men as the 'agent group' while women are placed as the 'target group', their terms for the groups that are dominant and subordinate respectively. Harro (2000) defines sexism as "the oppression of people based on their gender. It is cultural, institutional and individual set of beliefs and practices that privileged men, subordinate women, and denigrate values and practices associated with women" (p.117).

Women student leaders, in my study, have accepted their gender roles as normal. Happy reported that she felt pressured as a girlfriend.

*Happy: I still have to cook. Even if you cook two times a week but you have to. Males want you to cook at some point.*

The women leaders tried to live up to societal demands by colluding with their subordination. With regards to Happy, her boyfriend was also in leadership positions and also a student but Happy had to deal with all the domestic duties.

These findings suggest that women collude with their gender prescribed roles in a way that subordinates women and privileges men. While men were busy engaging in political debates as leaders, women had to cook for them. This in a way limits women's level of participation in student leadership. They feel pressured to choose between their leadership and gender prescription. For many of the women in my study, they end up sacrificing their roles as student leaders.

### **4.3.2 Exploitation**

The findings of study also suggest that women student leaders experienced exploitation. Their work remained unnoticed and unrecognized. This was evident during reporting time in the AGM (Annual general meetings) and during internship. Women were not rewarded or recognized for the work they have done. This has been witnessed by Tina.

*In the SRC I've worked on number of documents but come stipend time. In the SRC you work with lazy people but when it comes to congresses, people do not mind reporting on your work because they have not done a thing. The men do not mind to report your work without mentioning that you are the one who have done it. They (the men) actually claim your achievement.*

According to Tina, her male colleagues reported the work she has done as their own without even mentioning her name. When she had to be awarded her colleagues decided to pretend as if she did nothing. At the end of the term of office SRC members are rewarded according to the work they have done in the SRC in the form of a stipend. According to the SRC policy the stipend percentage paid to each SRC is proportional to the work they have done. Tina however pointed out that since men are the majority in the SRC they get a higher percentage, even if they did nothing in the SRC while women get a lower percentage despite their work contribution.

Young (2000) states that women as a group undergo specific forms of gender exploitation in which their energies and power are expended, often unnoticed and unacknowledged usually to benefit men by releasing them for more important and creative work, enhancing their status or the environment around them, or providing them with sexual or emotional service. The experiences of women leaders in UKZN show that the work of women leaders is unrecognized and unacknowledged.

### **4.3.3 Violence**

The findings of my study suggest that women student leader's experienced systemic violence. They were viewed as sex objects and not readily accepted as student leaders. Tumi observed that:

*In the SRC women had the fear of the fact that they will be treated unfairly and asked sexual favours and all that. (Tumi)*

Young (2000) suggest that members of the agent group suffer from systemic violence. “They live with knowledge that they must fear random, unprovoked attacks on persons which has no motive but to damage, degrading, humiliate, stigmatizing group member or destroy the person” (Young, 2000, p.47). This has been observed in the UKZN. Women student leaders were subject to sexual harassment and they lived with fear of violence against them. Lerato also observed that. When she was arguing about men’s attitude about women leaders, she said that

*I think sometimes its second nature (to man). You will here a guy talking to another guy saying “listen here mshana (Friend), that’s the only way, we chow (sleep with) girls.*

She further reported that for women student leaders to be taken seriously in the SRC they had to have a sexual relationship with a respected male leader in the SRC. If a woman refused to be in a relationship and stands her ground, she would be labelled as “*feminist, rude and stubborn*”.

Men student leaders were using sexual relationship with their women colleagues as a way of maintain their power. Even though some men student leaders were protecting women that they had relationship with, I will argue that it still had negative effect on women student leaders. Firstly women were not independent. They were relying on their partners to make decision and that perpetuate male domination. For example when women student leaders were asked how they dealt with challenges associated with leadership, Happy, who was in a relationship with her man colleague reported that her boyfriend was her fan. She reported that it would be much harder if her boyfriend was not there. She further reported that some of the issues that she had to deal with her boyfriend who was also in leadership position did it for her. She reported that

*I was lucky on that because I didn’t have to deal with all of that.*

Women student leaders lead having fears. Zinhle reported that she experienced negative criticism and she cried and she was labelled as a crying baby. According to her men were criticising them so that they will lose focus

*When men want to make you lose focus they will personally attack you and make you cry'*

Zinhle observed that men were using personal attack as a strategy to subordinate women. Young (2000) argues that repressive violence as a coercive tool to maintain their power. Men used women emotions to destruct them from performing their leadership duties and they intentionally drove them to failure.

#### **4.3.4. Cultural imperialism**

Women students experienced cultural imperialism in student leadership at UKZN. Young (2000) reports that to experience cultural imperialism means to experience how dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark them as the 'Other'. Women students were labelled as 'other' in the student leadership. Men and women stereotypically assume that leadership is not a women's place. Although women were elected in positions of leadership but they were excluded in political debates. Lerato reported her experiences in one of the meeting she attended. She said that

*"It was supposed to be a formal discussion about some issues. When I got there it was like the session was for males. I was the only girl there and I asked where the females are. Men said that females could not be here because they were trying to think. The only time they going to have females were when they wanted to have entertainment. After that they say they were going to sit and chat and all women will be going to the kitchen to prepare some meals and I refused to do that."*

Lerato's narrative suggests that women in student leadership were excluded from serious debate. They are only invited to participate in entertainment sessions and in preparing lunch. This has also been observed by Bjarke (2008). He reported women were wearing torn t-shirts to seduce men during campaigns instead of engaging in political debates. In student leadership women's culture or way of doing things is not recognized. Women student leaders because men did not see them as leaders instead of challenging men

stereotypes they colluded with it. They saw themselves as not capable of engaging in political debates.

Young (2000) suggest that when the subordinates experienced cultural imperialism they become invisible. “The invisibility comes about when dominant group fail to recognize the perspective embodied in their cultural expressions as a perspective” (Young, 2000, p. 45). Women in student leadership experienced this form of oppression from university management as well. Their views did not carry the same weight as their male colleagues. Tumi for example reported that

*Management can actually listen to, you know, to what you say. Obviously if a man presenting something just get bit of difference, where let me say you are discussing funding they might get more or things like that.*

Even though management did listen to women there were some differences. The voices of women student leaders were not as loud as those of their male colleagues. Participants suggested that they did not enjoy the same respect that men got in the SRC, indicating a degree of institutionalized sexism. Male students received more attention from both management and students. When they were debating issues women were likely to get less attention than their male counterparts.

#### **4.3.5. Powerlessness**

Women student leaders at the UKZN were leading in a male dominated environment. The participants reported that they were experiencing “*restrictions and limitations*”. They were limited in terms of what they could do. Women were sidelined and excluded. They experienced self doubt due to the fear of negative criticism. They were scared of expressing their views because they knew that men did not perceive or accept them as capable leaders. Men used their personal life against them so that they will resign. They reported that they were leading in the environment where they felt as if everybody was watching them, expecting them to do mistakes so that they will criticize them. Zinhle reporting her experiences she said that

*It is like everybody is watching you; they look for your weak points. You are always criticized. Even students sometimes I felt as if they forget that I am also a student*

Women students did not have authority in their SRC work. They felt that male colleagues and students were watching their moves. Young (2000) suggest that the powerless people have no or little work autonomy. They exercise little creativity or judgment in their work. In the UKZN women student leaders were controlled by men. Men dictated how they had to lead. Women were powerless. Men were giving orders as Zinhle observed. According to her she had to do as told.

*The SRC members had their own agenda. I had to deal with their dirty politics and sometimes I was manipulated. I learnt things that I did not know.*

Zinhle's report shows the extent in which women were controlled in the SRC. Since they were also the majority in the organization they dictated on who to deploy in the SRC and the portfolio to hold as Tina has observed

*The problem is with the organizations that release people to the SRC.*

Women student leaders were controlled by their male colleagues both in the SRC and in their political organizations. They did not lead as they wish. Men were controlling them Senzi observed: *Women if they are given a space to lead without being told what to do, are good leaders.*

#### **4.3.6 Marginalization**

The findings of study suggest that women student leaders were marginalized. Young (2000) defines marginalization as oppression whereby the whole category of people is expelled from the useful participation in social life. Women were denied the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution towards organisational responsibilities. Tumi reports:

*... you find that a woman is saying something that is meaningful but because it is said by a woman it will not be considered. You can see that person is not taking your point just because you are a woman not because what you are saying is not correct. Sometimes you find that sometimes a man just change the grammar and*

*say the same thing that was said by a woman but because is said by man now it will be considered as a valid point.*

Tumi further observed that:

*Sometimes you find that a woman may raise up their hands to say something. They (men) will simply ignore them. They will not note them to hear what they will have to say because they just assume that this person will say something that is out of order.*

Lerato: ...discussion would not point at women.

Women student leaders are not given a chance to express their views. Their gender limited their level of participation. They were judged by their gender, not by their leadership capability. Young (2000) argues that even if those who are marginal are provided with a comfortable material life within institutions that respect their freedom and dignity, injustices of marginality would remain in the form of uselessness, boredom, and lack of self respect (Young, 2000). This has been an issue at UKZN. Students were put into positions of leadership but they were not given a space to lead. I will argue that women student leaders were marginalised. Women were still considered useless in the SRC because they were not even noted during discussion that is why some left positions of leadership.

#### **4.3.7. Male hegemony**

The findings suggest that politics in student leadership excludes women. Women were not accommodated through the language used and their existences were disregarded. In the SRC meetings student leaders used big words which threaten women. For example Zinhle observed that:

*One person comes to a meeting for the first time and uses this big word. It turns off, it's like... and you go there, you find that you do not understand most the stuff that was said there, you would think that you're lost, you're just lost, because you are intimidated by this people (men) cause they are talking this big words that you don't understand.*



According to Zinhle bombastic words used in student body meetings are intimidating to most women students. For a student who attends a meeting for the first time and hears big words she ends up not understanding discussions. She may lose interest in attending meetings again.

The terminology used in politics is gendered and is mostly an army lingo. When student organization members are talking to each other they do not use their names. They call each other ‘chief’, ‘commander’, and ‘soldier’, ‘general’ and so on. Such terms are used in armies as Bjarke (2008) has observed. Chiefs are generally men and they are head of the clan. Soldiers are people of the army who are strong and vigilant. This kind of terminology is intimidating. It suggests that politics is for people who are fighters, who are aggressive and who are strong and it is for men. Bjarke also observed that in student body meeting they use the word Amandla (“power to the people”) as a way of communicating with the masses. That is also an issue at UKZN especially during mass actions. Students listen and follow a person who is able to call Amandla (“power to the people”).

The findings of the study suggest that student politics is class based. It is perceived as it is for people who are from the working class, who did not attend good schools and who are financially needy. Tina argues that

*Politics is for people who speak seriously and who calls perpetual orders (correct meeting proceedings) and so forth. I think student politics is too uptight and that causes minimal participation especially with women students.*

As Bjarke (2008) has argued, students are still faced with the same challenges, financial and academic exclusion, shortage of residences and fee increment. Men are readily seen as capable leaders that can be able to defend students who are needy. This kind of thinking draws back to how men and women are socialized. Men are leaders in their households; women are depending on them. In the student leadership if students are faced with challenges they look for strong men to provide leadership that is why women were not elected in key positions. Lihle for instant reported that the key challenge was the

stereotypes about female leaders. According to her *“students think that women are not good leaders. Dineo also reports that “women do participate in student body meetings; the problem is when they had to be elected in positions of leadership”*

Student politics at UKZN do address student concerns and women students are actively defending students who have academic and financial problems. Lihle for example reported how she was dealing with students who were academically excluded

*There is this case I had to deal with, one student who was financially excluded from the university. I think I went an extra mile trying to even find sponsors. I sat down with the student and got to hear all the background and maybe it did relate or maybe I didn't relate that much it was just that I wanted to help her.*

Lerato also reported that she had to deal with a lot of issues such as student exclusions.

*There is a lot of pressure involved. Let me say you have 50 cases hypothetically speaking and you win 45 you get frustrated, thinking how to win the rest. The fact that you know that you are dealing with people's lives, you can't rest.*

Dineo took the perspective that the students' leaders struggle is for the working class. She reported that

*Whether you are in the SRC your main concern is the struggle for students who do not have financial aid, you try to make sure that they remain in the institution.*

The findings of the study are that even though the class struggle is perceived as men's terrain, women student were dealing with day to day student issues. Women student leaders did win as many cases as men student leaders.

Bjarke (2008) argues that the fact that student politics draw so heavily on discourses of the struggle against apartheid that the necessity of class tends to marginalize the position of women in the struggle matrix. This is because former struggle heroes have been men and women's place has been implied to be in the home, doing domestic work. Even if women have proved that they were equally capable to defend Students rights, in student politics they are still undermined.

#### 4.3.8 Quota system

The findings of my study suggest that women were not taken seriously in the SRC because they were nominated into positions of power only because of constitutional obligation. Women student leaders as a result were undermined. They were not regarded as capable leaders. Senzi reported that when she was in leadership her male comrades were calling her an '*affirmative action comrade*'. Dineo also suggested that

*Women are seen as quota and they are not taken seriously*

My findings suggest that even though the quota system was meant to redress the gender inequalities in the PYA structures, the gender policy was not applied correctly. There were few women deployed in the SRC as compared to the required number. The quota and the 50/ 50 policy were not applied. Secondly those few women who were deployed in the SRC were not given space to lead. That has also been observed by Lerato. She argued that

*We preach women must lead, women must lead but in practice they don't give them the chance.*

Lerato further argues that:

*There is a concern that we don't see women in leadership. We put our focus on a quota system. That should be an indicator that we are in trouble. It shouldn't be something that is celebrated. My personal view is that it shouldn't have gone far where it increased to 50 50 because it gives us a false picture that women are now participating and is not true. Because if I am there, and I'm not developed, I'm not ready. A quota is a dangerous alert to me. Is not something that we can say we are conquering male domination. We are addressing quantity while the quality is not addressed.*

Lerato suggests that as much as there was a need to enforce gender equality, despite having a policy that suggests that at least there should be 40% of women in all leadership structures (SASCO) and that suggests that at least there should be 50% (ANCYL) of

women representation in all leadership structures, women leadership skills are not developed.

The issue of capacity in student leadership is paradoxical. All participants reported that the SRC environment was harsh, tough, challenging. They suggested that women were not given a space to lead or to prove that they were capable leaders. At the same time women felt that they were not given positions of leadership because they were not capacitated. All participants spoke about capacity and leadership but there was no clear definition of capacity and the scale used to measure the leadership capacity was not clear.

Hardiman & Jackson (1997) suggest that the dominant group has exclusive power to define and enact reality and to determine what is normal, real and correct. At UKZN men in the SRC defined the capacity in their own terms and the manner in which they measure it is used as a tool to exclude women. That is why Lerato was against the 50/50 or quota policy. She felt that it was addressing quantity instead of the quality. As much as there is a need to teach women to lead, I argue that the challenge at UKZN SRC is that both men and women have internalised their domination and subordination respectively. Men did not take women seriously because they assumed they were in leadership only because of constitutional obligations and at the same time women accepted that by thinking that they did not have capacity.

The study found that women were mostly leading in lower positions in terms of the SRC leadership hierarchy. There were mostly give the positions of finance, or project or secretary general (Figure 3). Women students were given positions that are service based. They were not given positions that requires decision making. This is because women were undermined. They were in leadership because of the constitution not because of their leadership capabilities. The participants suggested that if they were man they were going to be given better positions.

Tina: ... *a male that is not capacitated enough just because he's a male; he will be given a position that is above you. Even if you can see that your leadership qualities are better than him but because you female you have to go under him.*

Tina suggests that even if women student were having leadership skills they were not in top positions. Men despite any weaknesses were given positions that will give them more power, compared to the positions of women. Tumi reported that she has been leading in the same positions consecutively. She was not given executive positions because of her gender.

Tumi: *One, I would not have been redundant in SASCO. In SASCO I have been in the same position for two terms. I don't think if I were a male I would have been in that situation. The same thing goes with SRC. I have been in different positions – the RLO and Academic and transformation – but I don't think I could have been experiencing the same thing. If you are a woman – you must see for yourself.*

Happy reported that she was once nominated as president but because of her gender students had doubts of her leadership. According to her, her colleagues raised personal issues to hinder her from becoming a president.

#### **4.3.9 Lack of support**

The findings of study suggest that women leaders did not get support from their male colleagues, other women student and from management. Men used to caucus on their own and they were expecting women to support them.

Tina: *They do that I don't know, man don't support woman but they support each other. That's the situation.*

Women at the same time were not supporting each other. They were not voting for females. Tina reported that:

*Sometimes you feel that sometimes women let you down. It's worse if you are not in their cabal. Women leaders were always having clashes.*

Lerato speaking when asked whether she gets support from other women reported that:

*It depends on people, but for me I had support from women from the SRC, but in political structures I never had support from women instead of support those (*

*women in the political structures) were the people who were really pressing my head down. In males it varies. Sometimes you get support sometimes you don't. It depends on people as I have said before.*

Lerato led with her friends in the SRC that is why she had support. Happy reported that she got support from her boyfriend who became her own fan. Findings suggest that women did not have support in general. They only get support from their friends and their boyfriends.

The findings of the study suggest that women instead of supporting one another were supporting men.

*Dineo: Women become a quota or a voter for an individual who's going to support a man and that's the problem that I had.*

*Tumi: Some women think a man must be the president and woman must be deputy. Women now do not see other women as a president, they are seen as deputies.*

Hardiman and Jackson (1997) suggest that "the psycho social processes at the unconscious level represent blind or naïve collusion with the maintenance of oppression. The oppressed and the oppressor come to accept the dominant logic system and justification for oppression as normal and right" (p.5). Both men and women students have colluded with the oppressed situation. This is why women did not support other women who are in leadership positions. At the same time since men are readily accepted as leaders, men as members of the agent group could not accept women to compete with them. Both women and men accepted that women are not good leaders and they justified that view.

#### **4.3.10 Where learning to lead took place**

##### **4.3.10.1. Organization**

Findings suggest that women leaders learnt to lead in political structures. They learnt through participating in debates, induction workshops, and through reading documents. For example Lihle reported that she learnt through inductions and documents, reading and interacting with people, comrades and documents. Lerato also suggest that women learn from whatever organization they affiliated to.

*You are taught things. You start working as a member of a branch first and then get to your branch executive committees. You develop yourself, you go to workshops, you learn from other women and you get some who may be from different ranks. Some women are RAG members. I think organizations start by giving them the basics, the fundamentals and another important thing I think they give themselves [is] time to develop themselves*

Women student leaders learnt to lead in a male dominated environment, where student politics reflects the male dominated history of struggle discourses. They learnt in institutions where they were asked for sexual favours, sidelined and marginalised. The findings of the study suggest that the nature of the environment where women students learn to lead obliterates women's interest in leadership.

Furthermore, student leaders learn leadership in student organizations, clubs and societies. According to the UKZN SRC constitution, the SRC, in its capacity as the umbrella organization for all students organization on campus, must oversee all student organizations and has the power to withdraw recognition of such student organizations on campus (UKZN SRC Constitution, clause 7.3.1). The clause suggests that student organizations are administered by the SRC. Organizations report to the SRC and the SRC decides to recognize or withdraw a particular organization.

If the SRC itself is struggling to deal with issue of gender equity, then students' organizations will have the same challenge. Again the University does not have a structure in place to teach women students leadership skills. When participants were

asked about the implications of leadership development for undergraduates, all participants stated that it would have a positive impact on student governance. Whitt (1991) in her study argues that coeducational institutions have academic structures and traditions that reinforce rather than counteract masculine qualities. She reports that sexism is institutionalized and that women are marginalized in and out of the classroom. She further reports that the stereotypic messages about what women should or should not or can and cannot do are a contributing factor for the lack of participation in student leadership. A 'null' environment can be defined as the absence of encouragement (Whitt, 1991).

#### *4.3.10.2 Home*

Findings suggest that some women learnt to lead from their homes. Women in student leadership were taking care of their siblings. They were nurturing and taking care of them. Tina for example reports that

*When you grow up you know that there are people that you need to be responsible for and you can't just be responsible for someone if you can't lead them. So it starts with basic things. So when you come to the leadership position you are giving a space to a leader do what they can do for other people. To me leadership is more of stewardship. A leader is a servant to other people.*

Senzi: *I think we learn to lead at an earlier stage. At home I was doing everything especially for my male siblings. I had to do everything they didn't do much; they always follow me, even if they want something they were asking me. They requested things from me because they see me as a mother. From an early age my siblings always looked up to. So from home it is still leadership.*

Women drew largely on the leadership style they have learnt in their home to lead in the SRC. They were like parents to their cohorts. Women leadership style reflected that women were nurturing, caring and their leadership was more of stewardship as compared to men.



#### 4.3.10.3. Role models

The findings suggest that women learnt to lead by observing people who led before them. They mentioned that they learnt by observing their mothers, fathers and grandmothers. Women students reported that they learnt to lead from their immediate families. Dineo, for example, modelled her leadership style on that of her father who is a member of the parliament. According to her, her father inspired her to participate in leadership at an early age. She started to participate in leadership at primary school where she became a prefect. Tumi also suggest that her mother was in a leadership position. Her mother is leading in the African Congress Women's League. Tumi observed her mother and that is how she learnt to lead. Lerato further reported that her mother and her aunts are participating in different leadership positions:

*I've always been fortunate whenever I go I find people that I can really they are grooming me, people that I can learn from, so I've always been fortunate.*

*Lihle: Eh, I think it takes you to have passion and to listen more to other good leaders, not squabbles leaders, it takes you to look at what is good.*

Zinhle also suggest that she learnt to lead from different people that included her mother, grandfather and her uncle.

*"My family members were in different positions in politics so I got inspired. That's why I am a leader as well" (Zinhle).*

Whitt argues that, "Dynamic female role models force people to see things; it is an awareness of what women face and expands the image of what women can do" (1991, p.204). Boatwright & Krause further argued that "the absence of female professors in the University system who hold professional and familial leadership positions have an impact on women's interest on running for leadership positions"(Boatwright & Krause 2008.)

The study however suggests that women learnt from both genders how to lead. Women student leaders were not only inspired to lead by women but they were also inspired by men who were their relatives. I will argue therefore that women can have men and women role models. Role models could be any person that women like and trust. The

women in my study also indicated that they learnt to lead from their male and female teachers.

#### **4.3.11. Withdrawal**

The environment where the women student leaders in my study lead and learn to lead had a negative effect on them. My findings suggest that some women participants left leadership after their first term of office. For example, Lerato reported that:

*The environment it does not encourage; it de-motives and some people just choose to be reserves and just do their own things and sit in their corner (Lerato).*

Tina also reports that women after their first term of office did not want to avail themselves for a second term: According to her

*The environment is too harsh and the next thing when term finishes you don't want to be concerned with issues of leadership.*

Some women participants did not even finish their term as student leaders. They resigned. For example Happy could not balance her academic work, her leadership role and her gender role. When she was asked if her experiences would be different if she was a man, she said

*Yes, definitely I think I wouldn't have a pressure that I had as a girlfriend because if you are someone's girlfriend you still have a cook even if you cook two times a week but you have to. Males want you to cook at some point. I also wouldn't be getting negative attitude towards my leadership"*

Boatwright & Egidio (2003) report gender role as one of the factors contributing to lack of aspiration in women leaders. According to them gender role expectations for females may reduce aspirations for college women invested in maintaining their socially feminine gender identity. My findings suggest that indeed women left leadership to maintain their identity as women. Happy for instance left her leadership positions because she had to cook for her boyfriend and at the same time she had to deal with her academic pressure.

#### 4.3.12 Internalization

Women student leaders, in my study, have accepted their gender roles as normal. Happy reported that she felt pressured as a girlfriend.

*Happy: I still have to cook. Even if you cook two times a week but you have to. Males want you to cook at some point.*

The women leaders tried to live up to societal demands by colluding with their subordination. With regards to Happy, her boyfriend was also in leadership positions and also a student but Happy had to deal with all the domestic duties. This shows the extent in which women student leaders have internalised their subordination. Francis defines internalised subordination as when “women who have been socialised in an oppressive environment and who accept the dominant group’s ideology about their group, have learned to accept a definition of themselves that is hurting and limiting” (Francis, 2004, p.1). Women student leaders have accepted that as women they are limited. They have accepted messages of what they can and cannot do.

These findings suggest that women collude with their gender prescribed roles in a way that subordinates women and privileges men. While men were busy engaging in political debates as leaders, women had to cook for them. This in a way limits women’s level of participation in student leadership. They feel pressured to choose between their leadership and gender prescriptions. For many of the women in my study, they end up sacrificing their roles as student leaders.

My findings suggest that women who remained in leadership positions lost, rather than gained, in self confidence. They experienced negative criticisms which made them to doubt their leadership ability.

*Zinhle: In the SRC environment you are really interrogated on what you were suppose to do. So there is more pressure in the SRC than in the Youth League. In the SRC you have people who always criticize you and you have to be very strong to be able to take the critics.*

Women leaders because of the negative criticism ended up not contributing in meetings.

Lihle suggested that:

*If women want to take part they are sabotaged in a way. They are shouted by males and they become uninterested.*

According to Lihle, women were not participating because of the manner in which men communicated with them in the SRC. Instead of assisting and supporting their female colleagues, male SRC members shouted and called them names. This has also been observed by Lerato. She reported that:

*Women are challenged in all angles. They are called empty. And I think the environment is very restrictive, sometimes you have brilliant ideas, you end up not doing it. You can't even do it because these people are going to kill me, you think I m going to have a problem you can see that this people aren't happy about my leadership anyway.*

Lerato's report shows that the environment in the SRC leadership is hostile towards women. The women participants mentioned that they are scared to voice their views because men will 'kill' them. The use of the term 'kill' is an indication of the relationship which men and women leaders have in the SRCs. Francis suggests that "internalised domination happens when men exert pressure or even mistreat women who question their role" ( Francis, 2004, 1). Men student leaders in the UKZN did not see women as leaders. They accepted their leadership roles as natural to them and as their terrain. Women who question their role were mistreated.

Men student leaders assumed that they cannot make positive contribution in the structure. Tumi talking about her experiences said:

*Women are scared to speak because in the SRC there is this assumption that suggests that women do not know a thing.*

Young (2000) suggests that target group accept that members of the agent groups are qualified, talented and deserving their credentials. In the UKZN women student because

of their internalized subordination assume that men deserve to be in positions of power because they are men.

The women participants in my study internalized their subordination. In many ways, the women in my study had internalised the sexism. They did not see themselves and other women as capable leaders. When women leaders were standing for a position, they would either discourage them from standing for that position because they were not sufficiently capacitated or they would look for their weakest points or use it against them as to prevent them to contest for a position.

According to Hardiman and Jackson's theory of oppression (1997), both dominant and subordinate groups have a role in supporting the continuation of the oppression, through individual behaviours, actions, attitudes and beliefs and by fulfilling their prescribed roles as dominant and subordinate. In UKZN student politics, both men and women have played a role in women leaders' oppression. They play victim, as Hardiman & Jackson (1997) put it. Women leaders also perpetuate women's oppression by putting themselves down, for example by not electing other women leaders. Women's psychological colonization makes them believe that leadership is for men.

#### **4.3.13. Hostility in student leadership**

The findings of study suggest that some women become aggressive as way of dealing with their oppressive situation. Their relationship with their man colleagues becomes hostile. Women reported that when dealing with challenges in the SRC they were 'rude', 'stubborn'. They made men to conform to them. Tumi suggested that if women do not make men conform

*Man will be on top of us all and I don't want that. Some of us will never be kept like that. What ever a man says I actually think most of them are stupid, unreasonable and are stubborn.*

Tumi's utterances reflect the anger that she has against her men colleagues. During the interview period Tumi was leading in the SRC for the third time. She reported her frustrations in the SRC. I will argue that the more women remain in the SRC, the more they get frustrated and become aggressive.

Hardiman & Jackson (1997) suggest that subordinate women display classic victim behaviour, such as withdrawal, aggression, having a sense of powerlessness, being unable to see options and choices, and using self put-downs. They absorb untruths about themselves. The SRC environment became the battlefield between men and women student leaders.

#### **4.3.14. Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have presented and discussed the findings from my study. The key points of concern were role conflict, exploitation, cultural imperialism, marginalisation, powerlessness, violence, masculinity hegemony in student politics, the impact of the quota system, support structure, where learning took place, hostility, withdrawal, internalisation and withdrawal.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Conclusion**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

My study's aim is to explore women experiences in student leadership. I wanted to find out if there were challenges faced by women who are in student leadership. I also wanted to find out why there are few women participating in student leadership. My findings suggest women student leaders experienced oppression in UKZN. Secondly, owing to socialization men did not readily accept women as leaders and at the same time women did not see other women as leaders. Further to that women's gender role affected their leadership aspiration. In this chapter I explain how oppression and socialization affected participation of women student in student leadership. I will then provide recommendations that UKZN could employ to deal with the current situation.

#### **5.2. Oppression**

In my study an oppressive environment between men and women student leaders was established. Women students at UKZN experienced sexism, in other words women were oppressed on the basis of their being women. Women were asked for sexual favours. The findings suggest that some women internalized their sexism by using their womanhood to seduce men to get positions (Dineo). Some because of the oppressive environment lost aspirations to leadership and self confidence. Women student leaders were disparaged and they were looked down upon by management, and by their men and women colleagues. Young's theory of Five Faces of Oppression (2000) asserts that oppression exists if a social group experiences exploitation, marginalization, violence, cultural imperialism or powerlessness. In the study women student experienced all "five faces". In addition to that women traditional gender role affected their leadership aspiration.

Women who tried their best to do their SRC work were not recognized. Women did not have power to decide even on the positions to occupy in the SRC. Men student leaders had caucuses to discuss issues of leadership without inviting women student leaders (Tina). The finding suggests that women internalized their subordination. They saw themselves as less capable to hold certain positions. Men at UKZN defined leadership

capabilities. They saw women as 'Affirmative Action comrades' and not leaders. They had stereotypes against women that suggest that women cannot lead. Men defined what is right or wrong, as Hardiman and Jackson has observed. According to them in an oppressive environment

the subordinates generally concentrate on basic survival needs, yet tend not to take open, self initiated action on their behalf. They display classic victim behaviour, such as withdrawal, aggression, have a sense of powerlessness, are unable to see options and choices, and use self put downs. They absorb untruths about themselves (from the dominants) and internalise them as true (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997, p. 3).

My findings suggest that in UZN some women student leaders concentrated on the survival needs. They used their womanhood to get positions of leadership. Women student leaders because of the environment became aggressive. That is why Tumi suggested that '*men are stupid*'. This is an indication of the anger and animosity that women student leaders operate with.

### **5.3 Women's and men's socialisation**

The findings of my study show that some women did not challenge their oppression because of their socialisation. Lerato narrated that she grew up with her four brothers and she was treated differently. She was reminded of her place as a girl. Thandi also said that she comes from a place where women put most of their time nurturing men. Towards the end of the term she concentrated more on becoming '*a good girlfriend*' at the expense of her leadership duties. Happy also reported that she left her leadership positions because she could not balance her gender role, her academic pressure and her leadership roles. Tumi further suggest that she came from a background where leadership was not *a woman thing*'. Women who grew up in such background feared to contest positions of power because leadership is not their thing anyway.

My findings further show that men student leaders were socialised in an environment where women were not taken seriously. That is why when participants were asked what to be done to change their situation most of them suggested that '*men should be taught*



*power sharing'* (Thandi, Lihle, Zinhle, Senzi and Lerato). Men in student leadership did not give a space to women to lead. They invited women to leadership because of constitutional obligations, not because they saw them as leaders. Women were 'others' and men were enjoying the fruit of being the dominant group. They were given positions of power because they were men. That is why Tina suggested that if she was a man she would not have to be worried.

*I've seen men, they are really relaxed. They don't care about everything. They just say what they feel like saying and people just take it because it is them: 'they are men'. If you are a woman you are leading to prove the point but if you are a man you just lead for the sake of leading. People believe that you can just lead if you are a man you don't prove a point, you don't prove anything.*

The findings of my study suggest that women had to constantly prove that they are leaders because they were not readily accepted as leaders whereas men are leaders just because of their gender. The findings suggest that the socialisation of men and women is one of the barriers that hinder women participation in student leadership.

## **5.4 Recommendations**

### *5.4.1. Leadership inclusion in the curriculum*

Astin & Astin report that "leadership skills are increasingly among the qualifications needed by employers of all kinds, from private corporations and non-profit organizations to government agencies and academic institutions" (2000, p.31). Concurrently, institutions of learning provide a powerful learning ground for students to experiment with and develop their leadership capabilities (Astin & Astin, 2000). At UKZN, leadership skills are not taught across all qualifications even though it is one of the skills required by future employers. Odendaal & Ndaba (2005) argue that even though different fields of study have different interpretation and meaning of leadership however issues of power and power relations are common. The inclusion of leadership in all qualification could therefore be possible. Allen, Bordas, Hickman, Matusak, Sorenson and Whitmire in Odendaal & Ndaba (2005, p. 11) suggest that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the focal point to leadership should be

1. To create a supportive environment where people can thrive, grow and live in peace with one another
2. To promote harmony with nature and thereby provide sustainability for future generations
3. To create communities of reciprocal care and shared responsibility; one where every person matters and each person's welfare and dignity is respected and supported.

I argue therefore that if student at the UKZN can learn leadership qualities as outlined above students self esteem could be developed. Again women will have self respect and more women will aspire to contest for leadership positions without fear of being undermined.

Boatwright & Egidio (2003) report that students who had leadership experience in high school may be the students most likely to receive leadership training. They would have gained interest in leadership previously. For those who have never been in leadership, they might not have the belief that they can lead and therefore are not interested. That is why it is important for the University to create classes that will develop leadership aspiration. Whitt (1991) findings suggest that in women colleges in the United States of America, women learn to lead through leadership developmental services and by using work of female authors to be informed about leadership. Women students are taught theories of leadership, communicating skills and leadership skill development. The WILL (Women Involved in Living and Learning) Program in one of the women colleges is used as a tool to train women in leadership. The programme combines academic course work, women in literature, women in law and in leadership (Whitt, 1991). I suggest that at UKZN as a starting point leadership skills development be included in the curriculum.

The inclusion of leadership as a module across qualification will increase women's participation in leadership. In the long term women will not only fill in positions as required by the affirmative action policy but they will be competent. Whitt (1991) suggests that institutions could learn from women's colleges the importance of challenging and pushing women to participate in leadership as a way of boosting their

self confidence. She further argues that the “fact that we are aware about women students’ self esteem, to say nothing and to take for granted that they know they are competent is to confirm their worst fears about their capabilities, women need to know that they are capable of intelligent thought and they need to know it in a right way” (Whitt, 1991, p.40). If UKZN can institute a leadership module which will include a socialisation awareness programme, women will be helped to unlearn the myths about their capability. At the same time men will be made aware about the untruthful myths about women that they were socialised with.

It has been noted that UKZN has created a policy which acknowledges students who participated in leadership by including their participation on their academic records. Again the university has also a sector for student development. However I want to argue that men are still benefiting more from this system as compared to women because they are the majority in student leadership across the board. Women need to be encouraged to participate in leadership. If the leadership is included in the curriculum their self esteem and aspiration will be developed.

### *5.2. Leadership development programme*

Whitt’s findings suggest that in the US women colleges’ women were taught to lead in the workshops such as emerging leaders’ workshops for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> years (Whitt, 1991). I suggest that in UKZN symposia be organized. Women students should attend these workshops from their first year of their study. This will be a way of stimulating the desire for leadership amongst women. In these workshop women students will share their experiences and their fears, and they will be able to come up with solutions.

Whitt (1991), Boatwright& Egidio (2003) and Miller & Krause (2004) suggest that role models are the most important component for women to aspire to leadership positions. Through role models, they see that they too are capable of being leaders. Miller & Krause (2004) further suggest that women did not run for leadership positions because they did not have female mentors that served as role models of leadership or who encouraged them to run. Boatwright & Egidio (2003) argue that “the absence of female professors in

the university system who hold professional and familial leadership positions an impact on women's interest on running for leadership positions" (Boatwright & Egidio, 2003) At UKZN there are women heads of schools and professors who can be women students' role models, however there is no space created for them to interact with those professors. If there could be a symposium designed for women, women would have the time to talk about their experiences, their challenges and come up with strategies to deal with those challenges. A symposium would also facilitate younger student leaders getting advice from senior leaders. Women students would be developed and they would be motivated to lead.

#### *5.4.3 Student parliament to be revived and be monitored*

Findings suggest that women have led as chairpersons in non-political student organizations. Again, findings suggest that at UKZN organizations that participate in SRC elections are mostly political with the exception of a few such as the Student Christian Fellowship and Muslim Students Association. Other student organizations that are non-political do not participate in SRC elections. It is therefore necessary to have a student body that will enhance maximum participation of students in student issues. Whitt (1991) in her study suggest that there is a need to assess the environment which student lead under. What opportunities for leadership are available, and to what extent do women avail themselves of those opportunities? If there are no such opportunities, what are the reasons? A body like the student parliament should be used as a means of attracting more students to participate in student governance. If this body could be made more functional and be monitored by the student services office, more students would have an opportunity to participate in student governance issues. Since the findings have also indicated that student politics excludes women I am convinced that women students could meaningfully participate through other channels.

#### *5.4.4. Review SRC constitution regarding gender representations*

The SRC constitution should be reviewed. It should be more explicit on issues of gender representation. Currently the SRC constitution is silent on gender representation in the

SRC. Only organizations which have constitutional obligations regarding gender representation submit female candidates. Since the SRC constitution is silent in this regard, it is within the organization's jurisdiction how they prioritise their list of candidates. Constitutional obligations regarding gender representation should be extended to the SRC electoral policy. This would be the first step to challenge gender oppression in student politics and as Bjarke (2008) has observed that gender oppression has remained unchallenged in student politics for a long time. If organizations were therefore forced to give women space to lead, there would be more women who would participate in student leadership. In addition the SRC substructures – house committees, faculty representatives, students' union – should be obliged to have female representatives.

## **5.5 CONCLUSION**

My research aim is to explore women's experiences in student leadership at UKZN. I answered the following critical questions: How do the women students describe their leadership experiences? How do the women students learn to lead? And how does the environment in which the women lead and learn to lead, affect their leadership experiences? Data for this qualitative study was generated through interviews. Findings in my study suggest that women student leaders experienced oppression. Further to that, women also had to deal with role conflict when they were in leadership.

I presented a series of recommendations which the UKZN management could employ to change the current situation in the UKZN student leadership. I further recommend that there should be engagement between student leaders and the management as a way of improving the role of women in student leadership.

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## **Annexure A**

### **Interviews questions:**

1. What leadership position do you hold?
2. How long have you been in that position?
3. Do you mind telling me your age? 20-25 / 25-30/ 30-35
4. Are you in leadership position for the first time?
5. If no, where were you leading before and what leadership position were you occupying?
6. Who influenced you/ advised or convinced you to participate in student leadership?
7. Is leading in the SRC different from leading other organizations?
8. What do you think are reasons? What are similarities and differences?
9. How do women students lead?
10. From your view, how do women learn to lead?
11. How do environments in which they lead and learn to lead, affect their leadership experiences
12. How did the women students deal with the challenges associated with student leadership?
13. So, How do women students describe their leadership experiences?
14. Would any of these experiences have been different, do you think if you were a man?
15. So from your view what are the implications of students' experiences for coeducational Universities, like ours interested in developing leadership opportunities and skills for undergraduate women?
16. From your view now what do you think are the reasons for lack of participation of women in leadership at the University of KwaZulu Natal?
17. What do you think should be done to encourage women participation in student leadership?

## **Annexure B**

### **INFORMED CONSENT**

#### **Dear participant**

My name is Fisani Shabalala. I am studying towards Masters Degree at the University of Kwazulu Natal. Part of the requirement to complete my degree is conducting a research. The aim of my study is to explore women experiences in student leadership and my long term objective is to see more women participating in student leadership.

As part of women student leaders and former leaders at the University of Kwazulu Natal I am requesting you to participate in my study. I will conduct in depth interviews to find out your experiences of participating in student leadership. I am therefore requesting you to give as much in depth information as you can and to be honest in your responses. The research is not only for my qualification but its aim is to contribute to gender equity and transformation in student leadership. Your honest response will assist be highly appreciated.

All interviews will be tape recorded and be transcribed. I will take approximately an hour of your time. As a participant you have a right to withdraw statements that you feel should not be included in the study. Participation in my study is voluntarily and therefore is not obligatory. As a participant you have a right to withdraw your participation at any time. For confidentiality your names will not be used during interviews or in the study. I will use a pseudonym. Interviews questions are not too personal. However during the interviews you have a right not to respond to a question that you feel uncomfortable with. You can also ask questions of clarity during the interviews.

You are therefore requested to sign an informed consent form as an indication that you have agreed to participate in the study. The form is not a binding document as I have said you are free to withdraw your participation any time. You are free to contact my supervisors for more information. Their contact details are below.

Thank you in advance

Yours truly,

Fisani Shabalala

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### **Supervisor's details**

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**Annexure C**

**DECLARATION**

I..... (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

**SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT**

**DATE**

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