A NARRATIVE INQUIRY ON FEMALES' LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES: LEARNING FROM THREE SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN TWO DISTRICTS OF KWAZULU-NATAL

BY

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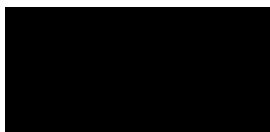
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January 2021

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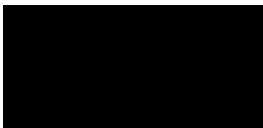
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STATEMENT BY THE SUPERVISOR

This thesis has been submitted with/ without my approval.

14 January 2021

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Supervisor: Dr P.E. Mthembu   Date

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this study firstly, to my parents, Nomusa and Musa Mdabe. I love you. Secondly, to my best friend, Lemohang Tebeli, who gave me great support. Thirdly, to all the female principals who are working under rough conditions, I salute you.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to narrate the lived experiences of three female principals from secondary schools in KwaZulu-Natal. The study further explored how gender-related barriers affect and influence female principals' leadership experiences. The study used three research puzzles: What are the lived experiences of female principals who have acquired leadership positions in secondary schools? How do female principals' experiences shape their leadership practices? What can we learn from the stories of female principals regarding their leadership experiences and practices in the midst of gender-related issues?

Framed by the Complexity Leadership Theory and the Intersectionality Theory, this study utilised a narrative inquiry methodology, where field texts were generated through narrative interviews and collages. Two narrative inquiry levels of analysis were used to analyse field texts, that is, the narrative analysis and the analysis of narratives.

The findings reveal that female principals' leadership experiences are influenced by their upbringing, their school context, and the amount of development they received as post-level one educators. Another finding revealed that the poor implementation of gender policies in education contributes to the hurdles that women encounter in educational leadership. Women also need mentorship to enhance their leadership experiences. Furthermore, we learn from the findings that, female principals experienced the glass ceiling effect within three levels: societal, organisational and individual. Lastly, we learn that despite the barriers they experienced, these female principals were resilient leaders who found ways to mitigate their leadership path obstacles. This study implies a need to create more support platforms for female principals to reduce contextual factors that contribute to women's difficulties in their leadership practices.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DBE   Department of Basic Education

SMT   School Management Team

CLT   Complexity Leadership Theory

SASP   South African Standards for Principalship

SASA   South African Schools Act

HOD   Head of Department

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<div align="center">**CHAPTER ONE**</div>

<div align="center">**BACKGROUND AND ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY**</div>

1.1 Introduction and background of the study

The global trend in educational leadership faces a gender imbalance, where female leaders are fewer compared to male leaders. According to Jauhar and Lau (2018), globally the proportion of women in leadership compared to men is low; this is not to say that women are not represented, but their minimal presence in leadership positions indicates gender inequality. Until recently, the nature of leadership has been viewed as masculine; studies are now redefining the leadership discourse to include women. This narrative inquiry tells female principals' lived experiences and the meanings they attach to their leadership experiences. I retell these stories as experiences of female principals leading in secondary schools.

The presence of women in school leadership continues to be a challenge especially in secondary schools in South Africa as well as internationally (Coleman, 2003; Moorosi 2010). One of the policies that South Africa has conformed to is the Southern African Developing Countries (SADC) Gender Policy of 2004, which compels that member states should ensure that gender equality is achieved in the region (SADC, 2004). To be precise, this declaration's vision is to ensure equal opportunities for women and men's participation in the public, workplace, and private sectors, including decision making (SADC, 2004). These countries are committed to opening opportunities for both men and women and ensuring that gender is not a barrier to any social group. Locally, section 9 (4) in the Bill of Rights contained in the Constitution of South Africa of 1996 seeks to protect women's rights as well, namely by saying that no one should be discriminated on any grounds, particularly gender (RSA, 1996).

Subsequently, there is the promulgation of other gender equality policies, including the Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Policy of 2001. This policy seeks to encourage women's participation in various sectors in society, including leadership roles in education. While such policies exist, their outcomes are not as positively visible as they should be. Contributing to weak policy implementation Glass and Cook (2015) state that, women are under-represented due to

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home responsibilities, family life and the patriarchal orientation of leadership. Hence, they encounter impediments as they aspire to be leaders in various sectors, including education. Collectively, policies seem not to fully minimize the obstacles that women encounter in their upward movement. Therefore, this narrative inquiry tells the lived experiences of female principals amid gender-related barriers.

This study is not merely an academic experience for me, but it is close to my heart as a female student, whose mother struggled into leadership. She eventually took early retirement as a principal due to the demands that stood before her as a married female principal. When she retired, I had little understanding of the dynamics and struggles of female educators aspiring to be principals; and the struggles they faced when they acquired leadership positions. Coming from a family that clearly distinguishes gender roles through culture and social norms, I explicitly understood my gendered role as a female. As a result, I conformed to this as a cultural lifestyle; however, being a student in the educational leadership, management and policy discipline changed my view of power structures in the household and in the workspace. This study gave me a broader spectrum of gender issues in educational leadership for female principals.

Literature suggests that the advancement of women into leadership positions, mostly in secondary schools is faced with the deep rooting of patriarchal culture in many communities and schools in South Africa, resulting in women facing more constraints compared to men (Diko, 2014; Mestry & Schmidt, 2012; Moorosi, 2010). Collectively, previous studies allude that women face numerous challenges even after acquiring leadership positions including gender stereotypes and discrimination, lack of mentorship and support; as a result, some women end up withdrawing from their positions (Cross-Hillier, 2012; Davids, 2018; Glass & Cook, 2015). This explains why women make up only 38% in the principalship population, yet they make 68% of the teaching staff (Davids, 2018). Nonetheless, some women who acquire leadership positions have been good educational leaders through their nurturing ability and other leadership skills, as observed in this study.

Women through their educational leadership differ from men with mainly two elements: they focus on instruction along with nurturing; and they integrate principal-teacher relationships with instructional leadership (Oyeniran & Anchomese, 2019; Shaked, Glanz, & Gross, 2018). This helps women to maintain effective work relationships that influence teacher performance, which

in turn, improves learner outcomes (Oyeniran & Anchomese, 2019). This is important in understanding female leadership as similar and differing accounts come out of the principals' narratives in this study. This study will add to the research on female leadership in South Africa.

It is well documented that South Africa has evolved. Now the country is close to thirty years into a democracy with substantial change, improvement, and setbacks in the education system and in educational leadership. In the initial stages of democracy, the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996, was legislated; it speaks about school leadership and management's vitality in the functioning of the education system and the advancement of schools and learner outcomes amongst other things (SASA, 1996). Then the South African Standards for Principalship (SASP) was introduced in the pursuit to restructure leadership and management of South African public schools. This was updated in 2015 as means to provide quality in the education system through enhanced pedagogic practices and improvement of learner outcomes, but it does not attend to gender issues in educational leadership (SASP, 2015). This policy influences women's leadership practices since they have to adhere to it, regardless of them being unprepared for this position. It is visible in Moorosi's (2010) study that, women in South Africa experience barriers in their advancement into leadership positions, resulting in few women taking up leadership positions. Amid the stipulated reality, this study intended to understand female principals' lived experiences and the meanings they attached to their leadership experiences, despite gender-related barriers.

1.2 Statement of the problem

From the above background and policy implementation issues, the existing body of knowledge in gender and leadership insists that gender policies should provide a gateway for both men and women's leadership participation. However, it is not the case in educational leadership, since adopted gender policies in South Africa are not fully supporting women's advancement into leadership positions in society and the workplace. Isaac, Kaatz and Carnes (2012) indicate that gender policies have good intentions and should ensure that women gain equal access to previously male-dominated leadership opportunities. Nonetheless, access to such opportunities remains a problem for women as gender-related barriers persist in hindering women's advancement into leadership.

Furthermore, female principals in secondary schools face many challenges resulting in them being few in educational leadership positions in secondary schools than men (Coleman, 2003; Coleman, 2017; Isaac et al., 2012). While women remain under-represented, they also face numerous challenges resulting from societal, organisational and individual experiences. Therefore, female principals' journeys differ from those of their male counterparts. This study looked at female principals' leadership practices in three secondary schools, in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. These narratives will contribute to existing South African research in education by exploring women's upward movement and their current leadership experiences. These includes the gender-related obstacles female principals encountered in their advancement and their lived experiences in leadership. My belief is that research on female leadership will provide knowledge of female principals' actual experiences and their resilience strategies.

The focus of this study was to explore how female principals experience educational leadership in secondary schools. Telling their stories and experiences will help address the knowledge gap in educational leadership. The literature lacks the stories of how female principals experience leadership in secondary schools; this study built on existing knowledge in educational leadership and management in relation to gender. The experiences were captured in narratives that come from the participants' field texts.

1.3 Rationale and motivation for the study

Narrative inquiry's three levels of justifications foregrounded the rationale and motivation for this study. These levels comprise of personal, practical, and theoretical justifications (Clandinin, 2013). At a personal level, I did this study to explore the lived experiences of female principals' leadership journey and the contributions of gender-related barriers; and to retell their narratives. I grew up in a household that clearly defined gender roles. Therefore, being a female, I was always seen as vulnerable. My role was in the soft skills and not in having the freedom to choose anything outside the feminine category. I was not treated the same way as my brothers because I am a female, so the gender barriers were enforced at an early stage of my life. This makes it hard as one grows to move out of the socially constructed roles. It was only at a later stage that I have moved out and believed that gender roles should not limit me. Another element close to my heart is women empowerment, as I strongly believe that women have the ability to lead institutions successfully. Therefore, this study was not only educational experience but also a personal experience where I

intended to be a part of retelling the stories of other women, who inspire change in the educational field. I am also passionate about changing the status of women in society and in the workplace. This has to start with how I view my status as a woman and how I have risen above the socially constructed barriers.

At the practical level, female principals' experiences are not well researched in South Africa; hence, this study adds to the educational leadership discourse. Moreover, exploring this phenomenon enabled me to understand the lived experiences of female principals in secondary schools. I was determined to inquire into female principals experience their journey into leadership and their experiences as leaders regardless of the existing barriers that come with gender stereotypes pertaining to leadership. Gender stereotyping affects women's advancement into leadership positions since leadership has been identified as masculine (Jauhar & Lau, 2018; Lumby, 2015). This makes it interesting to present the findings on how female principals could navigate their barriers and leave footprints for other female educators aspiring to be principals.

At the theoretical level, some strides are made to increase the participation of women in educational leadership. However, in various contexts, educational leadership's discourse faces a challenge because of the noticeable gap between women and men participation (Oyeniran & Anchomese, 2019). The role of women has been traditionally-based as being in the lower social hierarchy, to the extent that even when women attain educational leadership positions, they face multiple challenges like discrimination and lack of support (Cross-Hillier, 2012; Oyeniran & Anchomese, 2019). The leadership of women in schools has been praised for fostering the socio-affective development of students and work motivation for teachers (Oyeniran & Anchomese, 2019). They used to their advantage the gender attributed trait of nurturing to ensure the school's effective functioning (Murakami & Tornsen, 2017; Shaked et al., 2018). Moreover, the most challenging side of female principals is that they experience barriers in their upward movement in leadership. Women may qualify to attain leadership positions, but they encounter the barrier caused by stereotypical myths and the masculine orientation of leadership (Mestry & Schmidt, 2012). This is greatly contributing to the under-representation of women in educational leadership. Hence, I explored this area to gain more enlightenment on the experiences of female principals in the South African context.

1.4 Research puzzles

In narrative inquiry, critical questions are referred to as research puzzles. Narrative inquirers use 'research puzzles' to understand the nature of human experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Subsequently, this study used three research puzzles to gather the narratives of the participants.

This study sought answers to the following research puzzles:

1. What are leadership development avenues experienced by female principals before their appointment to principalship?
2. What are female principals' experiences of leading secondary schools, and how do these experiences shape their leadership practices?
3. What can we learn from the stories of female principals regarding their leadership experiences and practices in the midst of gender-related issues?

These research puzzles are derived from the objects of this narrative inquiry. The objectives of this study were:

1. To describe the leadership developments of female principals in secondary school. understand the leadership experiences of female principals in secondary schools.
2. To narrate the experiences of female principals in breaking the glass ceiling in educational leadership and overcoming gender-related challenges.
3. To examine the gender-related barriers that these principals might have encountered during and after the appointment.

1.5 Clarification of key concepts

The key concepts are clarified below to ensure the correct interpretation of terminology in this study.

1.5.1 Leadership

Leadership focuses on a leader's actions by ensuring that institutions function accordingly (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Research suggests that leadership is a process of influencing others to achieve and maintain certain goals or objectives (Northouse, 2013; Yurl, 2013). Throughout this

dissertation, leadership refers to the influence of female principals in secondary schools, despite gender-related barriers.

1.5.2 Gender

For this study, gender is understood as a social construct that distinguishes categories of male and female (Rushton, Gray, Canty, & Blanchard, 2019; Shakeshaft, 1993). This includes social behaviours that are categorised as feminine or masculine. Hence, gender can be viewed as both an origin and function. When gender is described as an origin, it emerges from social behaviours and constructs (Pryzgoda & Chrisler, 2000). When gender is described as a function, it refers to the use of this concept, for instance, in classification (Pryzgoda & Chrisler, 2000). In this study, gender refers to how female principals behave and how their feminine constructs were derived. It is also used as a function in order to distinguish between male and female leaders.

1.5.3 Social and professional identities

Social and Professional identities are constructed from individual and social elements. The professional identities of principals are socially constructed by the processes of their leadership and management roles (Johnson & Crow, 2017). This includes how female principals view themselves and their leadership together with the social construction of leadership that influences their professional identities. Throughout this dissertation the term social and professional identities will be used to refer to the social and professional roles that female principals take up.

1.5.4 Lived experiences

Lived experiences describe the first-hand account of events, feelings and the social context. These experiences are unique to the one who experiences them. In qualitative research, lived experiences are understood as representation and understanding of the participant's experiences, or stories; and how these influences their perception of knowledge (Given, 2008). In this study, lived experiences will refer to the accounts that influence female principals' narratives in their leadership journey.

1.6 Outline of the study

This dissertation is presented with seven chapters, and below is a synopsis of each chapter.

Chapter One

Chapter one presents the background and orientation of the study. In this chapter the following are included: Introduction and background of the study, Statement of the problem, Rationale and motivation for the study, Research puzzles, Clarification of key concepts, Demarcations of the study, and Outline of the study.

Chapter Two

Chapter two offers a review of international and national literature relating to the phenomenon under study. It draws on various topics that capture female leadership in education. It also offers lessons that can be learnt from international and national experiences of female leadership.

Chapter Three

Chapter three presents the study's theoretical framework, which consists of two theories: The Complexity Leadership Theory and the Intersectionality Theory. The first theory offers the leadership framing of the study, whereas the second theory encompasses the gender framing within the study.

Chapter Four

Chapter four deals with the research methodology and design adopted for this study. The focus was greatly on the narrative inquiry methodology which influenced the study, and the sampling strategies. The chapter also presents the methods used to generate data that form the narratives. It also includes method of analysis and how these narratives will be presented. Lastly, it includes issues of trustworthiness, limitations of the study and ethical consideration issues.

Chapter Five

Chapter five presents the narrative analysis, which is the first level of analysis in narrative inquiry. The narratives of the participants are presented separately with their collage portraits attached. These narratives provide a leadership journey of the three participants gathered from the field notes.

Chapter Six

Chapter six presents the analysis of narratives, which is the second level of narrative inquiry analysis. This chapter presents the common themes that arose from the narratives of the participants. These themes are presented in relation to the research puzzles.

Chapter Seven

Chapter seven presents a brief summary of study, and conclusions drawn from this study. The chapter then discusses the implications for further research.

1.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter mapped the introduction and background of the study. Additionally, it presented the statement of the problem, rationale, research puzzles and clarification of concepts. This chapter shows the development of the dissertation, and the outline of the chapters was presented. The next chapter will offer the review of literature.

<div align="center">**CHAPTER TWO**</div>

<div align="center">**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**</div>

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided an overview and introduction of the study. In that way a clear background was set, clarification of concepts in this study was given as well as details on the study's rationale and research puzzles were provided. This chapter presents a review of literature on the leadership experiences of female principals. Various sub-topics are presented that explain female leadership in education.

2.2 Trends in the educational leadership of women

Female leadership has been present from ancient times. However, it was not prominent and encouraged, until recently where leadership has clearly opened opportunities for women to participate. Hill, Miller, Benson and Handley (2016) mention that, women led in social movements that promoted social equality in various parts of the world. Women also lead efforts to improve sanitation and health care, develop public education, and create a social welfare system (Kim, 2016). This is an indication that women leadership is not a new phenomenon, but it has often been silenced in literature.

As more women attain leadership positions in different sectors, including education, their voices are now being heard. However, their representation in leadership positions remains low compared to that of men. This is often the case in educational leadership positions. A recent study suggests that there was an increase in female leadership in the mid-seventies, yet till today women remain low due to the perception held on women's capacity to lead (Chase & Martin, 2019). Women's capacity to lead is drawn from the opportunities they have in the workplace. Women are able to take up professions that were previously reserved for men. However, the greatest concern is the slow increase in their participation in leadership positions (Watson, Hodgins, & Brooks, 2017). Women in Australia and Vietnam have the right to equal opportunities in the workplace. However, informal power relations hinder their advancement (Mate, McDonald, & Do, 2019). Nonetheless, a recent study observed a relevant increase in women participation in leadership however, women's participation remains relatively low compared to that of men (Watson, et al., 2017). It can be concluded that women are under-represented in leadership positions.

2.2.1 The under-representation of female leadership

There are various causes for the under-representation of women in leadership positions, mainly the gender roles that are traditionally enforced. The traditional norms associated with women are based on the belief that characteristics and the perception that leadership roles are more fit for males than females (Al-Ruhaili, Salleh, & Ibrahim, 2020; Van Eupen, 2010). This results in women remaining under-represented in educational leadership positions. There are few women in educational leadership, while sadly more leave these positions due the challenges that limit their progression. Zikhali and Smit (2019) articulate that, there is a drop in female leadership in Secondary schools in Masvingo, Zimbabwe from 5.69% in 2009 to 2.66% in 2016. The data in South Africa seems to be scarce in terms of female principals' experiences (Zikhali & Smit, 2019). Women leaders are few in various sectors including education, which increases the gender inequality gap.

Sexism also plays a vital role in shaping these statistics on women leadership. This is visible in how women are excluded from networking with male counterparts because of the 'boys club' effect which allows only male network environments placing women at the far end (Zikhali & Smit, 2019). The boys club is a network system for men in leadership and excludes women from being part of it (Chase & Martin, 2019; Zikhali & Smit, 2019). Women may want to learn from their male counterparts, but they experience exclusion from such networks for growth and development. This contributes to the minimal representation of female leaders.

2.2.2 The presence of policies does not increase women participation in leadership

As stated earlier, there are gender policies which address women's access to leadership opportunities; however, it still remains a challenge. Diko (2014) articulates that gender equality is addressed in the constitution and through the Commission on Gender Equality, including other policies and frameworks that should help women attain leadership positions. These are not ensuring that women have a smooth advancement into leadership. The reality is that women must work very hard and encounter the negative perceptions of their capabilities as leaders (Chase & Martin, 2019; Steele, 2017). Despite policy interventions on gender equality in South Africa, educational leadership favours men more than women (Diko, 2014). This then contributes to the under-representation of women in educational leadership.

There is considerable progress in South Africa regarding women's legal status as noted in the Constitution of South Africa of 1996. In South Africa, there is also the promulgation of other gender equality policies, including the Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Policy of 2001. This policy seeks to encourage women's participation in various sectors in a society which includes leadership roles in education (RSA, 2001). While many policies exist to open opportunities for women, their upward movement is not as easy. Glass and Cook (2015) state that policies seem to not fully minimize the obstacles women encounter in their upward movement.

In practice, South African women and men do not enjoy equal rights to opportunities in various sectors, including educational leadership (Mestry & Schmidt, 2012). Consequently, regarding the legislative strides made, there are numerous gaps in the implementation process. Referring to educational leadership, Lumby (2015) suggests that, the experiences of women principals in South Africa are similar to those elsewhere, with issues of gender at the forefront. The shocking reality shows that female principals' experience a constant battle against discrimination and the struggle to overcome the glass ceiling effect in educational leadership (Mate, et al., 2019; Zikhali & Smit, 2019). Therefore, the argument is not so much about policies that promote women participation but also about their experiences in the upward movement.

2.3 The upward movement of women in educational leadership

It is evident that women experience more obstacles than men in their career route. The expectations between male and female leaders in the workplace is different; women face scrutiny and the dilemma of femininity results in them being viewed as incapable to successfully lead (Chisholm-Burns, Spivey, Hagemann, & Josephson, 2017). The issue of gender in defining leadership fitness of individuals causes a widening of the gender gap in educational leadership. Therefore, women's upward movement in educational leadership presents these factors: female educators' anticipation for leadership, the acquisition of principalship for female candidates, female novice principals resuming leadership duties, and professional networks for novice principals.

2.3.1 Female educators' anticipation for leadership

During their anticipation phase, female educators should be prepared for leadership and management roles. The main focus is how leadership and management knowledge and skills are being developed (Moorosi, 2010). According to Moorosi (2014), gender inequality in school

leadership limits women's preparation and development for leadership and management roles. Part of their preparations requires women is to be participating in informal learning networks as means for preparation for leadership and management roles, however such networks are reserved for men (Moorosi, 2010). Women seem to lack opportunities to be part of such networks of growth as they anticipate to take up leadership positions.

Apart from the lack of network platforms for female principals, they do not have other female principals to motivate them. Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017) articulate that, women are discouraged to take up leadership positions due to a lack of women who are successful in leadership positions to look up to. It is important for women to have mentors who can offer behaviours and styles to influence aspiring female educators (Gandhi & Sen, 2020). Mentorship refers to the initial support, which helps women to understand how they are to advance in their careers (Gandhi & Sen, 2020). However, female principals lack such platforms to assist them in their leadership identity development and in enhancing leadership practices (Moorosi, 2014; Reyes, Dinh, Lacerenza, Marlow, Jospeh & Salas, 2019). This can help them to be confident as they aspire to take up leadership positions.

2.3.2 The acquisition of principalship by female leaders

In many African countries, there is no formal entry qualification into principalship. South Africa is not an exception to this despite the fact that previously an Advanced Certificate in Education School Leadership was recommended. However, it did not materialise or reach its full potential. The appointment is often on the basis of successful records as teachers and involvement in management and leadership roles (Moorosi, 2010). In South Africa, the only preparation for principals is workshops organised by the Department of Basic Education [DBE] after the appointment which has minimal effect especially for female principals (Moorosi, 2010). Hence, the acquisition of principalship positions looks at access and entry into leadership positions. When women are seeking to be appointed into leadership positions, they may face the assessment of their skills and abilities to lead (Coleman, 2003; Moorosi, 2010). The problem is that most women do not get sufficient exposure and preparation for management and leadership positions, since the preference is given to men (Coleman, 2003). This is a result of the masculine norm of leadership which continues to increase the gender gap in secondary school leadership. Men are likely to be preferred for leadership due to the impact of the glass escalator effect. The glass escalator effect

refs to how men move into predominantly female professions because of privilege (Williams, 1992). Preference is given to men more than women in educational leadership because of the masculine identity of leadership.

2.3.3 Female novice principals resuming leadership duties

Having cracked the glass ceiling vertically women try to perform leadership and management roles. However, they still face the horizontal barriers which affect their performance in these positions (Moorosi, 2010). Women are required to work harder to prove their ability. This is the point where various factors like personal, social, and organisational influences play a significant role in women's experiences. At this point women, are already struggling greatly with internal issues of professional identities and confidence, due to the long stretch battle experienced in their upward movement (Carli & Eagly, 2007; Moorosi, 2010). Some female leaders resume leadership and management duties in risky areas as they are pushed to the edge; and experience the 'Glass Cliff'. The Glass Cliff is a term that describes that women are appointed to risky positions, even after breaking the glass ceiling (Haslam & Ryan, 2008). This contributes to the disadvantages female principals experience.

The case in most countries is that principals resume office without being trained for this position, some with minimal support. In Ghana and Nigeria, the length of time you have served in the field becomes the prerequisite for the appointment, while basic teacher training, certification, and experience are also essential before promotion to leadership, however, more training may be required for leaders to be successful. This perception of appointment may lead to incompetent leaders, and so Ibukun, Oyewole and Abe (2011, p. 3) reinforce that, "appropriate training for principals is required to fill the competence gap between experienced and inexperienced principals". Training of principals may have a positive contribution towards teaching and learning, and their leadership practices. Bush and Glover (2016) articulate that principals are appointed without training or even necessary qualification, but they try their best. This hits more on female principals since they are not exposed to leadership roles at an early stage.

Though there is no adequate training before the appointment of principals in South Africa, the training or induction provided after appointment does not add enough value to female principals' leadership practices. Bush and Glover (2016) say that one-month induction courses are not fit for

the purpose since it is staffed by people with limited experience, who use repetitive and inappropriate teaching styles, without linking the training to nationally legislated norms. The major problem with this course is that it is done after appointment, and so it may not serve the purpose (Bush & Glover, 2016). Therefore, to enhance leadership practice, there should be great time invested in the training and mentoring of novice principals.

2.3.4 Professional networks for female novice principals

Professional networks refer to learning communities that enhance career production. Female novice principals need more formal networking environments to enhance their leadership practices. Networks of professional principals are influential in the leadership experiences and change in organisations such as schools (Iyekolo, Okafor, & Abdulaziz, 2020; Kim, 2016). Studies reveal that the social capital gained from networking with influential leaders is even more important for advancement and job performance (Carli & Eagly, 2007; Hewlett, Peraino, Sherbin, & Sumberg, 2010). This can be advantageous for novice female principals. The lack of networking in the workplace for female principals creates a huge barrier in their advancement to leadership positions. These structures are important as women take up leadership positions, to enhance personal and professional identities in leadership positions (Gandhi & Sen, 2020). The developmental experiences within professional networks are able to contribute to novice principal leadership experiences.

2.4 The invisible barriers on female principals' leadership experiences

Women in educational leadership positions face numerous challenges before and after taking up leadership positions. This is often referred to as the Glass Ceiling effect, which causes hindrances in women's career advancement. According to Smith, Caputi and Crittenden (2012) the glass ceiling is a metaphor to explain the invisible obstacle that women face as they aspire to climb the hierarchical chains of command, meaning leadership positions. This creates a barrier for women, should they wish to be promoted to leadership positions, since stereotypes tend to favour men over women. According to Watson et al. (2017), women should be able to access leadership and management roles where gender policies are adopted, but this is not the case, as women still remain under-represented in such roles. The under-representation of women in educational leadership is largely due to the cultural expectation of women within the society which is transferred to the

institutions and internalised by women (Diko, 2014; Hill et al., 2016). Therefore, the barriers that women face come from the societal, organisational and individual spheres.

2.4.1 Societal Barriers

Societal barriers include gender stereotype, sociocultural cultural perspectives, and family responsibility. The first challenge that emerges from society is gender stereotype. Gender stereotype refers to the generalised view of men or women's attributes and roles (Mbithuka, 2019). The stereotype held of women is that they are nurturers. Hence colleagues and peers expect women to submit to caregiving responsibilities only, which can be inappropriate or discriminatory in a work setting (Heilman, 2012; Segkulu & Gyimah, 2016). Such stereotypes exist from the different upbringing of girls and boys (Al-Ruhaili, et al., 2020). Stereotypically men are expected to be independent, aggressive, competitive, rational, dominant, and objective (Crites, Dickson, & Lorenz, 2015). This makes men to be seen as fit for the control of learners.

Women, on the other hand, are seen as incapable. These perceived differences that gender stereotype impose are barriers that hinder women's advancement in their careers (Chase & Martin, 2019; Mthembu, 2013). As alluded in literature, gender stereotyping affects women's advancement into leadership positions, since leadership has been identified as masculine (Lumby, 2015; Jauhar & Lau, 2018). This causes women to have a double burden of pressure in doing their jobs well while overcoming stereotypes in their potential to lead (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). Women are constantly viewed as incapable of taking up leadership positions (Alqahtani, 2019; Mythili, 2017; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010). These stereotypes separate women from men within society.

Gender stereotyping is seen as an external barrier that affects women within the workplace which hinders even their motivation towards leadership positions (Jugmohan & Muzvidziwa, 2017; Makori, n.d.; Ndebele, 2018; Vassakis, Sakka, & Lemonakis, 2018). There is an idea that particular behaviours and personality attributes identify leaders. Uwizeyimana and Mathevula (2018), including Vassakis et al. (2018), articulate that leadership has been regarded as masculine due to its attributes, which causes women to be labelled into specific roles that are different from those of men. This barrier results from set gender roles that place men as fitting for leadership more than women. In Zikhali and Smit's (2019) study, it was observed that South African women often face barriers that are societally influenced. A female principal indicates how her leadership was tested

by the local community members and male colleagues who undermined her leadership just because she is a woman (Zikhali & Smit, 2019). This alludes to what Moorosi (2007) suggested in her study that, women in educational leadership in South Africa are hindered by traditional stereotypes that define leadership as masculine.

Culture refers to a set of beliefs, values, practices and norms associated with the local community and workplace (Al-Ruhaili et al., 2020; Shava, Tlou, & Mpofu., 2019). These are reflected in the roles assigned to women and men, which does not put women in leadership spheres. Diko (2014) also mentions that, apart from culture; race and ethnicity affect female educational leadership, despite the policies designed to improve such. These sociocultural stereotypes create a barrier for women upward movement. Sociocultural stereotypes hinder women since it places them in a position that they are unable to lead, mainly because they are women (Mthembu, 2013; Mythili, 2017). Therefore, Moorosi (2010) indicates that women in South Africa experience difficulties in their upward movement due to the community and schools' cultural attitudes. According to Coleman and Glover (2010) women's socio-cultural role is childcare and domestic responsibility whereas men are perceived as breadwinners, hence when women advance into leadership it serves no great value in their sociocultural status.

A similar case is observed in Vietnam, where women are unable to acquire leadership positions due to culture and its orientation of gender (Mate et al., 2019). Sociocultural beliefs include the norm that women should raise children and care for their family and homes; therefore, they avoid taking leadership positions which will break the cultural norm (Al-Ruhaili et al., 2020). In Zimbabwe, women face cultural barriers in their advancement since their status does not put them in leadership arenas (Shava et al., 2019). These cultural norms have circled women into spheres that do not see them as leaders. This is influenced by the attitude towards women leadership embedded in socio-cultural norms which favour men as leaders than women (Mberia, 2017). These traditional roles place women as nurturers in the family life; thus, conflicting with leadership roles that might encourage them to aspire to take up leadership positions (Gandhi & Sen, 2020; Mberia, 2017; Segkulu & Gyimah, 2016). Women are therefore entitled to family responsibility which is deeply entrenched in the sociocultural role as women. Women seem to be attached to their family roles; this hinders their advancement into leadership because they have to consider their family

first (Al-Ruhaili et al., 2020; Mate et al., 2019; Shava et al., 2019). This then causes work-family conflict for women.

Women struggle in their advancement into educational leadership positions due to these leadership position demands, consequently causing work-family conflict (Mthembu, 2013; Pirouznia, 2013; Shava et al., 2019). Mbithuka, Muola, and Maithya (2017) indicate that women leaders who have children, have a parental role to play which they often struggle to balance with work demands causing them to straddle with dual worlds. A study in Vietnam revealed that women have a great responsibility to maintain home and family life, giving them less time to advance in their careers; this is the case in other parts of the world (Mate et al., 2019). This responsibility placed on women makes it impossible for most women to easily take up leadership positions without worrying about other responsibilities that demand their time (Gandhi & Sen, 2020; Watson et al., 2017).

Therefore, women fear taking leadership positions because they might struggle with balancing their marriage roles and family life with their leadership positions (Amondi, 2011; Mberia, 2017). As a result, some women would rather wait until they reach their career objectives before settling with having a family (Mberia, 2017). Other women would wait until their children have grown before taking up leadership roles (Mberia, 2017). Studies in South Africa reveal that women leaders are already given family responsibility of nurturing, which affects their advancement in leadership (Mbithuka et al., 2017; Uwizeyimana & Mathevula, 2018). A similar study in the United States of America reveals that there is conflict in balancing family and leadership responsibilities (Pirouznia, 2013). This is connected to the gendered stereotype that women are assigned to specific gender roles thus they cannot take up leadership roles.

Women choose between these two options because they do not want to be in a dilemma of conflicting roles. Therefore, even when women have the opportunity to advance, they would rather take care of their family (Al-Ruhaili et al., 2020). The family-work balance causes women to experience dual pressures from ensuring family life wellbeing and work success (Gandhi & Sen, 2020). As a result, most women leaders are often single and some with fewer children, which allows them to not suffer greatly with balancing responsibilities. On the other hand, men are expected to identify long-term goals and prepare for advancement (Watson, et al., 2017). Women are therefore unable to advance at the same rate as men. In some cases, women are discouraged by family members. Al-Ruhaili et al. (2020) highlight that most women in their study were

discouraged by their immediate family so they cannot pursue their career. Women are often discouraged by family members and other family roles they take up as women.

2.4.2 Organisational Barriers

From the abovementioned barriers that emerge from society, they are transferred to the organisational structures that women work in. This leads to organisational barriers that women face in educational leadership. Organisational barriers result from organisational structures that deem leadership as masculine, thus pushing women to the bottom level of the hierarchy (Moorosi, 2007). Even though women are able to access leadership positions, they are faced with challenging traditional institutional practices that place men as sole leaders in such organisations (Longman & Anderson, 2016; Shava et al., 2019). Women in the workplace, are often categorised with communal attributes of being friendly, helpful and concerned with the compassionate treatment of others (Mthembu, 2013). In contrast, men are associated with agentic attributes that make them assertive, in control and confident (Mthembu, 2013). Already these attributes have grouped women at the lower level, hindering them from being viewed as leaders. Therefore, when they are in educational leadership positions their authority is often undermined by both male and female subordinates because they are women (Mberia, 2017; Rarieya, 2007). Organisational barriers hinder women from advancing into leadership positions.

It is observed that masculine organisational culture causes a barrier for women aspiring to be leader; this is the case in places where the social construction of leadership is masculine (Jauhar & Lau, 2018; Ndebele, 2018; Uwizeyimana & Mathevula, 2018). This social construction of educational leadership may result in women being discouraged from being promoted to leadership positions, especially in cases where they are seen as incompetent. In his findings, Ndebele (2018) indicates that the masculine construction of leadership has led female principals to be perceived as incompetent by both male and female colleagues. This perception causes women principals to experience exclusion due to the minimal support they receive. Women leaders do not get enough support to carry their leadership duties due to social construction of leadership (Msila, 2013; Ndebele, 2018). This barrier hinders the advancement of women into leadership positions despite their abilities to lead.

Women take longer in their leadership journey compared to men. Al-Ruhaili et al. (2020) indicate that women work years in education in order to qualify to lead, this is approximately seven to fifteen years. When they eventually do take up leadership positions and are strong enough, they are viewed as aggressive, whereas strong men are viewed as effective leaders (Duevel, Nashman-Smith, & Stern, 2015). This results in women being underestimated in their leadership abilities compared to men; to the extent that their authority is resisted (Longman & Anderson, 2016; Zikhali & Smit, 2019). Women in Omani work as teachers for an average of seven years before they advance into leadership positions (Al-Ruhaili et al., 2020). Masculinity is organisations greatly influences the experiences of female principals.

This masculine orientation of leadership is connected with the patriarchal attitudes of leadership. Colleagues in the workplace tend to reject the authority of women principals due to patriarchal attitudes associated with leadership which does not support the advancement of women in leadership (Zikhali & Smit, 2019). Therefore, women are required to work extra hard to prove their ability to lead. Zikhali and Smit (2019) reveal that, women have to live up to unrealistic expectations which often result in exhaustion due to the demands that emanate from work and personal life. Therefore, when women are strong enough to take up leadership positions, they are considered as aggressive and disliked (Al-Ruhaili et al., 2020). This impacts on the response of colleagues towards female principals. Watson et al. (2017) indicate that female principals' leadership has less recognition, to the extent that colleagues find it more acceptable to report to male leaders rather than female leaders.

Interestingly, in some cases it is more than the masculine orientation of leadership, but also the fear of misjudgement, should male colleagues work closely to female leaders, and be misunderstood as sexual attractiveness (Watson et al., 2017). These traditional patriarchal perspectives ensured that women perform the role of caretakers at home and men are breadwinners, which influences the organisational roles (Gandhi & Sen, 2020). These organisational roles place men as leaders that possess authoritative nature more than women (Gandhi & Sen, 2020). The work environment limits the ability to prepare women for leadership responsibilities to achieve educational goals (Gandhi & Sen, 2020; Shava et al., 2019). The preparation stems from the lack of support before and after appointment to leadership. Shava et al. (2019) bring an argument that the negative attitude towards women leaders causes an institutional barrier as their leadership is

challenged based on gender and ability to take up this position. The main contributor is lack of mentorship within the system. Women have no mentors who can assist them and provide support structures for novice principals (Longman & Anderson, 2016; Mate et al., 2019). A participant in Zikhali and Smit's (2019) study, indicated that she had done leadership and management course but she was not seen as fit to be a leader; the parents would put pressure on her performance no matter how much she tried. This is because she is a woman and is viewed as incompetent by colleagues and parents. Therefore, the masculinity of leadership affects women before and after appointment; hence it creates a glass ceiling for women aspiring to be leaders.

2.4.3 Individual and professional identity barriers

From barriers that exist within the society and the organisations, they are transferred to individual barriers; these influences how women perceive themselves and their professional identities. This can be viewed as the individual and professional identities which cause women to lack self-esteem. In this barrier, women are their own cause for under-representation, due to lack of self-confidence and assertiveness, and so avoid applying for leadership positions (Mberia, 2017; Mthembu, 2013; Mythili, 2017). This barrier is influenced by perceived gender roles. Therefore, even when given a chance to take up leadership positions some women are reluctant due to lack of self-confidence in their ability to lead (Mberia, 2017; Mythili, 2017; Reis & Hope, 2019). This individual barrier affects the professional identities of female principals. Their professional identity is not measured by whether they qualify, but they continuously strive to prove their ability to lead (Murakami & Tornsen, 2017). The professional identity of educational leadership is masculine, which becomes a barrier for women in educational leadership positions since they might not have male attributes of leadership, hence they are treated differently (Liang, Sottile, & Peters, 2016; Murakami & Tornsen, 2017). These barriers, therefore, may affect the leadership of women and largely contribute to the under-representation of women in educational leadership positions.

Women's individual and professional identities are classified by their femininity; therefore, they may be reluctant to take up leadership positions. Al-Ruhaili et al. (2020) emphasise that, when women and men are offered leadership positions, men desire to take up those positions, whereas women hesitate. This influences women to resign from leadership positions or opt not to take up leadership positions (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Zikhali & Smit, 2019). Zikhali and Smit (2019), indicated that personality traits act as a barrier to the advancement of some women since leading

in male-dominated places require academic and relational self-efficacy. In this regard, women remain reluctant to take up leadership positions without necessary skills. Kaaria et al. (2016) and Moorosi (2010) allude to this by saying that when women lack confidence and necessary skills, they are afraid of failure should they take up these positions. A similar trend in a recent study is observed, that female principals lack confidence and self-esteem and so may be unfit to be school leaders (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Shava et al., 2019). They not only lack confidence and self-esteem; they also lack the motivation to take up leadership positions and develop themselves (Gandhi & Sen, 2020).

Women might consider themselves as equal to men. However, they value themselves as less effective; hence they are very hesitant to take up leadership positions (Al-Ruhaili et al., 2020). Women tend to be reluctant to take up leadership positions, because they are afraid that they might do as well as men do, because of the organisational orientation of leadership (Chase & Martin, 2019; Segkulu & Gyimah, 2016). Contributing to them being reluctant is the fact that women principals are aware that they have to work harder and longer to obtain approval from their colleagues (Watson et al., 2017). Another problem is that female principals are not influencing their female subordinates. Hence they are not uplifting one another (Segkulu & Gyimah, 2016).

2.5 Traces of positive female principals' leadership

Even though women are few in leadership and experience barriers in their leadership experience, they can still contribute positively to school effectiveness through survival mechanisms. As a means to survive in male-dominated leadership areas, women have to find alternatives to enhance their educational practices. Zikhali and Smit (2019) mention that, women need academic and self-efficacy beliefs as mechanisms of survival in their leadership. Adding to this, some women who manage to get into leadership positions do not struggle to contribute to other women aspiring to take up leadership positions (Chase & Martin, 2019). Therefore, women have the capacity to lead and influence other women by their positive traits.

There are a number of lessons that we can learn from the leadership experiences of women. Firstly, women put in extra hours in ensuring that their management and leadership roles are fulfilled (Al-Ruhaili et al., 2020). They make sure that strategic decisions, annual plans and dealing effectively with challenges they experience in schools is a priority (Al-Ruhaili et al., 2020). Secondly, women seek more education and development so as to advance their career (Al-Ruhaili et al., 2020; Jones,

Ovando, & High, 2009). Novice female leaders seek to improve their knowledge, leadership and self-awareness (Moorosi, 2014). This influences their individual and professional identities. This contributes greatly to their leadership.

Thirdly, their style of leadership is seen to impact positively on the functionality of the school. Even though there is little difference between the leadership of female and male principals (Shava, et al., 2019; White-Smith, 2012), particular traits are mainly associated with the leadership of female principals. These traits include that women are good in prioritizing; deliver as promised; socially sensitive; enhancing teamwork; and in having multiple skills (Lopez & Rugano, 2018; Shava, et al., 2019). Contributing to female leadership is the inborn mothering role of female principals which they transfer into their leadership (Lumby & Azaola, 2014). What is striking is that women in school leadership place more prominence on communication, cooperation, affiliation and nurturing; women have more communal qualities than men (Chase & Martin, 2019; Shava, et al., 2019). Women contribute to school leadership by their collaborative approach which keeps stakeholders in line with the goals of the school; this motivates charisma on followers (Iyekolo, et al., 2020). Women can be effective leaders when given a chance.

2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided literature relating to female leadership experiences. It is observed that the general trends in female leadership have changed. The journey of advancement for women presents barriers as indicated by literature above. However, there are positive traces of female leadership. The following chapter provides the theoretical frameworks used to structure this study.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the theoretical framework that underpins this study. The theoretical framework influences the design of the study and how data is collected and analysed (Maree & Pietersen, 2007). Consequently, the theoretical framework should link with the purpose of the research. I considered two theories to denote the complexity of gender issues related to the leadership roles of female principals in secondary schools. In this study, the Complexity Leadership Theory and the Intersectionality Theory were used to understand female principals' narratives regarding their leadership experiences and social identities that capture their social and professional realities.

3.2 The Complexity Leadership Theory

The Complexity Leadership Theory (CLT) emerges from the Systems Theory, particularly the Complex Adaptive Systems Theory. The CLT focuses on the networking of interactive agents bound by common goals and needs (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). In this case, it is the school network of stakeholders with a common vision and mission for schools. Therefore, in understanding CLT, we have to understand Complex Adaptive Systems. Lowell (2016) declares that the Complex Adaptive System theoretical framework looks at the causes and processes of organisational change by integrating the elements within a system. Leaders in such systems require Complexity Leadership Theory practices.

The Complex Adaptive Systems theory looks at the dynamics of systems or institutions, which influence their performance. This theory views the multiple components of dynamic systems and their interconnectedness. It also highlights the frequent exchange of resources within the environment (Lowell, 2016). This exchange of resources in systems like schools that are complex environments offers various networks and changes (Dawson, Poquet, Colvin, Rogers, Pardo, & Gasevic, 2018). Such changes require leaders to be flexible and adaptable because a change in one part of the system influences the whole system; and how systems respond to change (Dawson et al., 2018). From here forth in this theoretical framework schools will be referred to as systems.

CLT fosters Complex Adaptive System dynamics and enables controlling structures for coordinating formal systems and producing expected outcomes that are in line with the system's vision and mission (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Female principals leading in secondary schools are expected to perform in line with their school's vision and mission, despite the gender-related challenges they face. CLT enables adaptive outcomes including learning, innovation, and adaptability in systems such as schools (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). These adaptive outcomes lead CLT to a focus on leadership processes that can effectively evolve due to dynamic interactions and relationships in the system (Dawson et al., 2018). Such interactions within a school system include staff, learners, parents, and stakeholders that directly or indirectly influence the system. Arena and Uhl-Bien (2016) insist that CLT focuses on adaptability to enhance performance and innovation within a system through its components' continuous interaction. The CLT requires female principals to enhance performance and innovation within a system and overseeing the interaction of components to enhance the system.

In understanding CLT, there are four notions and three leadership roles that define the framing of CLT in this study. The first notion is the context. The context in CLT plays a vital role in the interaction of components in the system and the relationships involved (Uhl-Bien, et al., 2007). In this case, the context refers to the context in which schools are situated and the school environment's context. The context of their leadership experiences largely influences female leaders since these contexts have a perceived definition of leaders' identities. The three leadership roles of CLT exist within a given context (Baltac & Balc, 2017). CLT assisted in tracking how the context has influenced the leadership experiences of female principals. The second notion is about understanding the difference between leaders and leadership. Consistent with Uhl-Bien et al. (2007), leaders are individuals who often act in ways that influence the outcomes of systems and leadership focuses on a leader's actions, which makes leadership a process. This notion brings attention to female principals' preparation for being leaders and understanding their leadership roles. This framework guides how leaders perceive their professional identities and leadership processes.

In complex systems, it important to understand the difference between leaders and leadership. This notion looks at individual roles as leaders and the leadership as an influence. Lichtenstein, Uhl-Bien, Marion, Seers, Orton, & Schreiber (2006, p. 2), allude that leadership in complex systems is

an "emergent event and an outcome of relational interactions among agents". Therefore, leadership is seen as an exchange of skills and ideas through agents' interaction within a system. Hence, changes in a system influence the flow of leadership roles, so leaders need enabling leadership roles to deal with such. "Leadership is a product interactive dynamic, whereas Leaders are people who influence this process." (Lichtenstein et al., 2006). Leaders play an important role in influencing the system, and their leadership influences other individuals within the system. Enabling leadership role is important in this aspect. Enabling leadership is a leadership role that fosters effectiveness conditions during change by merging both the other leadership roles (Baltac & Balc, 2017). Enabling leadership allows the leaders to ensure effective transitions in changes within the system. Women are often not prepared for such changes.

The third notion is the administrative role of leaders. This role involves the formal organisation and management of resources in the system (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). This looks into administrative roles that female principals are equipped to perform once they are appointed. Administration roles guide the management in schools, including planning, evaluation, and monitoring. The administration notion emphasises the importance of administrative leadership roles, including planning and evaluating processes within the systems. Administration requires leaders to use formal authority in institutions to deal with environmental obligations and relationships that enhance institutions' vision and mission (Baltac & Balc, 2017). The administrative notion ensures that system leaders or school leaders use auto-coordination skills that assist them to focus on school activities and mechanisms of survival of institutions under changing environments and contexts (Baltac & Balc, 2017). The administrative notion requires leaders to adopt administrative leadership roles. Baltac and Balc (2017) articulate that administrative leadership focuses on formal managerial roles, including planning, coordinating, regulation of workflow, creating an efficient work environment that supports the main function of an institution. This requires leaders to be able to use administrative leadership skills to respond to changes within the work environment.

The fourth notion deals with how leaders adapt to change and how they perceive the role of change in organisations (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Female principals are leading in systems that are in constant change. This notion acknowledges the changes, and it is concerned with how they deal effectively with the change. How leaders adapt to change is important in school leadership, where change is a continual process. This notion requires leadership to make use of adaptive leadership

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roles. The notion of how leaders adapt to change acknowledges that institutions experience changes from external and internal forces, thus provoking organisations to be adaptive (Lichtenstein et al., 2006). This notion acknowledges that "CLT proposes that adaptability, which enhances performance and innovation, occurs in the everyday interactions of individuals acting in response to pressures and opportunities in their local contexts" (Arena & Uhl-Bien, 2016, p. 23). Therefore, leaders need to have adaptive leadership roles in adapting to changes that may occur with a school effectively (Arena & Uhl-Bien, 2016; Baltac & Balc, 2017). This leadership role allows leaders to be innovative when change occurs in the system; it questions how leaders deal with change effectively.

This theoretical framework was used in this study to view the leadership of female principals within a secondary school system. These four notions permit three leadership roles to be at play.

It is important to be mindful that CLT allows learning, creativity, and adaptive capacity of systems through three entangled leadership roles: adaptive leadership, administrative leadership, and enabling leadership. In the process of this entanglement in CLT, there is an interaction between the environment and these leadership roles (Dawson et al., 2018). Firstly, the Adaptive Leadership role produces change outcomes and innovative ideas within a system. This gives leaders a chance to deal with tension and changes that occur in the interaction of different components of the system (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Adaptive Leadership in CLT acknowledges the changes that occur in systems and how leaders and systems adapt to such; and open opportunities for creativity and learning actions that emerge from interactions (Dawson et al., 2018; Uhl-Bien, et al., 2007). The theoretical framework viewed how female principals use adaptive leadership to deal with the school system's changes and their upward movement.

Secondly, another construct of CLT is the Administrative Leadership, which is grounded in the traditional, bureaucratic notion of hierarchy and control (Uhl-Bien, et al., 2007). Administrative leadership considers individuals and groups' actions, formal managerial roles of planning and coordination of organisational activities (Dawson, et al., 2018; Uhl-Bien, et al., 2007). Such leaders structure tasks build the vision, and ensure that there are resources to achieve goals while managing any emerging crises and personal conflicts (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Dawson et al. (2018), articulate that administrative functions assist in maintaining stable working environments and sharing of power. This allows women to be collaborative in leading despite the barriers they

experience. This theoretical framework acknowledges that principals' administrative roles are important for the functionality of the school.

The third factor is the Enabling Leadership role. Enabling leadership allows systems' conditions to optimally address creative problem-solving, adaptability, and learning (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). There are two major roles in enabling leadership. The first major role of enabling leadership effectively fosters enabling conditions that allow emergence with CAS dynamics (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Dawson et al. (2018) articulate that, when pressure exists in the surrounding environment, it pushes leaders to use enabling leadership to balance interactions that operate through administrative and adaptive roles of leadership. The second major role is that enabling leadership, "manages the entanglement between administrative and adaptive leadership" (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007, p. 309). This happens through two elements, firstly, through managing the organizational conditions that exist; secondly, it helps disseminate innovative products of adaptive leadership and formal managerial systems (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Therefore, female principals need this enabling leadership role to manage organisational conditions and balance administrative and adaptive leadership roles.

Enabling leaders foster the right balance of adaptive and administrative processes, networks and relations to effectively respond, adapt and change in a complex system (Dawson et al., 2018). Therefore, enabling leadership manages the entanglement between administrative and adaptive leadership. Principals should foster enabling leadership in the success of their schools since this component promotes the importance of problem-solving and learning in the education system. CLT clearly addresses the leadership aspect of this study; however, it does not look at the gender issues in this study. Therefore, the intersectionality theory was used to address gender issues within female leadership experiences.

3.3 Intersectionality Theory

This study's related construct is Intersectionality Theory, which foregrounds the intersectional effects of gender, female social identity, and power relating to female principals' leadership. Bowleg (2012, p. 1239) defined intersectionality as a theoretical construct, "that posits that multiple social categories, [for example, gender, and socioeconomic status] intersect at the micro level of individual's experience to reflect multiple interlocking systems of privilege and oppression at the macro socio-structural level". Bowleg (2012) posits that using intersectionality as a construct

could reflect the societal realities of inequality and power. This reveals individual experiences that show and generate structures that promote discrimination.

There is advocacy in using intersectionality in gender-related research. Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman cited in Davis and Maldonado (2015, p. 55) contend that "research on socio-cultural issues such as intersectionality, is needed to provide a deeper understanding of how social realities can affect an individual's lived experiences in the workplace". This tenet helped me understand how the social identities of female principals construct their experiences and practices; and how this shape and are shaped by their stories. Cole (2009, p. 179), suggests that intersectionality makes explicit gender, culture and class and how these can "simultaneously affect the perceptions, experiences, and opportunities of everyone living in a society stratified along these dimensions". Female principals' experiences were viewed in their gendered category that influences oppression and barriers in their leadership.

Intersectionality theory frames gender-related oppression through the intersection of other social interactions (Patil, 2013). This is taken as far as patriarchy and the oppression of women in the process (Patil, 2013). The patriarchal orientation of leadership greatly influences school leadership; therefore, it poses a system of oppression for women. Carastathis (2014) alludes that, intersectionality has become a lens to conceptualise the relations between systems of oppression where power and privilege exist. In this study, intersectionality theory is used to narrate female leadership experiences at a micro and macro level of oppression.

These levels show the interwoven-ness of systems of oppression that experiences occur (Carastathis, 2014). Bright, Malinsky and Thompson (2016), articulate that intersectionality theory focuses on the perception that people occupy multiple demographic categories, with interactions of power. Rice, Harrison and Friedman (2019) articulate that intersectionality involves the study of gender, race, disability, sexuality, age, class and other social categories that relate in ways that allow other groups to be oppressed or privileged. Similarly, other scholars view intersectionality as a lens of understanding the interrelation of social groups with others being oppressed (Nash, 2017). This theory helped to understand the experiences of female principals' gender grouping and their upward movement. The intersectional theory was used together with CLT to frame the experiences of female principals in secondary schools.

3.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided the two theoretical frameworks that were used in this study. These frameworks are CLT which focuses on leadership issues, and Intersectionality Theory which focuses on the gender issues of oppression. In the next chapter, I present the research design and methodology employed in carrying out this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided the theoretical frameworks that frame this study. This chapter discusses the research design and methodology used to approach this study and how it benefited this study. This qualitative study narrated the leadership experiences of female principals in secondary schools. This section outlines the research design, research methodology, research paradigm, sampling strategy, data generation methods, data analysis, ethical issues, issues of trustworthiness, and limitations of the study.

4.2 Research approach

This study used the qualitative approach in researching the phenomenon. Qualitative research focuses on the meaning participants attach to their lived experiences, social and cultural context (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Merriam, 2009; Struwig & Stead, 2013). According to Merriam (2009), a qualitative approach focuses on the process, understanding and meanings the participants have on the topic under study. The aim was to understand the meaning participants attach to their lived experiences as female secondary school principals. This approach embraces multiple realities of participants in the same phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher in this approach is interested in understanding how participants construct and interpret their experiences; and meanings attributed to their experiences (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, qualitative researchers study a phenomenon in the natural setting or perhaps the social world; to gather the actual experiences; and how the participants experience and interpret them (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2009). Participants construct and analyse their experiences of leadership.

Merriam (2009) insists that the researcher becomes the primary instrument of data generation and analysis. I journeyed with the participants in the sharing of their narratives. The natural setting of the events of the participants in this study was their work environment and their homes. Therefore, the gathered experiences were from these settings in relation to what happens, and the people involved who inform these experiences. Lastly, participants attached meanings to their experiences which influence their storied narratives. It is important that the researcher takes responsibility in leading the participant on the discussion of the phenomenon. The researcher is able to understand

non-verbal and verbal messages communicated by the participant (Merriam, 2009). This study intended to understand female principals' lived experiences, together with the understanding of meanings they attach to their experiences. Most importantly, the study captured the participant's world as well as the experiences and went on to described them, which is unique to each participant. My role was to understand the verbal and non-verbal messages communicated by the participants during the study and I re-narrate them as shown in the data analysis chapter.

The overall purpose of a qualitative approach in research is to understand how people make sense of their lives and how they interpret the phenomenon. This approach results in rich descriptions of events and the phenomenon under study, unique to the experiences of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Merriam, 2009). There are two types of qualitative research approaches: the applied and the basic qualitative research approach. This study used the basic qualitative research. There are three main interests in basic qualitative research as Merriam (2009, p. 5) alludes, "how people interpret their experiences; how they construct their worlds; and what meanings they attribute to their experiences". Qualitative research benefited this study because the focus was on understanding how female principals interpret their lived experiences in leadership; and how they construct their worlds in the workspace, which is largely male dominated. The study also looked at the meanings the participants make from their leadership experiences and how these influence teaching and learning outcomes.

4.3 Research paradigm

The research paradigm plays an important role in guiding the direction of a study. A paradigm refers to a view in which research is done (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Merriam, 2009). This study used the interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm assumes that reality is socially constructed, thus there is no single known reality, but there are multiple realities to explain a particular phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). The realities of female principals were socially constructed; hence the narratives are unique.

Merriam (2009) insists that the interpretive paradigm seeks to understand the world in which participants live and work, according to participants' lens. This study engaged in the aforementioned paradigm. This paradigm was chosen since it supports the aim of the study, which is to understand and interpret female principals' leadership experiences in secondary schools. This

paradigm helped me to gather information on the lived experiences of participants and the meanings that they attach to their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Fouche & Schurink, 2011).

4.4 Research Methodology

The research design refers to the procedures for directing a study that includes the general plan of the research in relation to the research objectives (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). This study used a narrative inquiry research design to provide understanding on the phenomenon. This methodology in qualitative research focuses on the actual experiences of participants in relation to the study. Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2014) mention that narrative inquiry research methodology connects storytelling and research together. This can be through using stories as research data or by using storytelling as an instrument for data analysis or representation of findings. This study used storytelling as an instrument of representing the data and for the analysis as well.

Narrative inquiry is a way of getting into a deep reflection on participants' lived experiences through gathering, analysing, and interpreting their stories (Clandinin, 2009; Craig, 2011; Moriarty, 2011). Therefore, storytelling in narrative inquiry is very important since it allows an understanding of human experiences through stories (Smit, 2017; Van Schalkwyk, 2013). Narrative inquiry benefited the study because the focus was on participants' lived experiences in their leadership journey as female principals, their own stories. It also allowed me to connect with the participants and their experiences as I listened and retold their stories. This allowed the study to offer an understanding of human experiences through stories.

The narrative inquiry aims to give participants an opportunity to tell their stories in general terms as well as allowing them to connect to their stories as narrators (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Consequently, this study was able to describe female principals' storied lives in secondary school leadership, including writing their narratives of experience. Narratives are stories of how participants make sense of their experiences, communication and understanding of the world around them (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kim, 2016; Merriam, 2009). Narratives provide first-person account experiences of the phenomenon under study without misinterpreting the meanings participants have associated with the phenomenon (Kim, 2016; Merriam, 2009; Polkinghorne, 1995). Therefore, narratives begin with the "experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 54). The study provides a first-hand account of the

participants' narratives. When the researcher uses narrative design, they focus on the product and process of the experiences of participants (Fouche & Schurink, 2011; Kim, 2016). Rich and unique narratives were gained in this study as each principal had their unique pathway to leadership. These stories were all different but with common struggles and achievements, which contributed greatly to the objectives of the study.

This narrative inquiry uses commonplaces to guide narratives: temporality; sociality; and place. Temporality looks at the temporal transition of events from the past, present and future in relation to people under study (Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Huber, 2010). These narratives looked at the past and present realities of the lived experiences of participants. It also considered how these events shape female principalship's future through the lessons left behind for other female principals. Sociality focuses on the personal and social conditions of participants. Personal condition looks into participants' and the researcher's feelings, desires, hopes, and moral dispositions (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). Narratives are personally constructed; hence, the personal level of the participants played a vital role in understanding their experiences. This included the level at which they were ready to share their stories as well as the events they shared, which make up their story. This included my being interested and open to being a storyteller in this study. Meanwhile, the social condition looks at the condition in which participants' experiences and events unfold within the cultural, social and institutional context (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). The social level of the participants has a great impact on their stories as female principals leading within circles of socially constructed roles of leadership. This justification also considers the sociality commonplace, where the researcher's and participant's lives influence the inquiry (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). The study was not a mere generation of information, but an interaction with the participant that built a mutual relationship and sharing of experiences.

Lastly, narratives are justified by place, which refers to the physical and topological boundaries or sequence of places where events take place (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). In this case, events of participants took place largely in the school environment, and family set up where their roles were interlocking. These events are offered many truths that are not generalizable as they were unique to participants. Narratives are made of bits of events that are happening in the space of time and collected together; these have a thematic thread called plots (Polkinghorne, 1995). Plots arise from bits of parts connected together.

The advantage of using narrative inquiry is that people are often willing to tell their stories and the in-depth description of events that form part of their experiences (Polkinghorne, 1995). Narrative inquiry is used to allow in-depth knowledge of the experiences of participants. Narrative inquiry is influential in education research since it seeks more knowledge in the phenomenon (Kim, 2016). It also assumes that various ways of telling the same phenomenon are experienced in different ways (Barkhuizen, et al., 2014; Kim, 2016). This influenced greatly on the study as participants were willing to tell their stories, some of which were first shared in this account. It is important then that the researcher creates a relationship and is not merely a spy (Kim, 2016). Hence, Polkinghorne (1995) insists that researchers in narrative inquiry are effective listeners and the participants are storytellers in process. The participants' role is to tell his/her story and the research retells the story (Merriam, 2009). This narrative study intended to tell female principals' lived experiences in secondary schools and how they rose above gender-related barriers. These are stories of the process of their leadership as female principals. They were often open to sharing their stories. They owned their experience, and it was a wonderful learning experience for me as a researcher. Some experiences were rather emotional at times, resulting in participants not going further into those hurtful events.

4.5 Methods of Generating Field Texts (Data)

Since this study I used narrative inquiry, it was advantageous to use narrative interviews and collage portraits for data generation. In research, interviews serve the purpose of knowledge construction through interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, and through interviews, one discovers the participants' beliefs and behaviours (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Merriam (2009) articulates that the main purpose of interviews in research is to engage in a person-to-person encounter or conversation that relates to the research study. This allowed me use participants lens and to view the phenomenon under study. Narrative interviews were relevant for this narrative inquiry study. Sources of narratives include written documents, oral statements and pictorial data (Polkinghorne, 1995). In this study, I used oral statements from interviews and collage portraits to generate data.

Narrative interviews in qualitative studies are unstructured and in-depth, offering a specific feature to the study (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Such interviews focus on the participants' storytelling to answer the research puzzles; therefore, the interviewer's influence should be minimal

(Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Therefore, during the interview I asked a question and allowed the participant to narrate their experiences. In preparation for this type of interview, it is important that participants are aware of the purpose of the study so that their stories answer the puzzles of the study. I had three narrative interviews guided by the data generation tool (Appendix A). Narrative interviews have four phases: the initiation; main narration; questioning; and the concluding talk. The initiation phase offers the participant a broad explanation of the context of the study, the topic under study and the format to be followed (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Participants were given a clear outline of the study, including the title, objectives, research questions, interview guiding questions and the interview schedule.

The second phase is the main narration phase. This is the phase where the participants tell their stories and narrate their experiences without being interrupted (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). The researcher's main role in this phase is to attentively listen and take notes to probe further (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Participants narrated their stories in three narrative interviews that were between 35 – 90 minutes. They were not interrupted in their narration; I stepped in once they indicated that they were done. The third phase is the questioning phase. The questioning phase is initiated from the attentive listening; therefore, probing questions serve the purpose, thus gathering more information that was missing in the narrative (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). The questioning was more of probing from the shared stories and missed accounts of the guiding interview questions. The last phase is the concluding talk. This phase may involve a small discussion between the participant and the researcher, which is informal, yet it has rich information for the study (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). These informal interactions were very special to me because I made time to talk with participants outside of the formal data generation space. Sometimes it would be during a walk out conversation. These phases complemented the study and allowed information rich narrative.

The main idea in narrative interviews is to acknowledge that individuals define the world or phenomenon in different ways, as they tell their stories (Merriam, 2009). Such interviews allowed the participants to further explain their leadership stories in a secondary school setting despite gender-related barriers. These interviews were scheduled prior with the participants, before the day of data generation. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Recording ensures that I get all the information that the participant shares (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2009). This

method benefited the study since narrative interviews revealed participants' lived experience of secondary school leadership. In addition to interviews, collages were used as means of data generation to complement the data from interviews.

Collage portraits use art in telling the stories of participants. Collage portraits are useful in qualitative research, especially where narratives are used (Gerstenblatt, 2013). Collage portraits offer an opportunity to include marginalized voices in this case, female principals; and it encourages a range of linguistic and non-linguistic representations to communicate participants' authentic lived experiences (Gerstenblatt, 2013). This method assisted me in making more close contact with the experiences of female principals in secondary schools and to understand their stories as it is told in collage portraits. To make these collages, I gave magazines to participants to source pictures that appeal to their experiences. Participants shared the story behind their collage portraits and the symbols they have used to tell their story. These methods of data generation were utilised since the paradigm adopted by the study intended to understand the experiences of participants. Therefore, interviews together with collages provided a good understanding of the experiences of participants. The data generation tool provided in Appendix A was used in this process.

4.6 Data analysis strategy and data presentation

Data analysis refers to interpreting data that has been generated, which can be audio, written, or pictorial. In this study, the data was in the form of audio and pictorial data. Before the data was interpreted, it was transcribed. As Kim (2016) suggests, after data is generated, the verbatim data is transcribed to textual data; thereafter, data analysis may follow. Data analysis seeks to interpret participants' behaviours, attitudes, and opinions in the study (Kim, 2016; Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Struwig and Stead (2013) stress that researchers need to reflect if the data relates to the research questions during data analysis. In this study, I transcribed the data from the participants' narrative interview recordings to textual data. After every interview, the data was transcribed. When the transcripts were ready, they were carefully read and sent to the participants to verify and thereafter the narrative inquiry analysis process started.

Narrative inquiry is analysed better using two methods: narrative analysis; and analysis of narratives. Narrative analysis involves the narration of participants' experiences in this case the narration included collage portraits as support instruments for the narratives. According to

Clandinin (2013), the researcher in narrative inquiry plays a vital role in retelling the stories of participants. Therefore, the first stage of analysis was to retell the stories of participants as they are, with the meanings the participants attach to them. This stage offers rich knowledge from the experiences of participants. The stories were told using first person storytelling whereby the researcher assumed the role of the narrator. These stories were a result of transcripts and narratives. A story is a series of events and actions tied together into a structured whole by means of a plot (Polkinghorne, 1995). A plot is a type of conceptual scheme by which a contextual meaning of individual events can be displayed. Plots assist the researcher to recognise data that should be included in the final storied account since not all data is needed in telling the story (Polkinghorne, 1995). These narratives consider what Polkinghorne (1995) talks about the importance of the environment and people that effect participants' narratives. In this case, the narratives have a school, community and family setting as contexts of events and actions. There are people involved, including family, colleagues and other stakeholders within the school environment.

The narrative analysis may be structured with a beginning, middle and end with plots that connect to tell a story (Polkinghorne, 1995). Such stories are created and re-created in the process of data generation. This level of analysis the researcher adopts the role of a narrator as she tells the participants' stories. During the process of re-writing the narratives, I encountered a dilemma with writing in the first person or the third person. After great reflection on this, I decided to represent my narratives as the first-person accounts together with the collage portrait.

The second stage is the analysis of narratives. This is now moving from the storied narratives to common elements found in the stories (Polkinghorne, 1995). At this point the analysis focused on drawing common themes from the data narratives. In discussing the data from the narratives, firstly, data coding was done, which is a process whereby information is grouped into themes employing codes, these are known as labels that assign units of meaning to information acquired (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Struwig & Stead, 2013). In this study, the participants' responses were grouped into themes that answer the research questions. This is what is called the inductive process of data analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). However, there were differing responses to the same questions, since each participant had their unique story to tell. Most importantly, the aim was to apply one of the paradigmatic searches where concepts

are inductively derived from the data; this involves ordering the data into categories (Polkinghorne, 1995).

The inductive approach is from the ground up and not handed down by theories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Hence, the researcher should be able to extract themes from participants' narratives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study used the thematic analysis, whereby themes were drawn from participants' narratives. Creswell and Poth (2018) and Barkhuizen et al. (2014) articulate that in thematic analysis, the role of the researcher is to identify themes from participant's stories. Themes were drawn from participants' stories that related to the research questions. Data is represented in narratives and also linked together during the discussion with literature reference.

4.7 Sampling strategies and selection of participants

Sampling is important for researchers, as they choose participants who will add value to the study and answer the research questions. There are two basic types of sampling, probability and nonprobability sampling (Merriam, 2009). Nonprobability sampling is called the purposive sampling and is commonly used in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2009). Purposive sampling allows the researcher to have a criterion of selecting participants that meet the expected outcomes of the study and produce outcomes that are information rich (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Maree & Pietersen, 2007; Merriam, 2009). This study used purposive sampling. Participants were chosen based on the purpose of the study.

There are considerations in purposive sampling that a researcher needs to consider. Firstly, the decision on whom to select as participants or sites for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The site selected for this study were secondary schools in two Districts of Kwa-Zulu Natal. These schools were selected because they have female principals. In this case, the sample were principals who met the following criteria: female principals; who have been in leadership for two years and above; and female principals leading secondary schools. The second important thing in sampling is the size of the sample under study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The sample size of this study is three principals. Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasise that narrative research should have fewer participants so as to gain in-depth information on the experiences of participants. The study gained rich experiences and knowledge from three participants who met the abovementioned criteria.

4.8 The trustworthiness of the study

Trustworthiness in research deals with how reliable and valid the findings of the study are (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Maree & Pietersen, 2007). It deals with the authenticity of the study and the presented data (Merriam, 2009). This study used four procedures of trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability.

4.8.1 Credibility

Credibility in this study required a constant checking with participants on whether the data is really telling their lived experiences. Participants were given their transcripts and narrative to check during the data analysis process. This is referred to as member checks. Lincoln and Guba (1985) articulate that, member checks are a process of continuous checking of data by participants; this allows the researcher to ensure that the data reflects participants' responses. The emphasis is on ensuring that the findings capture participants' reality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Hence the research findings represent accurate information taken from participants' stories after the use of member check process. In narrative inquiry, participants are allowed to check their data as stories and interpretations derived from them; and they offer views regarding them (Loh, 2013). The participants did member checking throughout the data analysis level, whereby they read their stories and provided feedback on their narratives.

4.8.2 Dependability

Dependability focuses on whether one can track the process and procedures used to generate and interpret data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure dependability, I used an audit trail as a description of research steps taken during the research process (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Loh, 2013). The field texts were recorded and kept in a storage device. The collage portraits were kept as hard and soft copies by the researcher. Findings were evaluated and interpreted to make sure that they are all supported by the data generated from participants in recordings, transcripts and collage portraits. Furthermore, to ensure dependability, authenticity was preserved by presenting narratives as actual stories of participants derived from transcripts.

4.8.3 Transferability

Transferability looks at whether the findings provide sufficient detail to contextualize their interpretations of a historical, present and future event for the sake of comparison of similarities (Daniel, 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is noted that narratives are not completely transferable, but they can be used to make comparisons in the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2009). Similarly, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) articulate that even though narrative inquiry research cannot be transferable, but lessons can be learnt from narrative research that can be common in different settings. The participants' narratives in this study are unique to the individuals; however, some elements can be traced in previous research and in other contexts of female leadership in education. This is a result of the participants having different background and leading in different contexts.

4.8.4 Confirmability

Confirmability focuses on the process in which interpretations are drawn from evidence of the data generated to ensure that the researcher's biased views are not affecting the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rose & Johnson, 2020). Confirmability also looks at the degree to which other people can confirm the findings (Loh, 2013). To ensure confirmability in this study, I involved participants in the first level of analysis by retelling their stories shared in field texts. This, therefore, limits the biases of the researcher.

4.9 Limitations of the study

The study's limitations refer to actions or events that may hinder the research process (Struwig & Stead, 2013). Since this study adopted a narrative approach there are several limitations. Firstly, in narrative research, the researcher generates extensive information, however if this extensive knowledge is not safeguarded the researcher might end up with a lot of information, yet with minimal effect on the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study had extensive data generated; however, it was reduced to answer the research puzzles. Secondly, the issue of power relations that occur between researcher and participants. These power relations may come from the participants' leadership position and the researcher's academic position (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This limitation was addressed by creating a mutual relationship with the participant. Thirdly, in narratives, transferability can be a problem since human behaviour is never static

(Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Merriam, 2009). The experiences of the participants may relate to others elsewhere, but it cannot be transferable.

The method of data generation chosen in this study may cause some limitations to the study. This is because narrative interviews involve a social and interpersonal encounter with participants (Merriam, 2009; De Vos, Delport, Fouche, & Strydom, 2011). I felt I created a friendly relationship with the participants. Another issue is that participants were not comfortable revealing certain information during the interviews in some instances. Since interviews generate a lot of data, it was overwhelming for me, since in some instance participants did not answer the interview question directly. De Vos et al. (2011) allude that it is natural for this to happen in interviews as they are conversations. Another limit to this study is that I felt emotionally drained during the narrative analysis, as I emotionally tapped into the narratives as though they were my own stories. Lastly, this study's finding cannot be generalised, since these are narratives of small sample. It is important to be mindful that the aim of narrative inquiry, is not to find one generalizable truth but the aim was to narrate the experiences of the female principals.

4.10 Ethical issues

Ethics in research are generally concerned with the right or wrong behaviour using a moral perspective (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Merriam, 2009). Ethics in research is important and needs to be considered in ensuring that there are required behaviours. Ethics prevent the researcher from failing to keep participants' confidentiality in the study and from falsely reporting results (Barkhuizen, et al., 2014; Struwig & Stead, 2013). There are three ethical principles: autonomy, non-maleficence, and beneficence. The ethics principal to be used for this study is the autonomy principle. The autonomy principle insists that researchers need to get the consent of every person who will participate in the study (Merriam, 2009). Participants were provided with a consent form that highlighted the purpose, objectives, confidentiality and free participation in the study. Ethical issues in research also ensure that participants are protected from harm, and guarantees the right to privacy. All of this is provided in Appendix D.

Moreover, the qualitative researcher faces multiple ethical issues that arise during data generation; hence the researcher needs to be open to such (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), ethical issues are summed up into three guiding principles: respect of persons including privacy and consent; concern for welfare which minimises harm; and justice which

encourages equitable treatment and enhances inclusivity. This study sought consent from the participants who agree to voluntarily partake in the study and must have the liberty to withdraw at any time. To protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms were used for ethical consideration purposes. Most important in this study is to be careful with the relationship developed with the participants. Kim (2016) articulates that the relationship developed with the participants can cause vulnerability on the participants, hence it important to consider this in the ethics of research. The study received permission from the Department of Education in KwaZulu-Natal (Appendix C) and also from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Research Ethics Office (Appendix B).

4.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the research design and methodology used in this study. The chapter began by discussing the research approach, paradigm and design that was utilised in this study. It also provided the sampling strategies, data generation and data analysis methods. Thereafter, it explains the trustworthiness, limitations and ethical issues in this study. The following chapter presents the first level of data analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE

NARRATIVES OF FEMALE PRINCIPALS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter highlighted the research design and methodology of the study. This chapter presents the first level; the narrative analysis, which presents the re-storied narratives of the three participants: Ndoni, Leon and Liam. These are re-storied narratives because I retell the stories of participants as though they are my own accounts. All three narratives offer different and interesting versions of female leadership lived experiences.

5.2 The insights of the female leadership of Ms Ndoni Mfeka - "A phoenix - rising from the ashes"

Figure 5.1: Ndoni's collage

5.2.1 A phoenix: rising from the ashes in my journey

I look at my journey in a spiral manner; everything in this collage is centred around rising from the ashes. It starts with my upbringing; I grew up with relatives as it is believed that, "It takes a village to raise a child". In 1962, I came to stay at Craneville. Most of the people in the family were teachers including my aunt, my sister and my mother; so that is how I developed my love for

teaching. Another factor adding to my love for teaching is that the teachers appreciated me because I performed very well. I attended a special school that took children from different schools who were in the top ten in all schools. If one did well, they would move to Mills High school to do form two. Then I went to a high school in Manzini, then University. After university then my career started. My teaching career started at high school teaching. I have been in four high schools. When I came to this high school, the late principal nominated me to act as a Head of Department (HOD). I became HOD for English even though, I only wanted to be a teacher. I was enjoying teaching because I had never been a leader. The HOD whom I was sharing the office with, passed away. So, then the management gave me her work to do. I served as an HOD from 1995 to 2008 and I was okay with that.

Then in 2009, I became a principal. I had a big vision for the school because I knew where the school was coming from. Six months into my principalship my circuit manager suggested that I apply for the best teacher awards. Initially, I refused because I had just been a principal only six months ago. I was surprised that I won at the district level and coastal level. As a principal, I began to chart a new cause for the school. We had to find a way of working with the unions inside the school. However, I found they were not willing to work with me in particular because I am strict with job descriptions. I started implementing the things that I wanted to do that were in my vision. This caused clashes with those staff members who were not willing to work in 2014. That year was when there was that huge strike and conflict because the teachers did not want to do their work.

As I prepare to retire, I was going to draw the plan for 2021, then leave the school with a clear plan for next year. Then the Corona Virus came in 2020. I learned to accept that I cannot do everything; the next person who comes must take over and better whatever I had done. So, when we came back from Corona Virus break, we discovered that there many ways of doing things now. For instance, there is e-learning; we have been lucky that we have had one alumnus who has an IT company that had offered to give us free equipment and training for the teachers on online learning. So, I think Village High School is ready for the 4th Industrial revolution because at least some of the children can learn with IT.

5.2.2 Starting my career journey as an educator

In starting my career, I am aware that teaching was my first choice. My teaching journey starts at Zibusiso Secondary school; in my first year of teaching, I was learning throughout the year. In my first post, I was given a grade 11 class and I taught English and History. This grade 11 class was a group of learners from different schools, so this class was created at Zibusiso Secondary. The teachers did not think much of this class since they were children who were leftover culprits. Another thing, they were not brilliant children; and I felt I was pushed into teaching grade 11 because I had a degree. At that time not many teachers had a degree; it was the principal, deputy, and I who had degrees. I then went to teach History at Native Ocean High School. Interestingly, where I felt I was a teacher was at Village High, where the principal really had a vision. He was ahead of himself, and far ahead of everybody even if you compared him with principals today, he would be far ahead in his vision for the school. Village High was a territorial boarding school, which meant it had financial support and resources. I enjoyed teaching at Village High because we were given a latitude to teach the way you wanted; no one went behind you and told you how to teach. I taught myself how to make my lessons interesting which gets the children excited. I feel good about my time as an English teacher at Village High.

5.2.3 My transition journey of leadership

My transition from being a level one educator to being in leadership was a transition that came to me. I never wanted to be in any position, as I was enjoying being a teacher. I was exemplary in doing the right thing all the time, even before my predecessor became principal. When Mr Ndlela took over, the school went really down in the doldrums. Everything changed into a shepherd-less house. Then somehow, I took some leadership in ensuring that things are done accordingly. I could also see the school's demands and I thought I knew exactly what needs to be done. I was doing this job anyway when that principal was there.

Then the principal left and there was a vacancy, and a few friends encouraged me to apply. My leadership journey took longer maybe because I never thought of being a principal. I thought I was okay as a deputy. I felt, I could do that, support the principal. So then four people were nudging me to apply. Then I applied for principalship, since a few people pushed me to apply who believed in me. They insisted that I have been doing it without being principal now is my time to apply.

Eventually, I applied but it was tough because that is when my challenges started. Our school is big, so SADTU wanted the school for their leaders in high places who were teachers who eyed the school. I did not know all those people because I was not active in SADTU politics. I was only known in English circles where I led workshops. The post went into dispute for more than ten months before the interviews. It was disturbed by the unions and eventually we went to the interview then there was a dispute for another ten months, which means there was no principal. There was an acting principal for almost two years.

In my school, I was the only person who was selected for the interview, which caused bitterness amongst the SMT members who had applied. My sister prepared for the interview by looking at possible interview questions with me. I did not find the interview difficult because I spoke from my heart. I was talking about what I plan to do, because I knew the school since 1988. I knew the opportunities and challenges for the school. My sister helped me with a beautiful document; a turn-around strategy for the school, but it was just an onwards draft turnaround consultative strategy that looked at the academic side and the boarding house. Consultative because then I was still going to consult the SGB and the teachers. If the management had supported me to use that document the school would be very successful.

5.2.4 My observation of gender and principalship

I believe female principals experience a degree of difficulty in their transition; I think the transition journey of female principals differs from that of male principals. There was a time when they were getting more male principals in primary schools, which is unusual. The problem is that the older female teachers in primary schools, who are good at their work, cannot articulate themselves. In primary school they speak isiZulu; the interviews are in English. It is worse when they go to the interview where they are competing with a male counterpart for a post in a primary school. Most interesting, many men are not performing well. If their schools are functioning, it is because they are using the stick to beat up the children. So, I do not feel that they have the skill to lead, since they lead by instilling fear. The children are afraid of them because they will beat them up for late coming. Bawobaba [they are fathers], so they behave as they behave in their homes. They transfer that to schools, which is the workplace.

5.2.5 Setting the tone in my principalship

When I became a principal, it was hard. However, I was lucky I had support from my sister. She had been a principal at Emalahleni, and she was good with policies. In 2009 things were bad in our school. I had to deal with the boarding house because if there is a strike at the boarding house, it spills over to the school. I realised that I had to have policies in place and review old policies. For that year I did not concentrate on the academic part which was a mess. Since this is a boarding school, I had to first lay some semblance of normality in the boarding house. Then if it is normal at the boarding house then the boarding house carries the school. There was still some resistance, but policies assisted in maintaining order.

In 2010, I started doing the school; the academic side. At school I did the same thing, I worked on the policies. Since we had a problem with teachers absenting themselves and not filling in forms; so, I decided to get the teachers to be in the class, you have to get the teachers at school. That is where it started, dealing with the leaves. On the first meeting as a principal leaves policies were explained. From there, I never had a problem of leaves in the school until now. The teachers follow the required procedure.

5.2.6 Allowing my leadership to be tested and the impact it had on learner performance

The teachers saw that the school was turning around in 2010, they started resisting. In 2011 they were writing grievances in our school for the first time. We had grievances which were lies of course. Since I was dealing with policy, even when they came with those grievances, I took the policy on grievances, and let us see whether what we are doing is correct. The hated that because any grievances against me should be sent to my superior, who is the circuit manager. Those union leaders were now angry that they had not succeeded to move me, so the school results went down to 44%. In its history, it had never happened since 1971. In 2012 the results improved to 76%. This is due to the fact that I ensured that teachers were in-class teaching. My principalship has been sapping my energy; every time I wake up in the morning, I am going to do the physical part because there was not much support from the management. Firstly, they are afraid of the teachers since they wanted to be liked by the teachers. My alternative was to have meetings with the RCLs. I enforced to them that it was their right that they learn in class. In 2013 the school improved to 93%, but that was from a lot of sweat and blood.

5.2.7 The fight back and my resilience

That very year the fight back started over. So, in January 2014, I received a letter from SACE with allegations, at 2 o' clock in the afternoon. It was said that I am abusing school money; I am abusing teachers; and allowing them to drink at school. I was told to respond to these allegations within 7 days. At first, I thought it was a joke, then I saw the names of teachers I was allowed to drink. In 2014 I had to deal with the court and lawyers in the same month, of January. Another teacher came with the police saying I tried to kill her by running over her with my car. When the case ended in May, on the very same day it ended 12 teachers went on strike. They called the inspector and they also called SADTU, then they had the same allegations against me. Those same allegations failed; then things were bad in the school. The whole of 2014 was like a rollercoaster ride because the teachers were angry with me getting the position in 2009. They came together, and said this person must go, but the children refused and wanted them to go instead. So, 20 teachers were beaten by the children, they left the school.

I did not have a supportive SMT and so it was hard to manage alone. However, I had support from the SGB. The SGB will never be able to do anything, if the management on the ground is not implementing. What I found is that the SMT in our school would even hate the SGB for wanting the school to be in a good condition. This puts a lot of work on the people who do not want to wet their feet. The parents want the best for their children, and the best is the school providing the best, yet the management want the fish, but they will not wet their feet. Therefore, I was not popular with my staff to an extent that others did not even talk to me. I asked some of the teachers, why are people not talking to me and the response was, "It is not about what you or anything you have done it is about what people do". So, they do wrong things and they hate me. In my leadership, I told myself, I will try until my very last day, there will not be a time where I get tired of this school. If you put the SGB and the management, in a meeting; having discussions about our school, the management by their body language are negative.

5.2.8 The hurdles that stood before in my leadership path

On a societal level, I have never felt hurdles because I was not married. I have never felt that the man is superior, yet I have always felt that we are equal. I had children and I was single, that affected me to a certain extent. So, when I was at Gugu High School as deputy principal, I was

young by then. There was a time, where I had to be at school till 5 o'clock because it was during those times of the struggle in 1986/87. It was tough at school; the management had to meet almost every day to look at the day and plan for the next one. Then I went to Village High School, I was just a teacher, then became a HOD, but luckily the school was near.

My organisational barriers include the resistance from matrons. So, I asked one guy who was employed at the hostel that, why do you think I have a problem as a woman principal. I can see the distance from almost everybody and other people are saying ngeke sitshelwe ilomfazi [this woman will not tell us]. I have never been called by that word before. I could feel that when people use that word it is like they are swearing, and this guy said that, "as a woman principal it is hard for the women. First, the women want to behave in a certain way towards a male principal, like getting used to them. Then the male principal will conform to that." This guy told me that, as a woman principal, these people cannot do that to you. They cannot get things from you with that kind of behaviour because you are a woman yourself. So, they cannot get what they want from you. Then they will be resentful to you without doing anything, it is just that you will not allow them to do anything wrong. Then I asked about the men. The response was that I am a strong woman. I understood that my position as a woman principal, it was very hard.

5.2.9 The exclusion I experienced in meetings

I am a vocal person, I say what I think because it is about moving forward. People just do not like it even in principals' meetings whenever I talk. The inspector once said, "Ayi [he exclaims in admiration] miss when you stand up to speak English bayanyanya [they get disgusted] the male principals at the back". So, it is this male thing. Even though I do not look at myself as a female principal until people make me feel like that, so I just stand up there because I think I am a human being. The positions we hold are just the same; it is just that I happen to be female, but do not treat me in a certain way because of my gender. Treat me like a human being but I do not get a lot of it here.

There is no female principal in a boarding school; I observed this at the association of previously disadvantaged boarding schools. I was the only female principal, and I could feel the men there; they did not even want me to raise my hand to speak. They hated it and they pretended as though I was not there. I can feel when people are speaking to one another and it is like a 'boys club'.

Through the jokes that they are passing I can see that it is excluding me. When I make a comment, and my comments are about gender too, I would say, "Oh is it like that, so what do you say about me, when you refer to all of us as 'Eyi madoda asikhulumeni phela' [hey men let us talk], did you count me, and that makes them angry. The men did not want to listen to me, because I am a woman and I am not afraid to apply policy. They never took my suggestion to apply the called Human Resource Management (HRM) 5 of 2011 which deals with aspects like absenteeism.

5.2.10 The impact of the context of my school on my leadership

When people come into the school, when they see that you are a woman, you can feel that you are respected less. Just because I am a female, it seems the male colleagues are threatened by a female who is challenging them. On the other hand, I could feel that the parents respect me less, but then two or three minutes into the conversation when they see that you know your stuff; then they say, "you are like a man". They start comparing me to a man, which I do not like. Why should it be men only who are strong, whereas there are strong women?

The context influenced my leadership as a woman. I do not think male principals in secondary schools, have a problem that goes on and on. When they assert authority in the school, and they may experience a little resistance for maybe a few years and then people will settle in. If a male principal would come to the school, they would toe the line immediately; but with the woman, you have to constantly fight and challenge. I think it was sustained because I am a female principal and they thought I would break. Fortunately, I had my support circle from outside which was very knowledgeable. I think I surprised them with the knowledge that I had. I mitigated around the challenges at school because I had been in the school for a long period and I am a strong woman.

5.2.11 I never looked at myself with a gender identity perspective

I did not have any personal barriers regarding my female identity in my career. I never looked at myself with a gender identity perspective, so I always did what I felt I was capable of. This draws to the whole idea of leadership; with the male teachers, they are expected to be leaders. A young male of 30 will apply to be a principal, but it is rare to find a female of 30 years applying to be a principal until they really know themselves and who they are, then they can start applying. Females stay on post level one for longer. I stayed for more than twenty years. As females, we also feel we can only be HODs, just be responsible for a small group of people, but not to be a deputy principal

let alone a principal. Yet women in middle leadership try their best. When I look at our school years back; the two females who were in the SMT were running the school, behind the scenes. I observed this because I became a HOD with them. They weighed things, and they could stand up to him and say no this is not going to work, and he allowed them to do it. They were running the school, behind the scenes.

5.2.12 My mentorship encounter

My mentorship came from my sister and two other principals. Every day I consulted. It helped me with a solution to problems and in understanding policies. I used policies; my sister was very instrumental with policies. She would sit and check on the website and download them for me. Therefore, the mentorship I received was great. I received it from a friend of mine who was a deputy principal, but sort of a principal. The principal was just a figurehead, they understood each other. So, whenever I wanted to start something, he would say no do not re-invent the wheel, I have done this, and he would share it with me. Then I would take it and go to school and share it with the management, but they would not implement one thing that was making the other school work. You will never succeed if you do not have support from the management.

The department on the other hand, never provided support. You are thrown in the deep end. There was no induction, there would be induction for the HODs and then the department would be so busy with other things and because they are striking there at the school, they are busy dousing fires they are reacting to situations, it's like they do not have a plan. All you do is to attend government workshops and there will be people helping you. You do attend those finance workshops which are few and spaced far between. So, I received mentorship almost every day from home and from a few principals, about five of them.

There is minimal gender policy implementation to support women. About four years ago, the people in management in the district office started something to mentor us that was called 'The mentorship for female principals'. It was beautiful when it started. We met and talked as women, on topics like, 'how you can accept yourself without being aggressive', however the following year, it was dead. It would die because in my observation, I've seen women principals favouring men like they do not want to put themselves in the same level as men; but they want to put the male principal on a certain pedestal. It is like they are above them whereas we are the same, I do

not like that, I just respect you as a human being not because you are a male. I have a problem with that thing of I am respecting you because of your status.

5.2.13 The presence of role models in my journey

Regarding the presence of role models for me, it starts with my high school principal. The other two female principals in the area, when I tried to engage with one of them, she was sort of dismissive. The two principals who were strong, very good ones but they came out as arrogant and also disrespectful even to the department officials when we had workshops. They were not humble. So, I did not get the principals this side. I found that the principals that were women, they came on too strong as if they were trying to prove a point. Angel, my friend became a principal at the tender age of 36. I think she was so good. I had a good network because I could rely on my sister. I also received support from Mrs Ndwalane who dealt with the academic side (the curriculum delivery). I would not have survived if I did not have this support.

5.2.14 My footprints as a female leader

My footprints are already felt and since I am retiring, they are saying, please do not be a stranger because we need you. They need me to mentor them. They do not want me to get lost on them, because they believe that they need me in their leadership positions. I have got that feeling that somehow people think I can do something to help them. I have accepted that I am going to be open to mentoring people. Other women aspiring to be principals can learn from my experiences amid gender-related barriers; is that it is important to have confidence and believe in yourself. Also knowing and implementing policies of the Department helps one in leadership. I do wish they first should build that confidence. The type of leadership I have adopted in my school would be mostly situational leadership and enabling leadership. I generally respond to the situation as it presents itself. On a daily basis, I am trying to create an enabling environment to allow teaching and learning to happen. I am very strong in interaction. I care for children and I am approachable to them. Hence, I think to create that enabling environment.

5.3. The insights of the female leadership of Mrs Leon Silverton – There's always time to celebrate

Figure 5.2: Leon's Collage.

5.3.1 There's always time to celebrate in my story

My starting point was the quest for remaining positive throughout trials and tribulations. My collage has these small picture frames, because the life of a leader is made of different pictures. The story these pictures tell is that, despite the chaos that is out there, there are always good people and things to celebrate. I love to travel, as shown in the collage. I also believe that strength and confidence are what carried me through; particularly, confidence in knowing who I am. I put three little pictures. One image of someone sleeping, because I do not sleep enough. Then I put a little smiley face because I can still get up in the morning, with those bags under my eyes, but I can still celebrate. The third one is a little picture of two people hugging one another because that is what energises me; it's other people. It is doing good for others, and other people doing good things for me that restores my faith in humanity. I put shoes as well, because I love shoes. There is also a little boarding pass because I love travelling. Then I have these words, 'it's empowering to know

that I can fix things myself'. Henceforth, I always say bring me a problem, and we shall find a solution together. I also have these words, 'don't tell me I can't', because I can but sometimes, I do not want to. Women say, 'people say that women can do better what men can do', and I agree. I can do everything that my husband does, but sometimes, I choose not to do it.

5.3.2 Being an authentic woman is my strength

As women, we need to acknowledge that we do need men to support us in whatever way, it is not a weakness. If you are strong within, you cannot perceive it as a weakness. So that is why I said, 'don't tell me I can't'. Then there is an apple with a heart, and with two hands; because I do believe it is about giving. When you are a child, you give the teacher the apple, and the other way around. Yet what you give is more than an apple you give love; you give care and you show interest. You have to be authentic though, if I like and I appreciate you, I also have to show it. Then there are these words, 'finding the balance'. Sometimes when we are leaders and managers, we often do not find the balance. We give too much of ourselves but do not receive much. There is my little watering can, one of my deputies always say, "you are watering the flowers"; because if we water our flower and other people's flower a lot can grow and a lot of beauty can come in the world. Then I used these words, 'you can do this'. You have to say to yourself that, 'you know what, it's tough, but it is going to be okay', and that is what leaders do. Women can multitask and love unconditionally and that makes true leadership.

5.3.3 The telescopic vision of my leadership

In leadership, there is a brain with wiring; you have to be wired to be a good organiser. Then I said, 'I take everything I do seriously, and I said to learn as much as I can'. That is in organising as well, you are always growing, and it is vital to allow yourself to expand. Then I wrote 'just go for it. It's okay to make mistakes; always be prepared and make sure you have all the tools that you need'. For me, sometimes those tools are people since they allow the functioning of the school system. Then there is a picture of scissors. I cut everything out of my life that is harmful and if there is anything in the organisational system that does not work, I take it out. Then I put a sticky tape because I make the good things stick, and I build on them. Then I put a light bulb because sometimes we keep trying, and it does not work; then all of a sudden, we have that 'ping' bulb

moment. Then it brings a reflection on what sticks me together, what energises me and makes me fulfilled.

Then under societal, there are people holding hands. There is a picture of an ear because I have to listen. In society, you have got one mouth, so you talk less than you hear. There are two ears; I have to listen. I have to be aware, so I used the big zebra eye. Then here, sometimes you need telescopic vision because when you are dealing with people, you have to dig deeper into that which is superficial. The woman with a bow and arrow, emphasises that I have to be strong, and then I have to work together with my staff and stakeholders. I am not an island; I have to be a team player. Finally, I need people with all the right attributes. The product can always be re-engineered or recrafted down to the person. Hence people and society drives me.

5.3.4 Influential people in my upbringing

My life's greatest influence is drawn from my father, who was a very loving man. I grew up in the apartheid days and my father was Afrikaans. He taught me the love for people. I grew up in a house where I was taught complete acceptance of the heart, mind, and soul of everybody. He also taught me about kindness, love, acceptance, honesty, and integrity. I think that is the cornerstone of who I am. My father was a Sunday school teacher; we were very involved in our Church. Then I also became a Sunday school teacher when I was in my matric year. So, I always wanted to be a teacher. At school, I had two brilliant teachers, my Afrikaans teacher, who was a phenomenal teacher, and so down to earth. We use to talk to her often; she had an impact on my life too. Then there was my English home language teacher who was sweet and loving. I also learned a lot from the teachers that I did not like that were sarcastic and horrible. So that has shaped my life. Then, of course, my leadership is drawn greatly from my father, who was a principled man, he had such strong values, and he was firm but fair. That changed my interaction with people, thus contributing to my leadership which is mostly about interacting with people.

5.3.5 The unfolding anticipation of leadership in my transition story

I was a level one educator when we transferred to Durban, together with a foster child who was looking for a High school and my son was about three years. At that point, I was not going to go back into teaching because I was going to mother my two children. When I went for parent interviews at Bay View High School. they asked if I could come in and teach Geography part-

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time, I agreed to this. Then I became a substantive post level one educator because I just loved the school so much. I think it is because once you are a teacher, you are always a teacher. So, I stayed on for close to five years and then realized that I was a born and bred teacher, and I can be a mommy anyhow by doing both. I do not think that while I was a level educator, I ever had leadership or management ever in sight. As an educator one goes into the work for the children. Being in the criticism bench is not ideal, if you still see your leadership making decisions that you do not understand. My desire was to make a difference. I think leadership is about being in service of others; so, servant leadership is very much close to my heart.

5.3.6 My acquisition of a leadership position

I became aware of the fact that I could be part of the decision making. When I learned that Rain Hill College had a promotion post. I thought it would be a great opportunity to be part of the educational landscape and in particular the decision making. That was really why I ventured into leadership. I applied at Rain Hill, and I was called for the interview and it was successful. About three days later that the principal phoned me and said, "We will be appointing you as a HOD, but would you mind acting as deputy principal?" I questioned if they would rather promote someone internal into that position because I am an outsider coming into the school. She said they had dealt with me when I was in the Geography association and they just felt that I could bring value to the school.

Eventually, I agreed, so in my transition, I was never a HOD; I went in as an acting deputy, and then I was appointed as a deputy at Rain Hill College. What unfolded in my journey into leadership was never about my own career path. I just love to get into grips with the inner working and the face of management, so I took such opportunities. I got to learn all the intricacies of the cogs and the wheel of the machine. I said I could do it, not because I am a woman, but because I am a well-equipped person. I think that is when you have to deliver, that's is when the performance comes out. My preparation for leadership came from being involved in other areas of the school apart from teaching and learning. I had done the timetable before, the matric dance, school production, exam timetables, and invigilated. This is an advantage because you can guide others only if you have walked in their shoes before since there is no job that is beneath the other.

5.3.7 The changing landscape of my leadership

My performance phase starts at Rain Hill College, after getting the deputy principal position. The principal went to be a conduit to the department for a while and I was acting principal. When she came back, it was quite hard for me because then I was the leader; although I do not believe one lead alone. Yet again, I had to learn to step back when she resumed leadership. I had to not be so involved in that coal face of leadership, which was very hard for me. Then I applied for principalship somewhere else because I realised that in the leadership position as a principal, I could direct and mentor.

My second experience of leadership was when I applied for principalship at an Afrikaans school. I ended up at this institution that was very Afrikaans with its Afrikaans values. There were many men there who obviously did not accept that a woman could lead them, I had to keep proving that I am capable. They had been there for 30 years, and they would say, "well why are you coming and changing things when it worked for 30 years". I often responded that it is 30 years ago now and children have changed, situations have changed, technology has changed, so we have to improve. We have to test ourselves all the time against two things: can it be done better, and is it in the interest of the children?

This school had boys and girls and of course, there was rugby, which is quite a big thing in the Afrikaans culture. As a leader, I had to speak into the lives of those I lead. So, I learned the rugby rules very quickly so that I could speak to the rugby boys. Whereas before at Rain View, I had only spoken to the netball girls and the hockey girls. This enforces that as a leader, I do not lead only with my qualities. It is important that I learn their world a little so that they can trust me; and they know that I am interested in them. Ten years later, I then took a different leadership landscape. Now coming back to an all-girls school certainly the leadership is different in that, I am leading on a more emotional platform.

When I came here at Duncan High the girls were all having these anxiety attacks. I was coming from a school where there were half boys, half girls, it was not cool for girls to have breakdowns in front of good-looking young men. They held it together. Now here, there are many women who are all very emotional beings, and they have these panic attacks. My first response was, "well just get over it girl. You know what, it's just a test". As a leader, you also have to learn to shape your leadership style, based on your customer base. So I had to learn very quickly to say "look oh

darling come let us make you a cup of tea, but you only have two seconds, then you have to get back to that test". So, I also think it was good for me to come with that experience. So leadership is all about gathering that and you do not have to prove anything as a female leader. The context of my current school is diverse demography. It is mainly middle to high income. It is an academic well-performing school. We have a 100% pass rate and it is not a question. It is like Rain Hill; it is just that here the parents earn a lot.

5.3.8 My leadership understanding as a female leader

Stepping into leadership, I had my definition of leadership, especially in the school context. For me, leadership was not about leading as much as it was about guiding the difference and guiding the people to make a difference. Above all, placing children at paramount or at the top of whatever decision was being made which is in the best interest of the child. That is my story by trying to raise my children and also trying to make a difference in children's lives in a broader sense. In defining leadership to me it was never a case of believing that as a woman, was inferior to anybody else in leadership. I never felt any reason to prove myself. As a result, it never struck me that I ever had to do that as a woman. I do everything as a competent person. I just go ahead, and I show that regardless of gender or culture or history or tradition I deliver. I think COVID-19 reinforced again that no leader walks alone; a lot of old school leaders are autocratic.

As a leader, you learn to adapt to changes in the school system. If you are not a change agent you are absolutely doomed, and I can speak from the educational context and the changes it has undergone. I have been a principal for over 14 years; there is no way that the children are the same today as they were 18 years ago. So, if you are still teaching or leading the way you led a few years ago, you will face adapting challenges. When something is working, you do not have to change it, but we need to continually reassess all the time the relevance of our approaches. Leadership also comes with the administration part. It has been quite easy for me since I am an organised person.

5.3.9 My everyday training and development

I believe that there is training and learning every single day. Firstly, the traditional formal training, whereby I go to workshops and now going to webinars on topics that I think can develop and grow me. However, I think lifelong learning is so important for a leader. Secondly, it is the learning that I do from those I work with is just as valuable. I am learning every day from my deputies, my

teachers, and my girls. I look at the prefects, and I see the amazing leadership qualities that they display, and I think I admire this. Being a leader is never a final destination; it's just a journey all the time. COVID came along, computers grew and developed. There is a shift from writing on chalkboards only, to doing WhatsApp lessons and Google Classroom lessons. If I did not put myself out there to learn, I would not be able to lead others. Therefore, a leader does not have to know everything. As a true leader, I do not have to have all the qualities. If I do not have them, I develop them, and if I do not develop them.

5.3.10 Traces of mentorship and role models in my journey as a woman

When I trace mentorship in my journey, I have never waited for clubs to be set up for me. I have made my platforms, so I have gone out and I sought good leaders. I have tapped into really good life coaches that have mentored me and some of them have been male. Some have been icons in education and even people in the corporate world. My one life coach was the Chief Executive Officer at Uniliver. In my journey, I have never waited ever for people to create the structures for me. I have gone out and I have surrounded myself and looked for people whom I could grow from, both male and female. I do have a group of friends who are like-minded principals. Also, in my inner circle, I do have a group of men and women whom I speak to. I have always been the one to go out and seek and create those structures for myself.

The department has given us many opportunities to be developed. They run workshops that we can attend, and I am fortunate to have an amazing circuit manager. She is a phenomenal leader and an incredible role model. I am grateful for her, and she gives me a lot of guidance. For that reason, there has been support from the department. It is important to build networks as a leader; perhaps that is just another factor.

5.3.11 Gender issues in my leadership experiences

The principalship is not attached to any gender policies in the education sector. So, concerning gender policies, the only thing that I was ever affected by some years ago was when I fell pregnant; I had to resign from teaching then I had to re-apply after the maternity leave. But thankfully all of that has changed, I forgive them because they knew not what they did. Apart from that, I have no other experience of being protected or vulnerable because policies. So, nothing has affected me. This gender and leadership issue has never been my mind-set. At the Afrikaans school, there was

a male principal before me, I had to prove myself to some of those men. I think it was just that I knew that I was confident in who I was. I was confident that I had done everything I could to equip myself to be in a leadership position. So, it was never really a conscious thing, that I felt that I had been disadvantaged because I am a female. I do not need affirmation from men.

5.3.12 The hurdles I faced in my leadership journey

It is hard for me to draw the hurdles from my journey because I do not allow these things to speak into my life and to define me, I do not give them power. Looking at societal hurdles, obviously in the past men were preferred in many of the leadership roles. Based on possibly the premise that women are far too emotional and that men are more practical. As a leader, or simply as a woman, I have to be mindful of this. I have to understand that people come with that bias, allow them to come with that bias and do not just prove them completely wrong. This speaks into all three categories in that women are perceived as being emotional. I also acknowledge that leadership has changed in the last few years. The landscape of leadership allows a more collaborative type of leadership; there are more soft skills. As a woman, I have the ability to step into that role. Society believes that men are more competent and intelligent than women, which is a big mistake they make. The other thing with society, women have always been seen in a very traditional role.

However, this family-work balance is always a problem. I think as a leader, I tend to shift towards spending more time at work because people do not love you as much as your family, and they are not as forgiving as your family. I think it is certainly something that naturally happens as a natural progression. For instance, if you have to decide on a family dinner, you will rather say I cannot cause I've got a meeting; I will shift the family dinner, rather than shift the meeting. I think people that love me in my inner circle would be more understanding. It is only in the last four years that I have found the balance. I think as a female leader, it has to be a conscious decision, whereas for male leaders, it is a lot easier because they do not have the emotional drive that women have. This takes me back to the motherly instinct as a woman. Your inherent motherly genetic instinct tells you that you should be raising your children and giving them everything.

5.3.13 My leadership challenges based on school contexts

Organisational barriers are influenced by the school culture. When I took the leadership position, it was at a girls' school, so there were not any obstacles at that stage. The school that I applied for

after Rain Hill College. I think the governing body saw my leadership and they looked past my femaleness and my women-ness. Now being a principal at a co-ed school, with quite several male members of staff as well as male members on the management and that really if I were to say that there was any barrier, it would have been in that ten years. As I lead at an Afrikaans school, which was pretty much a patriarchal community. I had to attempt to equip myself with the necessary skills, making sure that I could speak into the world of the male. They will respect you if they know that you can be respected.

So, one of the very simple things was that it was quite a rugby environment, so what I used to do is to listen to what my husband said when he cheered at rugby. This includes things like, 'the referee didn't make a good decision there, or that player didn't play well'. Then I would go back to school the next day, and I would have a discussion with my male teachers and say, 'What do you think about that decision in that rugby match?' So, I spoke their language. This was a way of trying to earn their respect, by me changing and growing. Since I have no control over other people, but I have control over my abilities and my approaches. This was the way that I equipped myself with the knowledge to be able to speak the men's language. So, with that as a female, they then respected me.

5.3.14 My living footprints for other women aspiring to be leaders

As women, we often do not realise how much strength we have; until we have to actually tap into that belief in ourselves; telling yourself that you can conquer the world. It starts with acknowledging that I do not know everything, I am learning every day, growing every day; and I am grappling on many days with things. In fact, getting through every single day, one needs to be kind to herself. You need to show other women that it is okay to be vulnerable and be kind to yourself. Surround yourself with people who fill the gap. I have a deputy who is phenomenal at drawing the timetable. I am a people's skilled person. I always say if you can get people on your side, they can walk the ends with you. Also, the importance of believing in yourself, give yourself room to grow and also be honest with yourself. Then one just has that inter-personal, emotional intelligence and be brave. Lastly, I think servant leadership, empathetic leadership, and certainly collaborative transformational leadership are vital. Women aspiring to be leaders need to understand and acknowledge that they are human, and they should be willing to learn as they advance.

5.4 The insights of the female leadership of Mrs Liam Johnsen
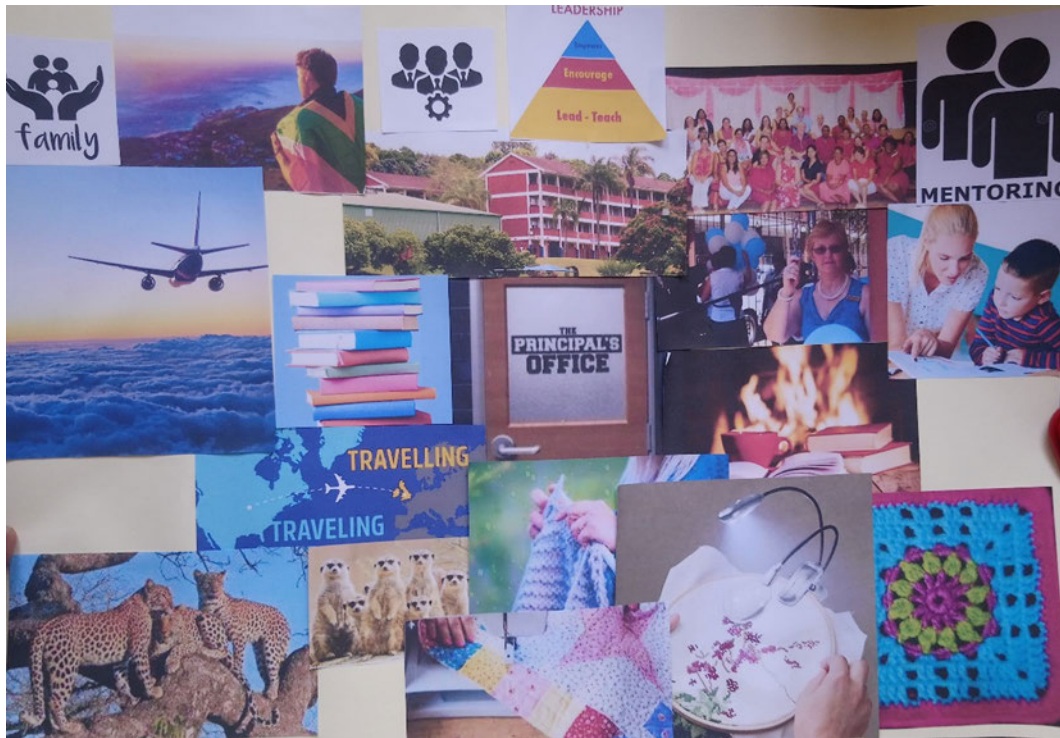
Figure 5.3: Liam's Collage.

5.4.1 My upbringing shaped me

My collage life story draws from my upbringing. Our parents put a lot of emphasis on studying. Education was very important and because of that, my attachment to school is greater. I was that child who had to achieve at school. Therefore, what I did at school had to be done to the best of my ability. We did travel at times because my parents loved travelling; specifically, that love for travelling came from my father. He loved travelling and meeting new people. The handwork side comes from my mother; she was a seamstress. The animals I have on this collage connects with the fact that I was a Biology teacher, so I think that is why the living side of nature is very strong. I was born in Zambia; therefore, I am an African. My parents moved to New Zealand. We spent a few years there and I was the only child. We went to stay in Australia, that's where I started schooling. Eventually, we moved back to South Africa. The change in context as I grew up definitely influenced me because I was encouraged to face challenges and to explore. So certainly, when I plunged myself into activities, there was this encouragement, so even when I finished studying my first four years through Edgewood. A few years later, I went back, and studied a few

courses in various aspects of education and then I did my honours. This was always encouraged and supported by my parents.

5.4.2 The foundation of who I am

My journey started off in this school, working as a team with the teachers. The picture of professional people represents the staff; my journey is centred around working with the staff. I am very much involved in the life of the school and part of climbing the ladder is being a post level one educator. I enjoyed that aspect of it; but I became part of the leadership team as I moved up. Being in a team starts off the mentoring role as represented by the two figures. There is a picture of a person covering himself with the South African flag, a symbol that I am proudly South African. Another balancing pole in my life is that I enjoy hobbies. I am very good at needlework. I included these handwork pictures because they form part of my story. I am also a person who loves reading. Another thing is that I love learning about new things and new cultures, so I do some travelling where I can. I like to go to parks and get back to God's creatures, because my connection with nature is deep. The picture representing my family is a lot smaller than it should be. The reason being I put a lot of emphasis on learning about the world and my work.

5.4.3 My preparation journey

I started my teaching career in 1982, so I have been in the school system for 38 years. My career and leadership story started here at Green Hill Girls High, since my first posting I have never left this school. This is an unusual story these days; people move a lot. My encounter is different since I have rather moved classrooms and offices in this school, but I have not the school. Yet undoubtedly, I have seen numerous changes. The general thinking in career development is that you have to move schools to experience something different. However, I have worked under five principals and I have seen changes throughout their decades.

As this change occurred, I took every opportunity that was given to me. As a source of preparation, I have been virtually everything in school. I started from being a cheerleader trainer; head of a sports group; to head of a competing house group and the first aid service. When I started here, I was told that I would coach the under 14 hockey team and also do tennis, none of which I knew anything about. I did not even know one end of the tennis racket to the next, but I did it. Doing all of these small things has helped a lot in developing skills for leadership and administration. This

forms part of my on-site training. This has broadened my experience; since it is not just classroom-based. My first year was quite interesting.

Another highlight that framed my journey is when principals believed in me, and they challenged me. I grabbed the challenge and took it as a chance to grow out wings as I learn a lot more about myself and the school system. The attitude is that I do not expect leadership positions to come to me, I need to be prepared so that I am ready for it when the opportunity presents itself. Then interestingly I was brought into the management team in an acting capacity. At that time, the principal believed in creating posts so that one becomes the head of something or in charge of something. This allowed us to also learn the management side of the school, which was an invaluable experience because it is very different from classroom-based experiences. Inevitably through such leadership platforms, I was prepared for when we had a wipe-out of our top management. There was voluntary retirement offered for staff over 55; while others moved to Cranes School. This change left an HOD and myself, an acting HOD to run the school. This was a huge challenge, but we waved through. Therefore, my anticipation was thrown at me and I took the ball since I had to then take up as an acting deputy principal.

5.4.4 My transition and acquisition of leadership

The beginning of my transition was when the Gazette came out, the lady who was acting as a principal decided not to continue her teaching profession; therefore, we had an outsider coming in as a principal. At that stage, I was a post level one teacher but acting as a deputy. I applied for the deputy post and I received it. I am very grateful for the belief the principal had in me, since it enhanced my professional identity. To place the transition journey on a timeline: I was a teacher for 30 years, but then the last few years of it I was acting as the HOD and then became a deputy principal. Later the principal retired, and I was acting as principal. Then I applied for the post and I received it, which was 9 years ago. Yet it is important to understand that with the department we do not set ourselves up and make an assumption that the post is ours because the department can change its mind. Especially because I was up against four men, it could have gone against me very easily because I am a woman.

The transition depends on how you are seen and accepted by the parents as well. That plays a huge role because at the end of the day it is parents that recommend the candidate that they want. As a

level one educator, I was the queen of my classroom. I had good rules with children, since they need structure. Being a principal was a big adjustment for me since I enjoyed the classroom; but then I had to split my time between management duties, and dealing with different stakeholders.

5.4.5 Performing my leadership duties

In the performance phase, you are left alone the department does not provide support. You have to network with other colleagues and develop your leadership capacity. I was fortunate that my predecessor taught me quite a lot regarding the management of the school and leadership skills. The parents were very supportive, mainly because I had been in school for so long. As a result, they knew the calibre of the person they had. Getting into the actual leadership experience, I was like a first-year teacher all over again in this office, but I survived. I sought help from my colleagues in this area; it was great support because they are only a phone call away. I learned coping mechanisms and now that I am in the post I'm still learning new things because the department can introduce new things. For instance, COVID-19, no one had training for that, but we had to learn and adapt so fast. I put myself out to learn for my own growth and change.

Leadership required me to play a very different role with people, instead of being their friend, now I have to be a principal. Therefore, my upward movement in my career cost me that loss. When they say it is a lonely job, it is no joke. As a post level one teacher where I knew everybody and every child in the school. When you are in leadership, you slowly drift away. You do not have access to all the children all the time. Yet while I lost friendships within the school, I have gained invaluable friendships with other principals.

5.4.6 The change in my leadership context

The demographics have changed and finances have changed, now that impacts our school. It means a change in parent support; so, it is a change in the finances; that has an impact on the academics. This is because low-income families often do not put a high emphasis on education. They do not always stimulate children from a very young age, because they do not have the facilities or the know-how. That has an impact on the calibre of children that we now have. So, we see a breakdown of school values like academic excellence. However, the school is doing well because I delegate management load. Even though I am still the one who takes over at the top, but we share responsibility with my staff. Each one has their strengths; therefore, I rely on that and I value it.

Next year it is ten years in leadership and no year is ever the same and no day is ever the same. Nobody woke up this year and thought about COVID-19 being the challenge it has become. This year we had to change every plan that we had in the school; every single one of them. Our focus had to go from academics and staffing, to fight a little virus that nobody could see. We went into health and safety and all sorts of challenges. But I am very proud of my management team. I think that is again because we work so closely together as a team and that we manage this challenge together. So being a principal you have to be flexible all the time. I try and read the future and the current events so I can improve my leadership. Now I have four and a half years to go before I reach compulsory retirement. What has been important for me is that I accept what I can do and find out how to do the things that I do not know how to do. I am aware that I cannot to be perfect.

Adaptive leadership is something that comes naturally to me. I look at the challenge and adapt my style, routine, and strategies to meet that challenge. With my good communication skills, I motivate other people to follow me. As a leader, I lead by example. Adapting to situations is not always easy, since I might be going one direction, and then I have to change, whereas I have to be constantly flexible as well.

5.4.7 The development and training that I received

I am not aware of the department having training sessions, they might have for the genuine official HODs, but in those days there was nothing much for principals. I did not get that development and training from the department at all. They just leave you on the site. The informal training gave me a starter to my leadership and allowed me to develop my confidence. Our principal was very visionary at that time, so that gave me some development and training. She brought people into the management committee, and she trained them that way through learning on the job. Being new in such a team you received support which paved the way for development. I also introduced that structure. We have on our management team people who are not official HODs, but we support them and provide them with that growth network. The growth that I have seen in those people is tremendous.

5.4.8 My support circle and mentorship

The networks that I form with other principals provide me with help in terms of support and mentorship. For instance, the principals in this area get together, and we help each other out.

Whatever it is, help is given instantly. The loyalty and support given by other principals is incredible. There is a mixture of principals in this support circle: it is high school, primary school, male, female, and every racial group. It does not matter, as long as you are a principal, you go through the same trials and tribulations as the next one. I look towards my colleagues for the great support and that is where the mentorship comes in. I get no support and mentorship from the department. To get yourself going it is up to you to find your own mentors and I have done that. I sort mentorship from people I admired and looked up to. In my sounding board, there is a deputy principal in a co-ed school, a young black man, who provides mentorship. As a result, I have never been affected by the so-called boy's club, because being in a girls' school is different, because I link up with girl school's principals, whether they are male or female. There is obviously a lot more female, so it is natural we bond together.

5.4.9 My experience of gender policies in education

I think a female will always be up against a male. From my own experience, it is very interesting; when I applied for principalship, I was the only female out of the five candidates. I was up against four Indian men, so I had to prove that I was the top candidate for a girl's school. If there were other female candidates, I would have thought, it is not a threat. I found out afterward that I was the only female candidate; and it was a challenge but thank goodness I did not realise that at the time. I am aware that as a woman, I have to really go out of my way to show that I am the worthy candidate to run a school. There are no policies in education that affirm women to take up leadership positions. However, I have observed the differing experiences of male and female principals. In the actual field of practice, male principals tend to get away with more than females do. This is the case since males usually have very good secretaries and management team backing them. Therefore, they come out as good leaders. Whereas female principals tend to want to do everything themselves. Female principals' micro-manage more than the male principals do. I take a lot of head accountability compared to my male counterparts.

5.4.10 The barriers in my leadership journey

There are barriers that exist in the society which directly and indirectly affect me as a leader. The patriarchal orientation of leadership has been broken to a degree; since I see more female principals than there used to be. Hence, it is not as patriarchal as it used to be. Yet challenges still exist for

female principals. When it comes to family life and work balance, I think it does put a strain on any kind of marriage, especially when both partners are in education. It does take a special man to accept that his wife is a higher wage earner than he is. Such positions carry much more responsibility, but I did try to cope; yet at the same time, it did not work for me. I think the higher I went; I took more responsibility for the school. The school has always been my life and so some men do not cope very well with that, having to be in second place. So that is why there are a lot more single female principals than there are married ones, but again it depends on whom they have married. If the man is in a higher earning position in the outside world that is fine; his ego is not tapped at.

I did not have a family of my own, but it was still carried into the family because I still had responsibilities at home. I am a sibling, a daughter, a daughter-law, and a wife, so when I go home, I still have to try and put those caps on and balance work and family life. School had to come first, but that was influenced by my upbringing as well. Another element is the professionalism and the regard that principals use to have at a societal level has been eroded. I think sadly teachers have as many rights as the learners these days. For instance, at the beginning of the national lockdown, the unions were undermining the power of the department and the principal. They demanded that teachers leave school premises. That annoyed me intensely because it undermines the professionalism of all teachers when they do that.

Within the school as an organisation, I am not experiencing any barriers with the management team, but I do have that with the general staff. There is this educator with strong-willed characters not necessarily good ideas, but just to be otherwise. She is very stubborn, and she reflects everything that is negative about her, and she, unfortunately, has a bad influence. Wherever she walks it is almost like a bad vapour is left behind her. She is just a negative soul and if I say anything in the staffroom, she thinks it is all about her. There is not much that I can do, I just have to work around that. Then on a personal level, I think no matter what as a woman, I always to have to work harder, to show that I can hold a school together just as much as a male principal can. It is easier for me because I went to a girls' school. I have taught in a girls' school. So, to me, I do not have many personal barriers.

5.4.11 My role models and the footprints I leave behind

I hope just by being who I am, others learn from me. You have to work hard if you want to be a leader, and it does not get any easier; it gets hard; more challenging. In the old days, the perception was that the principal just sits in the office and gives orders, that does not exist anymore. I have to be out there and be prepared to work with people to show that it is about servant leadership. I do not ask the staff to do anything that I am not prepared to do myself. I think being that role model is critical. Consultation is an important footprint as well. We do consult staff members as well. Regarding the existence of female role models in secondary schools, I think there are. Most of them would be your colleagues, rather than in a school. Although, my management team tries to be role models for the younger staff, my role models are coming from colleagues, other principals. That is one thing about female principals; we also talk to each other about challenges. In that way, we know how to handle it. Those are the footprints I am leaving behind for other female teachers aspiring to be principals.

5.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the narratives of participants' lived experiences as female principals in secondary schools. These narratives presented accounts of personal and professional experiences of the participants. The narratives were developed using a plot system of storytelling. The next chapter presents the second level of analysis, through themes that emerged from the participants' narratives.

CHAPTER SIX

ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVES

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the narratives of the three female principals. In this section, an analysis of narratives is provided. The participants' narratives were examined, and common themes were identified and are now presented in this section. The results of this study will now be compared to the findings of previous work in the educational leadership discourse. This procedure was influenced by the three research puzzles. The first being, *what are leadership development avenues experienced by female principals before their appointment to principalship?* The second being, *how do female principals' experiences shape their leadership practices?* The third being, *what can we learn from the stories of female principals regarding their leadership experiences and practices in the midst of gender-related issues?*

6.2 Leadership development avenues experienced by female principals before their appointment to principalship

The first research puzzle looked at what are lived experiences of female principals who have acquired leadership positions in secondary schools. When the participants narrated their lived experiences as female principals in secondary schools, they started with their experiences as post level one educators. Their transition journey from being educators to being principals generated six sub-themes.

6.2.1 Career development as post level one educators

The transition journey of the three participants began in their first posting as level one educators. This is the point where they develop their career as teachers which later, they mature as leaders. When asked to narrate about their transition journeys, the participant had different experiences as post level one educator which contributed to their pathways into leadership. The transition journey was important in framing the research puzzles on female principals' experiences shaping the leadership. Two of the three participants have been in different schools as level one educators, before their leadership journey started. Ndoni's narrative shows that she was placed into rough conditions in her teaching experience, but she meandered and tried her best. Ndoni articulated that:

In my first post, I was given a grade 11 class and I taught English and History. This grade 11 class was a group of learners from different schools, so this class was created at Zibusiso Secondary. The teachers did not think much of this class since they were children who were left over culprits…They were not really brilliant children; and I felt I was pushed into teaching grade 11 because I had a degree. (See chapter 5, p 47).

Drawing from the above narrative, it observed that this female principal found ways to survive even when she was pushed into a challenging classroom as a novice teacher. As a post level one educator the participant also had a chance to work in other schools which broadened her experience. Ndoni was open to change in her career therefore, she took the chance to explore other work environments. In such environments, she had different experiences. However, where she really felt what it meant to be a teacher was at Village High as she had the freedom to teach as she pleases. We gather that when Ndoni eventually had a conducive work environment she gave it her best. As indicated earlier in her collage portrait that the presence of teachers in her family contributes greatly to her love for teaching. Contributing to her work experience is having a leader who was visionary, which allowed her the leisure to engage in effective teaching and learning. Ndoni's narrative shows that when women put effort in performing their duties in the classroom, they become effective. This concurs with previous literature that suggests that female educators, unlike male educators, put so much effort in their careers to the extent that they work harder to obtain recognition equal to their male counterparts (Watson et al., 2017).

Leon shares a similar journey of change between schools as a level one educator. However, she had intended to take a break from her career to take up a family responsibility when she arrived in Durban. She returned to teach after being offered a part-time teaching post. Leon shares her career development journey upon arrival in Durban when she had planned not to teach, as she expounds:

At that point, I was not going to go back into teaching because I was going to mother my two children. When I went for parent interviews at Bay View High School. They asked if I could come in and teach Geography part-time, I agreed to this. Then I became a substantive post level one educator because I just loved the school so much. I think it is because once you are a teacher, you are always a teacher. So, I stayed on for close to five years, then realized that I was a born and bred teacher, and I can be a mommy anyhow by doing both. (See chapter 5, p 57-58).

In this narrative, we gather that it is in their matriarchal traits that women would think of their family first before their career. That is why when Leon had a baby to raise, she preferred to withdraw from her career in order to take care of her child. However, she did that for a while then she resumed her teaching career; since she received a part-time offer to teach, which she could take while raising her child. These findings reflect what previous studies have shown, that when women have family responsibilities before them, they are faced with internal conflicts of deciding between family and career, and in most cases, they choose family (Segkulu & Gyimah, 2016; Watson et al., 2017). Therefore, the career development of this participant is influenced by her mothering role. Unlike the other two participants, Liam never had an experience of changing schools in her post level one career. Her transition journey is, therefore, within the same school, but she has observed numerous changes within the school. Liam alludes to her career development as follows:

> *My career and leadership story started here at Green Hill Girls High, since my first posting I have never left this school. This is an unusual story these days, people move a lot. The general thinking in career development is that you have to move schools to experience something different. However, I have worked under five principals and I have seen changes throughout their decades. That makes my experience a unique one. (See chapter 5, p 65)*

The above narrative indicates that even though Liam's journey remains in the same school context, yet she observed a lot of change within the school. Her transition journey is different from the other two participants who changed schools. The participants' experiences are largely shaped by their career encounter as level one educators. These experiences can be drawn from being in different school contexts or being in one school context. We learn that the change in schools gave them different experiences of growth. Similarly, the participant who had been in one school experienced change within the school which contributed to her leadership experience. This is due to the fact that, change is inevitable in Complex Adaptive Systems like schools which undergo change all the time. Hence, the findings support what is highlighted in the CLT that context plays an important role in shaping the experiences of leaders as there is an interaction of different components (Uhl-Bien, et al., 2007).

6.2.2 Preparation for leadership as post level one educators and middle leaders

The informal development of all the principals is influenced by their experiences as post level one educators. In the narrated texts, it is apparent that leadership skills are developed at post level one. As participants were comfortable with being post level one educators, while performing management and leadership duties. Therefore, the participants' transition was not planned but it came to them. This is how Ndoni explained it:

> *I became a HOD from 1995 to 2008, and I was okay with that… My leadership journey took longer maybe because I never thought of being a principal; I thought I was okay as a deputy… Then the principal left and there was a vacancy, a few friends encouraged me to apply… My transition from being a level one educator to being in leadership was a transition that came to me. I never wanted to be in any position, I was enjoying being a teacher… Then I applied for principalship, a few people pushed me to apply who believed in me. (See chapter 5, p 46-47).*

Liam said: *Therefore, my anticipation was thrown at me and I took the ball, since I had to then take up as an acting deputy principal. (See chapter 5, p 66).*

This study gathers that these female principals were informally prepared for leadership through involvement in the managing of the school. Another striking factor is that they went into leadership to improve the teaching and learning experiences in their schools. The participants form a great part of the administration of schools, even when they are not formally appointed. Therefore, these female principals' preparation was not anticipated, but informal development occurred when they were educators. Literature expands on this by showing that, female teachers are involved in leadership and administration duties before they even think of acquiring leadership positions; yet they are often not aware that they are performing these duties (Al-Ruhaili et al., 2020; Moorosi, 2014). Similarly, this study's findings gathered that participants were involved in management roles that helped them in their professional identities.

Interestingly, the informal development forms part of preparing female educators for leadership. They appreciate this preparation as an integral part of their transition journey. Leon alludes: *My preparation for leadership came from being involved in other areas of the school, apart from teaching and learning. (See chapter 5, p 58).* On the other hand, Liam says: *Inevitably through*

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such leadership platforms, I was prepared for when we had a wipe-out of our top management. (See chapter 5, p 66). The participants took these leadership opportunities only because they felt prepared enough by their post level one experiences, performing leadership roles and being part of management. This offered them an informal platform for development. Literature seems to be silent about the on-site leadership development received by female teachers aspiring to be principals.

6.2.3 The anticipation of advancing into leadership

The participants were ready to acquire leadership positions, even though they have differing transition stories. In this study, all three participants had reached that phase of acquisition, whereby they had acquired necessary skills. Liam's transition started when the post at her school was gazetted, and she applied for principalship as a post level one educator who was acting as deputy. She received the post; this is rather unusual for one to move from post level one to principalship without going through the necessary ranks. One who applied through the ranks was Leon, she was called for an interview, as she delineates:

> *I became aware of the fact that I could be part of the decision making. When I learned that Rain Hill College had a promotion post, I thought it would be a great opportunity to be part of the educational landscape and in particular the decision making. That was really why I ventured into leadership. I applied at Rain Hill and I was called for the interview and it was successful. (See chapter 5, p 58).*

Even though in the above excerpt, Leon had applied for a HOD position and was called for an interview which was successful. However, Leon's journey had a turnaround transition because she was called to step in as a deputy principal. She later agreed, and the advantage is that they knew her from the geography circles, so they were confident about her abilities. Leon narrates: *Eventually, I agreed, so in my transition I was never a HOD. I went in as an acting deputy and then I was appointed as deputy at Rain Hill College… I said, I can do it not because I am a woman, but because I am a well-equipped person. (See chapter 5, p 58).*

Leon's narrative reveals that female educators had to be known prior to be trusted with leadership in a different school. Above all they need to have confidence in their abilities as individuals not as women. The findings support previous research that emphasises that, at the acquisition phase,

women should have acquired the skills and development to prepare them for leadership. They should be ready to utilise those skills (Moorosi, 2010). Despite the participants receiving this informal development, they are also reluctant to take up leadership positions as observed in two of the participant's narratives. Ndoni narrates her encounter as follows: *...I felt, I could do that [lead in the background], support the principal. So then four people were nudging me. (See chapter 5, p 47).*

Based on the above quote, it is evident that female principals seem reluctant to take up leadership positions at first. This is not because they are incapable of taking up the position, but it comes with a micro individual barrier that women may be reluctant to take up leadership positions. This is consistent with recent studies that indicate the individual level of the glass ceiling; women may not believe that they are ready to take up leadership positions (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). Contributing to female educators being reluctant to take up leadership positions is that leadership is greatly influenced by masculinity. Hence female principals become reluctant when an opportunity to advance presents itself. As Moorosi (2010) articulated, female educators may be reluctant to take up leadership positions because they feel they are not ready. This is referred to as the individual barriers that women step into at the micro-level influence of oppression. Reluctant as women may be, but they take up leadership positions with the intention to influence change in schools.

6.2.4 Female principals longer journey into leadership

Another interesting factor is that it took longer for one of the participants to advance into leadership as compared to the other participants. It is apparent that women would rather remain behind the scenes while performing leadership and management roles. The participant's narrative reveals that she took the second in command when she saw that the school was going down, Ndoni alludes: *So, when Mr Ndlela took over, the school went really down in the doldrums. Then somehow, I took some leadership in ensuring that things are done accordingly. (See chapter 5, p 47).* This narrative shows that the Ndoni was comfortable with just keeping the school in order without being the main leader. This confirms what Gandhi and Sen (2020) found that women would rather be second in command and perform leadership and management duties without being in the front line.

Contributing to female leadership lived experienced is that women who apply at good schools are not accepted since such schools are reserved for male leaders. This contributes to the challenges female principals face during the interview process, as observed in Ndoni's experience: *Eventually, I applied, but it was tough because that is when my challenges started. Our school is big, so SADTU wanted the school for their leaders in high places who were teachers who eyed the school. (See chapter 5, p 47).* The participant experienced a challenge after her applying in this school since she was a female wanting to lead a big township school. This made the acquisition process longer since the leadership post was reserved for male principals or particular individuals. This is a result of the different expectations towards men and women's ability to lead; as women are viewed as too feminine to lead (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). This experience contributes to the under-representation of female in educational leadership and their professional identities being overshadowed. It also highlights issues of privilege as stated by the intersectionality theory, where women are marginalised and placed on a leadership scale (Agosto & Roland, 2018). Women are not expected to take up leadership in well-performing schools only because their social identity as women.

6.2.5 The unclear transition routes in female principals lived experiences

The participants transition from being post level one educators into leadership takes different routes. Ndoni went into management with no initial desire; she was asked to sit with the HODs and be part of the middle leadership, while she was a level one educator. This gave Ndoni a growth platform as she echoes: *I became HOD for English, even though I only wanted to be a teacher. I was enjoying teaching… The HOD whom I was sharing the office with, passed away. So, then the management gave me her work to do… (See chapter 5, p 46).*

This narrative reveals that Ndoni was involved in leadership after stepping in for someone, but she had no intention of becoming an HOD. She was open to developing her leadership capacity. Similarly, the other two participants were open to opportunities of growth without directly seeking leadership. Such opportunities prepared them for leadership and management duties. Leon says: *I do not think that while I was a level educator, I ever had leadership or management ever in sight. As an educator one goes into the work for the children. (See chapter 5, p 58).*

Even Liam had no intention of venturing into leadership, as she narrates:

Doing all of these small things has helped a lot in developing skills for leadership and administration…I grabbed the challenge and took it as a chance to grow out wings as I learnt a lot more about myself and the school system. The attitude is that I do not expect leadership positions to come to me. I need to be prepared so I am ready for it when the opportunity presents itself. Then interestingly I was brought into the management team in an acting capacity. At that time, the principal believed in creating posts so that one becomes a head of something or in charge of something. This allowed us to also learn the management side of the school, which was an invaluable experience because it is very different from classroom-based experiences. (See chapter 5, p 65-66).

Based on the above plots of all participant's narratives, it is noted that their involvement in leadership and management duties as level one educators, contributed to their preparation and anticipation. The participants have unique transition journeys, but all three are centred around them being open to growth and development before they take up leadership positions. Therefore, their journey starts with what Moorosi (2010), calls the anticipation phase where they should be prepared for leadership positions. Interestingly, these female principals had their anticipation push on them, without any direct intention to advance in their career; they used the opportunity to develop themselves.

6.2.6 The lived experiences in acquiring leadership positions

The participants' acquisition of leadership positions is dynamic as some participants had an easy transition ride than others. Within the participants' narratives are issues of being accepted, extra preparation to acquire leadership positions and their journeys taking longer than those of male counterparts. These participants applied for leadership positions, and they received them, yet the journeys of their acquisition are different. Liam had a transition that depended on her performance in the current school as a level one educator. This is because she had never changed schools, so she was observed by the staff and parents. Liam did not experience challenges in the acquisition. However, she was aware of her vulnerability as a female principal, as she explicates:

Later the principal retired, and I was acting as principal. Then I applied for the post and I got it, which was 9 years ago. I was up against four men; it could have gone against me very easily because I am a woman. (See chapter 5, p 66).

From Liam's narrative, we gather that she received the post because she proved that she was worthy of the position. Contributing to her being accepted is that she had been in the school for a longer period. Her narrative reveals that female principals sometimes acquire leadership positions because they were viewed and accepted by the parents since they recommended whom they wanted. Ndoni, on the other hand, had a harder journey. She experienced a lot of resistance because she was the only person in her school who was called for the interview, which caused tension among those who thought that they were going to get the position. She was more than prepared for the interview, since her sister helped her. The post went on a dispute, since Ndoni was a female principal who was seen as undeserving of the position, as she narrates:

> *The post went into dispute for more than ten months before the interviews. It was disturbed by the unions eventually we went to the interview then there was a dispute for another ten months, which means there was no principal, there was an acting principal for almost two years. (See chapter 5, p 48).*

From the above narratives of the two participants, this study shows that female educators' acquisition of leadership roles depends on the schools' context. Both these participants had been in these school for a long period. However, Liam was accepted into leadership without any hurdles, while Ndoni experienced hurdles, the contextual factors affecting their leadership are different. It was hard for Ndoni to be simply appointed as a principal in a school within a township. We can draw that female principals face resistance more than their male counterpart in the upward movement. This accounts for the great contribution of stereotypes that hamper perceptions about female leadership (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). Earlier studies indicate that women have rouse above despite the resistance they encountered (Arar, 2019). Ndoni's narrative mirrors the above statement because she became a principal even after the resistance she experienced.

Another interesting element that arises is that the longer female principals stay in a school it allows them a better chance for leadership in that school since they are trusted by the parents more. However, that trust has boundaries for Ndoni. To ensure that she has a positive influence, Ndoni went as far as preparing a turnaround strategy for the school; since she knew what was needed to improve the school and knew the school's strengths and weaknesses. She alludes as follows: *My sister helped me with a beautiful document, a turn-around strategy for the school, but it was just*

an onwards draft turnaround consultative strategy that looked at the academic side and the boarding house. (See chapter 5, p 48).

Female educators require extra preparation for leadership roles as a means of proving themselves worthy of leadership positions. This has been observed in recent studies that women work harder to eventually be confident or recognised that they are capable for leadership since they know and believe that they need to prove themselves more than men (Watson, et al., 2017). This shows the intersectionality gender-related oppression, contributing to the longer and difficult journey of female principals compared to males.

The above mentioned and other factors contribute to the under-representation of women in secondary school leadership. Female and male educators are not treated the same in their transition into principalship, and this gender composition of leadership contributes to the under-representation of females in educational leadership (Liang et al., 2016). This study revealed that the participants as level one educators had to work hard in recognizing their leadership abilities before they acquired leadership positions. They were involved in various leadership and management duties as a foundation for their leadership. This proves that female principals manage to break the glass ceiling while they are competing with men.

6.3 Female principals' experiences of leading secondary schools, and how these experiences shape their leadership practices

The second research puzzle looked at the experiences of female principals in secondary schools and how their experiences shape their leadership practices. This research puzzle generated seven sub-themes.

6.3.1 Participants observations of leadership and gender

Two of the three participants observed characteristics of male leadership in relation to female leadership experiences. Male principals succeed in their schools because they use the stick to discipline the learners. When two of the participants narrated their leadership experiences, they shared an observation that they made on the leadership of male principals in Secondary schools. The first participant described that male leaders use masculinity drawn from their household roles. Ndoni propounds:

...many men are not performing well. If their schools are functioning, it is because they are using the stick to beat up the children. So, I do not feel that they have the skill to lead, since they lead by instilling fear. The children are afraid of them because they will beat them up for late coming. Bawobaba [they are fathers], so they behave like they behave in their homes. They transfer that to schools, which is the workplace. (See chapter 5, p 48).

Based on the above observation, male principals succeed because they apply their fatherly role into school leadership. Fathers assert authority all the time. Another issue with male leadership that was observed by another participant is that male leaders appear good because they are backed up by good secretaries. While female principals prefer to be hands-on in their leadership. Liam tells her observation as follows:

In the actual field of practice, male principals tend to get away with more than females do. This is the case since males usually have very good secretaries and management team backing them. Therefore, they come out as good leaders. Whereas female principals tend to want to do everything themselves. Female principals' micro-manage more than the male principals do. I take a lot of head accountability compared to my male counterparts. (See chapter 5, p 69).

The above observation suggests that male leaders are seen as successful because they are supported by women who help them to succeed. Otherwise, they receive the credit of being good leaders just because they are males. Studies in the gender and leadership discourse suggest that male leaders have the leeway to apply multiple leadership styles and still be the widely preferred gender for leadership due to the gendered stereotypes on leadership (Sanchez & Thornton, 2010). The preference given to male leaders contributes to women viewing themselves as incapable as they cannot assert fatherly discipline and also have support from management.

6.3.2 School context shaping the leadership practices of female principals

The participants in this study experienced the influence of the context in their leadership practice. The context shapes participants' leadership experiences by the change in demographics, which impacts the calibre of learners a school produces. Liam narrates as follows:

The demographics have changed, and finances have changed, now that impacts our school. It means a change in parent support; so, it is a change in the finances; that has an impact

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on the academics. This is because low-income families often do not put a high emphasis on education. They do not always stimulate children from a very young age, because they do not have the facilities or the know-how. That has an impact on the calibre of children that we now have. (See chapter 5, p 67).

Liam's contextual factors emanate from being in the same school but seeing demographics changing around the school. While another participant highlights that she had three different contexts influencing her leadership, Leon alludes to her current context as follows:

The context of my current school is diverse demography; it is mainly middle to high income. It is an academically well-performing school. We have a 100% pass rate it is not a question. ...As a leader, you also have to learn to shape your leadership style, based on your customer base. So I had to learn very quickly to say "look oh darling come let's make you a cup of tea, but you only have two seconds, then you have to get back to that test. (See chapter 5, p 60).

Leon's current school has a diverse demography which contributes to the academic performance of the school. The following is observed in Ndoni's contextual factors:

The context influenced my leadership as a woman. I do not think male principals in secondary schools, have a problem that goes on and on. When they assert authority in the school, and they may experience a little of resistance for maybe a few years and then people will settle in. If a male principal came to the school, they would toe the line immediately; but with the woman, you have to constantly fight and challenge. (See chapter 5, p 52).

One of the interesting findings in this study is that schools' context contributes greatly to the school performance and the leadership experiences of female principals in this study as narrated by the participants. Firstly, the change in demographics contributed to the school identity as learners are not well supported from home. Secondly, female leaders learn to lead according to customer base, by looking as the needs that arise. Thirdly, female principals had an ongoing problem of rejection due to the patriarchal normality contributions towards leadership in secondary schools. The school context is not accommodative of female leadership as all the participants narrated in their leadership experiences.

From the participants' narrative, it is also noticed that they dealt with the changes caused by COVID-19. This adjustment to safety regulations tested the participants' ability to adapt. Leon responded as follows: *As a leader, you learn to adapt to changes in the school system. If you are not a change agent, you are absolutely doomed, and I can speak from the educational context and the changes it has undergone. (See chapter 5, p 60).* From the aforementioned, the context of the school experienced a drastic change this year due to COVID-19 and the regulations regarding contact classes and social distancing. This change influenced the schools' system and all its components. This directly affects the leadership experiences of these female principals. Therefore, it required a different response from the leaders. This demands the three leadership roles in the CLT, which is enabling leadership, adaptive leadership and administrative leadership in the changing context.

The dual contextual factors shape female principals' leadership experiences. The first factor is the context in which the school is situated. Some schools are situated in contexts that are greatly patriarchal and hold masculine norms of leadership. This relates to the marginalisation aspect of social contexts that privilege male leaders than females (Agosto & Roland, 2018). This puts female principals at a disadvantage in their leadership performance as they are socially categorised before they even perform their duties. The second factor is the context of the school itself. This includes the school culture and atmosphere, which may or may not be supportive of female leadership. This connects to what Rarieya (2007) emphasises that schools can be places where gender roles exist and can possibly be challenged or reshaped. As contexts are exposed to change, it calls leaders to change and adapt. This confirms what Uhl-Bien et al. (2007) said, that as school systems are exposed to change, leaders must adapt to change and acknowledge the role of change in the school. Leaders have to keep in mind the main function of schools in the midst of the changes. They did this because they understood what it means to be a leader and to lead in a school.

6.3.3 Participants understanding of leadership and being a leader

Essential to these female principals' leadership experiences is the actual understanding of leadership and being a leader. The participants had an understanding of these concepts, but in some instances, they were not consciously aware of them. This could result from them stepping into leadership without envisioning it, but through being pushed by people or a desire to make a difference. Participants in their stories expressed their understanding of leadership, Leon alludes:

Stepping into leadership, I had my own definition of leadership, especially in the school context. For me, leadership was not about leading as much as it was about guiding the difference and guiding the people to make a difference. Above all, placing children at paramount or at the top of whatever decision was being made, which is in the best interest of the child. That is my story through trying to raise my own children and also trying to make a difference in children's lives in a broader sense. (See chapter 5, 60).

Leon understood that her leadership means providing guidance and placing children at the top of the agenda. Even though female principals generally understand their leadership roles, but as observed earlier, they are in a constant battle to prove themselves to colleagues and other stakeholders. Liam responds to a situation based on the required leadership role, as school systems are dynamic and are in continuous change, which shows that one understands leadership. She is open to adapt to change even though it is not always easy. Liam mentions that: *Adaptive leadership is something that comes naturally for me. I look at the challenge and adapt my style, routine, and strategies to meet that challenge. (See chapter 5, p 68).* Drawing from this narrative, it is evident that leaders need to adapt to changes that may arise in the system (school).

Female leaders experience micro and macro analysis of intersectionality, whereby they may respond to change, but still experience resistance because of their gender (Agosto & Roland, 2018). However, the participants are resilient, and they are able to rise above. Liam's leadership experience a lot of change and this is how she narrates the change

Next year it is ten years in leadership and no year is ever the same and no day is ever the same. Nobody woke up this year and thought about COVID-19 being the challenge it has become. This year we had to change every plan that we had in the school; every single one of them. Our focus had to go from academics and staffing, to fight a little virus that nobody could see. We went into health and safety and all sort of challenges. But I am very proud of my management team, I think that is again because we work so close together as a team and that we manage this challenge together. So Being a principal you have be flexible all the time. I try and read the future and the current events so I can improve my leadership. (See chapter 5, p 68).

Liam's leadership experiences offer a dynamic encounter of leading in a girl's school that has undergone numerous changes which she had been part of. She is a leader that is innovative in her

response to the changes in the school and also in improving the school. This greatly influences her leadership experience.

6.3.4 Speaking into the lives of those you lead through hard work

The participants in this study sought help, worked harder and were more determined so that they do not fail and also to prove that they are good leaders even though they are women. They are also interested in speaking into the lives of those they lead. In most cases their hard work paid dividends. Ndoni narrated to this as follows: *In my leadership, I told myself, I will try until my very last day, there will not be a time where I get tired of this school. (See chapter 5, p 50).* Her hard work and determination paid off as the school improved to 93% in 2013.

Liam also narrates the importance of working hard and being open to learning opportunities:

> *Getting into the actual leadership experience, I was like a first-year teacher all over again in this office, but I survived. I sought help from my colleagues in this area; it was great support because they are only a phone call way. I learnt coping mechanisms and now that I am in the post I'm still learning new things, because the department can introduce new things. (See chapter 5, p 67).*

Another element that emerged in this study is that female principals worked hard and spoke into the lives of those they led in order to be accepted. As Leon narrates:

> *As a leader, I had to speak into the lives of those I lead. So, I learned the rugby rules very quickly so that I could speak to the rugby boys. Whereas before at Rain View, I had spoken to the netball girls and the hockey girls. This enforces that as a leader; I do not lead only with my qualities. It is important that I learn their world a little so that they can trust me; and they know that I am interested in them. (See chapter 5, p 59).*

The above narratives show that the participants worked hard, found coping mechanisms, and spoke into the lives of those they lead by understanding their common interest. This required the understanding the context of their leadership. Even though female principals believed in themselves, but they often sought help to enhance their leadership. This study reveals that female principals are open to learning new things which assist them in their leadership roles. A similar observation is made in a study by Jones et al. (2009) that female leaders seek assistance and are

willing to assist others. Due to the scepticism towards female leadership, women have to continually prove themselves by working extra hard (Rarieya, 2007). Therefore, female principals worked harder in their leadership practice because they are already put on a scale and their performance is greatly observed.

The findings of this study highlights that the female principals are concerned with speaking into the lives of those they lead. They constantly fight the reality of proving themselves as woman and the knowledge they have acquired. This is because women come into leadership with their own style of leadership that may be different from the usual. Hence they are misunderstood and seen as incapable (Van Eupen, 2010). As part of the hard work and determination, one of the participants used policies to frame her leadership experience. She worked hard to read and understand state policies and school policies. In that way, she led with guidance from policies. She definitely wanted to do things right so that her leadership is not undermined. Ndoni shares on how hard her leadership journey was, to the extent that she had to use policies as means of survival:

> *I realised that I had to have policies in place and review old policies. For that year I did not concentrate on the academic part, which was a mess. Since this is a boarding school, I had to lay some semblance of normality in the boarding house. (See chapter 5, p 49).*

Based on the above quote Ndoni used policies as a strategy to enhance her leadership experience. This finding confirms that female principals work very hard. Due to the scepticism towards female leadership, women have to continually prove themselves by working extra hard (Rarieya, 2007). Therefore, female principals tend to work harder in their leadership practice, because they are already put on a scale to observe their performance. This study has been able to reflect previous findings that female leaders work extra harder than male counterparts to receive credit for principalship (Watson, et al., 2017).

6.3.5 Resistances towards the leadership of female principals

Two participants in this study experienced resistance even when they worked hard. One of the participants was faced with resistance to the change she came with, since things were done in a specific manner for thirty years. Leon experienced resistance as follows:

> *I ended up at this institution that was very Afrikaans with its Afrikaans values. There were many men there who obviously did not accept that a woman could lead them, and I had to*

keep proving that I am capable. They had been there for 30 years, and they would say, 'well why are coming and changing things when it worked for 30 years'. I often responded that, it is 30 years ago now and children have changed, situations have changed, technology has changed, so we have to improve. We have to test ourselves all the time against two things: can it be done better and is it in the interest of the children? (See chapter 5, p 59).

Leon's second wave of leadership is different from what she had experienced in the first and third wave. There is a huge interplay of context and intersectionality of gender. The school was highly patriarchal, so having a female principal provided an unusual change from the usual. She experienced resistance even when she was trying to improve the school, just because she was a female leader. There is an interplay of intersectionality in the resistance of female leadership since they are female principals stepping into masculine roles. Ndoni also experienced resistance in her leadership, one that is endless because she is a female principal in a township context. Ndoni's resistance was from the teachers, however she meandered around this resistance through policy implementation as she elucidates:

The teachers saw that the school was turning around in 2010, they started resisting. In 2011 they were writing grievances in our school for the first time. We had grievances which were lies of course. Since I was dealing with policy, even when they came with those grievances, I took the policy on grievances and let us see whether what we are doing is correct. The hated that because any grievances against me should be sent to my superior, who is the circuit manager. Those union leaders were now angry that they had not succeeded to move me… (See chapter 5, p 49).

Ndoni's resistance seems to be an endless fight because it keeps coming up all the time. She has not experienced a peaceful leadership journey, because in 2013 again she experienced resistance, due to the context of the school. It is a big township school which has been led by male principals, and now this strong woman takes over and she is not defeated. Ndoni also experiences shadows of resistances in her leadership which frames her leadership journey as a female principal, she alludes:

So, in January 2014, I received a letter from SACE with allegations, at 2 o'clock in the afternoon. It was said that I am abusing school money; I am abusing teachers; and allowing them to drink at school. I was told to respond to these allegations within 7 days…

In 2014 I had to deal with the court and lawyers in the same month, of January. Another teacher came with the police saying I tried to kill her by running over her with my car. When the case ended in May, on the very same day it ended 12 teachers went on strike. They called the inspector and they also called SADTU, then they had allegations against me. The whole of 2014 was a rollercoaster because the teachers were angry with me getting the position in 2009. They came together, and said this person must go, but the children refused and wanted them to go instead. (See chapter 5, p 50).

Drawing from the above, it is evident that even after working hard, female principals still experienced resistance. Ndoni deals with resistance in numerous occasions. Literature reveals that the leadership stories of female principals include a lot of resistance largely due to the masculine identity of leadership. The resistance is a result of the gender symbolism that attaches masculinity on leadership, and the gender stereotypes that view females as not fit for leadership (Van Eupen, 2010). Even after appointment, women experience resistance, contributing to this resistance is the lack of legislation that affirm female leadership (Moorosi, 2006). Despite these encounters of resistance, the participants never gave up.

6.3.6 The loss of friendship in the upward movement

One of the participants did not experience much resistance in her leadership, because she was leading in an environment where she was already known and trusted since her level one posting. However, there are two other elements to be noted in her leadership experience. Firstly, how she lost friendships as a result of her leadership advancement. Secondly, she is in a girls' school, so she is teamed up with other principals in girl schools, thus creating other friendships. When she acquired leadership, she had to play a different role. When Liam became a leader, it costed her a loss in friendships, as she explicates:

Therefore, my upward movement in my career cost me that loss. When they say it is a lonely job, it is no joke. As a post level one teacher where I knew everybody and every child in the school. Yet while I lost friendships within the school, I have gained invaluable friendships with other principals. (See chapter 5, p 67).

Based on the above narrative, Liam experienced isolation as she became a leader. The discourse on female leadership indicates that women taking up leadership in male-dominated spheres tend

to distance themselves from other women and focus on their own success (Arvate, Galilea & Todescat, 2018). On the contrary, for Liam, her colleagues moved away from her, then she found other friendships outside her work environment.

Despite the loss of friendship in the school because of the upward movement, she still kept to her goal of leading effectively. She adopted leadership practices that impacted positively on her work environment as she responded to changes and decision making within the school. Liam has also been a leader that empowers other staff members by sharing the leadership responsibilities with them. For female principals, leadership includes empowering others as well. According to Lopez and Rugano (2018), female leaders are more inclusive and open in allowing followers to learn in the process. Hence, Liam also shares the responsibilities by allowing staff members to shine at what they are good at. Her first deputy principal is good at administration and people control; therefore, she allows her to do that. Her second deputy does administration duties like the exam time table since she is well organised. She utilises each of their strengths to the advantage of the school. She shares her leadership with her staff, and she allows them to make an input to certain decisions.

6.3.7 Lack of support in female principals' experiences

One of the participants experienced a unique leadership journey compared to the other two participants. She had a vision but lacked the support of the SMT in the implementation process. This is because she was never favoured in the first place, so they made sure that she was not supported. Hence, she had a draining leadership experience due to lack of support from SMT. Ndoni explains:

> *My principalship has been sapping my energy; every time I wake up in the morning, I am going to do the physical part, because there was not much support from the management. Firstly, they are afraid of the teachers since they wanted to be liked by the teachers. (See chapter 5, p 49).*

Based on the above quote, she lacked support which contributes to the school success. It is hard when one lacks the support from the SMT because it means she is not united with them in vision and mission. She had a vision, but she cannot share it with a management that is not interested in the school. Since they are not interested, they will not implement anything that will assist the

school. The SMT was interested in being familiar with the staff then in performing their leadership and management duties. Female leaders often do not lead alone, so when there is lack of support from the management, it becomes a great challenge. Ndoni was unsupported with the distribution of management duties because the management still wanted to be popular with the staff. Hence, Zikhali and Smit (2019), assert that female leaders lack support from colleagues which affects their leadership.

Another factor is that the management and SGB were not on the same page. The SGB wanted what was best for their children, yet the SMT was not willing to work. For the SMT, it was about holding the positions but not working. Whereas with the SGB, it was about ensuring that quality teaching and learning happens, Ndoni explains:

> *I had support from the SGB. The SGB will never be able to do anything if the management on the ground is not implementing. In fact, what I found is that the SMT in our school would even hate the SGB for wanting the school to be in good condition. This puts a lot of work on the people who do not want to wet their feet. The parents want the best for their children, and best is the school providing the best, yet the management want the fish but they won't wet their feet. Therefore, I was not popular with my staff to the extent that others did not even talk to me. (See chapter 5, p 50).*

In Ndoni's narrative, the interest of the SGB and SMT was different, which divided her leadership body because she wanted what is best for the learners. This study's findings show that after female principals acquired leadership positions, they experienced some moulding and breaking in their principalship. For Ndoni it was very challenging. Shaping the experiences of these female principals is a variety of factors, that arose. Nonetheless, female principals share their narratives as accounts of growth.

6.4 Support, mentorship and development in female principals' experiences

Part of the lived experiences of female principals include support, mentorship and development as part of their narratives as female principals. This section connects with all three research puzzles. Six sub-themes develop under this theme.

6.4.1 The lack of polices to support female leaders in education

It is interesting to note that in the three narratives of this study, female principals have relied mostly on what they have informally learned as level one educators and in the process of their leadership context. This study indicates that participants are concerned about not having policies to support them in their advancement as Leon alluded:

> *Principalship is not attached to any gender policies in the education sector. So with regard to gender policies, the only thing that I was ever effected by years ago was when I fell pregnant; I had to resign from teaching then I had to re-apply after the maternity leave. (See chapter 5, p 61).*

Though there are no gender policies that support women's advancement into educational leadership, on an interesting note this participant was affected by the maternity leave policy. This policy required her to leave school to care for her child during and after the pregnancy. However, this has nothing to do with policies regarding her advancing into leadership. This is in line with the matriarchal identity of females, to care for their babies should they fall pregnant. This comes from what Lumby and Azaola (2014) talk about the inherent mothering role of female principals by raising the idea that women have a culturally bound notion of mothering. Hence their nurturing role comes first before their leadership role.

On the other hand, one of the participants raised the fact that female principals seeking leadership in a secondary school in particular, are often competing against men. Whereas men are not necessarily competing with women because they are deemed fit for this position, therefore there is a need for gender-related policies to support women. Liam had to prove herself as she was competing against four male candidates as she narrates:

> *I think a female will always be up against a male. …When I applied for principalship I was the only female out of the five candidates. I was up against four Indian men so I had to prove that I was the top candidate for a girl's school. If there were other female candidates, I would have thought, I would not see a threat. (See chapter 5, p 69).*

From Liam's account, it is reflected that women feel pressure because they are competing with male candidates, who are view as leaders. She articulated that if she was against female candidates, she would have felt at ease. This proves that there is an amount of pressure for female candidates

seeking leadership appointment. In the midst of this pressure, policies do not provide support to women in their leadership journey. This makes it an extra mile for them in their upward movement. It is apparent that the lack of policy implementation support female educators in their advancement contributes to women struggling in their upward movement. However, one of the participant's narrative reveals that some years ago, there was a mentorship program for female principals. This failed; and contributing to its failure is that women do not see themselves at the same level as men. Ndoni alluded:

> *There is minimal gender policy implementation to support women. About four years ago; the people in management in the district office started something to mentor us that was called 'The mentorship for female principals'. It was beautiful when it started. We met and talked as women, on topics like, 'how you can accept yourself without being aggressive', however the following year, it was dead. It would die because in my observation, I've seen women principals favouring men like they do not want to put themselves at the same level as men; but they want to put the male principal on a certain pedestal. It is like they are above them whereas we are the same, I do not like that, I just respect you as a human being not because you are a male. (See chapter 5, p 53).*

Ndoni raises an interesting dimension that women as individuals do not see themselves as leaders; instead, they see men as more deserving than them. The absence of policy implementation results in Moorosi (2014) emphasising that gender inequity in school leadership is prevalent, thus putting women in the edge and they constantly battle in their upward movement compared to men. Therefore, this will contribute to fewer women being interested in the upward movement due to the lack of policy implementation. This study observed that when there is a lack of mentorship, it becomes difficult; because even if policies are put in place, women need to first accept themselves as capable of leadership. They should find their own confidence before they are supported by policies in their advancement.

6.4.2 Inconsistency of development from the Department of Basic Education

Apart from policies existing, participants' narratives reveal that the DBE is not making enough strides to support women in leadership. Liam and Ndoni indicate that the department threw them into the deep end, and as novice principals, they had to settle themselves. Ndoni's narrates:

The department on the other hand, never provided support. You are thrown in the deep end. There was no induction, there would be induction for the HODs and then the department would be so busy with other things… All you do is attend government workshops and there will be people helping you. You do attend those finance workshops which are few and spaced far between. (See chapter 5, p 53).

This lack of support is a sentiment shared by both participants. The DBE places the female principals into the field, and they have to find their ground while doing their work. The only support would be some managerial workshops that are done once in a while. Female principals are not given support because of the masculine orientation of educational leadership.

On the other hand, Leon indicated that she received an amount of support from the department. Leon alludes: *The department has given us many opportunities to be developed; they run workshops that we can attend, and I am fortunate to have an amazing circuit manager. (See chapter 5, p 61).* Leon experienced this because her school is situated in a context that is of first class compared to the schools of the other two participants. So maybe that is why Leon experienced support and the other two participants did not. Therefore, the findings of this study show that there is no consistency in the DBE when it comes to the development of leaders. The lack of support that women experience contributes to the under-representation of women in leadership positions (Rarieya, 2007; Zikhali & Smit, 2019). Support such as mentorship could benefit female principals by providing motivation and development in their leadership experiences (Block & Tietjen-Smith, 2016).

6.4.3 Female principals creating their own support circles for guidance

Since female principals are not supported, the participants created their support circles for their mentorship and growth. Two of the participants indicated that the support they received from their own circles adds value to their experience. Only Liam of the two participants narrated that: *You have to network with other colleagues and develop your leadership capacity. (See chapter 5, p 67).* The participants in this study sought support from the people around them as means to meander around their new appointment in leadership. This helped them to develop their leadership practice.

The study also revealed that the female principals relied on what they informally learned as level one educators and in the process of their leadership. The participants show resilience as female leaders in Secondary schools through their own support circles and personal mentorship platforms. Ndoni narrates as follows: *Fortunately, I had my support circle from outside which was very knowledgeable. I think I surprised them with the knowledge that I had. (See chapter 5, p 52).* Ndoni's support circle consisted of her sister, who was a principal in a secondary school. The leadership guidance played an important role in Ndoni's leadership journey as she came with the knowledge and expertise of policy in leadership. Her sister also provided her with people who could assist with various problems regarding the management of the school and curriculum facilitation. It is also observed that Ndoni's mentorship and support circle also consists of other male colleagues in leadership. Ndoni shared how her informal mentorship assisted her:

> *...the mentorship I received was great, I received it from a friend of mine who was a deputy principal, but sort of a principal. So, whenever I wanted to start something, he would say no do not re-invent the wheel, I have done this, and he would share it with me. Then I would take it and go to school and share it with the management, but they would not implement anything that was making the other schoolwork. You will never succeed if you do not have the support from the management. (See chapter 5, p 53).*

From the above narrative, the study shows that women create their own support circles that provide necessary mentorship. On the other hand, Liam raises that she received support from other principals in the surrounding area as she narrates: *The networks that I form with other principals provided me with helps in terms of support and mentorship. For instance, the principals in this area get together, and we help each other out. (See chapter 5, p 68).* In this network, Liam did not build professional relationships only, but she also built friendships that are supportive. She also meets for leisure and moral support when the leadership seat gets hot. The loyalty in this support circle is incredible and it helps her to develop her leadership capacity. Literature is silent about the ability of female principals to create their own support circles to mitigate leadership challenges.

6.4.4 Traces of informal Mentorship in female principals' experiences

Findings of this study also revealed that female principals seek mentorship from those they feel will be beneficial to their leadership. They do not wait for the DBE to team them up with mentors,

since it does not happen. Leon says that she sought good leaders to mentor her and some of these are not in the education sector. Leon mentions:

> *When I trace mentorship in my journey, I have never waited for clubs to be set up for me. I have made my own platforms, so I have gone out and I sought good leaders. My one life coach was the Chief Executive Officer at Uniliver. In my journey I have never waited ever for people to create the structures for me. I have gone out and I have surrounded myself and looked for people whom I could grow from, both male and female. I do have a group of friends who are like minded principals. (See chapter 5, p 61).*

Female principals find their own mentorship through other networks of growth that assist them in their leadership. They choose people who will be valuable to their leadership journey so that they develop into more effective leaders. Some of these mentors for Leon came from organisations that she served in, and such circles provided a sharing platform where growth is inevitable. The findings reveal that women go out to seek platforms for growth through mentorship and development.

Since Ndoni was in a township context, it was hard for her to receive mentorship from other female principals in nearby schools. Women principals were not supportive towards other women. In this case, the female principals were rather too strong to extend support to novice principals. Ndoni explains: *I did not get the principals this side. I found that the principals that were women, they came on too strong as if they were trying to prove a point. (See chapter 5, p 54).* This study showed that female principals are present in some cases, but they do not provide support for other novice female principals. This is often referred to as the Queen Bee Syndrome. This syndrome cautions that some women who manage to succeed in male-dominated workplaces distance themselves from other women and also do not contribute to the upward movement of other women (Gandhi & Sen, 2020). This causes a divide between the well experienced female leaders and the novice female principals.

6.4.5 Female role models in educational leadership

Another element that arose in this study is the existence of role models for female principals. These participants tried to find role models that they aspire towards. Two elements are prevalent regarding the existence of role models. Firstly, some female principals come out too strong and

are unable to be role models to novice principals. Ndoni mentions that: *The two principals who were strong, very good ones but they came out as arrogant and also disrespectful even to the department officials when we had workshops. (See chapter 5, p 54).* In this regard, some female principals are unable to be role models and contribute to female leadership. Hence, Ndoni sought help from different people in her support circle, but her sister, who contributed in providing assistance regarding policies, stands out as a role model. Ndoni alludes that: *I used policies; my sister was very instrumental with policies. She would sit and check on the website and download them for me. (See chapter 5, p 53).* Her sister became her role model, providing her with support. Adding to Ndoni's support circle and development, she had a consultative strategy in her leadership. She consulted and received great support from her circle.

Secondly, the findings also show that female principals found role models from their colleagues. Liam narrates that: *Regarding the existence of female role models in secondary schools, I think there are. Most of them would be your colleagues, rather than in a school…my role models are coming from colleagues, other principals... (See chapter 5, p 71).* Therefore, female principals are able to learn from their colleagues. Studies have confirmed that such leadership networks allow female principals to develop social support. However, such networks are few for female principals (Moorosi, 2014). Literature suggest that women lack role models of their kind, meaning female role-models. Due to the masculine identity of leadership, women struggle to find female role models in organisations like secondary schools (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Gandhi & Sen, 2020; Moorosi, 2014; Wanjiru, 2011). This contributes to the lack of role models in female leadership.

As leadership is an ongoing process of learning and development, female principals are open to their leadership growth. The findings reveal that these female principals received minimal support and development from the DBE to assist them in their leadership development. The lack of support that women experience results in their under-representation in leadership positions (Rarieya, 2007; Zikhali & Smit, 2019). Support such as mentorship could benefit female principals by providing motivation and development in their positions (Block & Tietjen-Smith, 2016). However, in this study, the principals experienced informal mentorship and development from their support circle, but only one participant experienced some formal development provided from the DBE. From the findings of this study, it is concluded that the DBE needs to create more mentorship and development platforms for female principals in particular. Due to the masculine identity of

leadership, women struggle to find female role models in organisations like secondary schools (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Gandhi & Sen, 2020; Moorosi, 2014; Wanjiru, 2011).

6.5 The Glass Ceiling effect on female principals' leadership experiences

The third research puzzle looked at, what can we learn from the stories of female principals regarding their leadership experiences and practices in the midst of gender-related issues. When the participants narrated in this regard, the focus was on the barriers experienced within the societal, organisation and individual spheres; as well as the footprints they leave behind for other women. This study showed that female principals experience various barriers in their leadership journey within the societal, organisation and individual spheres, which are viewed at the micro and macro levels of intersectionality experiences. Nonetheless, we learn that they never gave up on their leadership journey.

6.5.1 Glass Ceiling due to the societal barriers

In this study participants were affected by two societal barriers; gender stereotypes and family-work balance conflict. These are imposed by the patriarchal orientation of leadership. However, societal barriers for women in educational leadership are not limited to these two that are narrated in this study. Gender stereotypes influenced the participants' societal roles as women and it indirectly influences their leadership pathways. Leon found it hard to draw the barriers she encountered in the societal sphere as she does not allow such things to affect her. Hence, she draws from the general perspective that stereotypically some women in leadership display the masculine traits of being aggressive and thick-skinned, thus lacking emotional expression. Leon also draws from the historical discourse of leadership and so narrates:

> *Obviously, in the past men were preferred or were favoured in many of the leadership roles. Based on possibly the premise that women are far too emotional and that men are more practical. As a leader, or simply as a woman, I have to be mindful of this. I have to understand that people come with that bias and allow them to come with that bias and do not just prove them completely wrong. (See chapter 5, p 62).*

Leon's story indicates that she does not attach herself to these perceived barriers. However, she observed that the feminine traits of female leaders are viewed as weak leadership, yet that did not discourage her. This is a result of the historical leadership discourse which perceived masculinity

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as key to leadership. She is aware of this and knows that it influences people's perceptions of her as a female leader. These gender stereotypes influence the patriarchal and masculine identity of leadership. Contrary, Liam and Ndoni did not experience the effect of gender stereotypes in the societal level, apart from them being aware that such stereotypes exist. In as much as gender stereotypes are present in the society and organisations, but women face the burden of breaking gender stereotypes in their career advancement most of the time (Chase & Martin, 2019; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). It was observed that the three participants showed great resilience in spite of the societal barriers that stood before their leadership pathways.

A common societal barrier in this study is the family-work balance conflict. All participants experienced the dilemma of family-work balance, because of their mothering role and their families' expectations. Leon narrates that women are often viewed in their traditional role of mothering and caring for the family. This comes from her generic instinct as a female. However, she spends more time at work, since she is comfortable with how much her family loves her and she is certain that they will always forgive her for not being there. Leon explicates:

> *...this family-work balance is always a problem. I think as a leader, I tend to shift towards spending more time at work, because people do not love you as much as your family; and they are not as forgiving as your family. I think it is certainly something that naturally happens as a natural progression. ...I think people that love me in my inner circle would be more understanding. It is really only in the last four years that I have found the balance. I think as a female leader, it has to be a conscious decision, whereas for male leaders it is a lot easier, because they do not have the emotional drive that women have. (See chapter 5, p 62).*

From the above quote, we learn that even though Leon could not strike a complete balance between family and work life, she was fortunate to have a supportive family that allowed her to grow and develop herself. This support helped her to be a good leader because she knew that she could stretch herself out any time. As time went on, she eventually found a balance. Liam on the other did not have a family of her own, but because she lived at home, she still had to try and balance the two, but it did not always work. She spent more time at school than at home. Liam narrates this barrier as follows:

When it comes to family life and work balance, I think it does put a strain on any kind of marriage, especially when both partners are in education. It does take a special man to accept that his wife you know is a higher wage earner than he is. Such positions carry much more responsibility. But I did try to cope; yet at the same time, it did not work for me. I think the higher I went I took more responsibility on the school. The school has always been my life and so some men do not cope very well with that, having to be in second place. So that is why there are a lot more single female principals than they are married ones, but again it depends on who they have married. If the man is in a higher earning position in the outside world that is fine his ego is not tapped at. (See chapter 5, p 70).

Liam's narrative shows that she struggled with balancing the two as well, which is expected of women. She also spent more time at work. As recalled in her collage portrait that her upbringing makes her focus more on her work. She also raised the issue that husbands are comfortable with wives having a high position at work only if they [husbands] are earning more. Ndoni on the other hand, was not married. She was a single parent, but she was affected by this barrier as she had children to care for. Ndoni narrated as follows:

I had children and I was single, that affected me to a certain extent. So, when I was at Gugu High School as deputy principal, I was young by then. There was a time where I had to be at school till 5 o'clock because it was during those times of the struggle in 1986/87. It was tough at school; the management had to have meetings almost every day to look at the day and plan for the next one. (See chapter 5, p 50-51).

Based on the above narrative, Ndoni experienced the dilemma of family-work balance only at a period where she was raising her children as a single parent. Based on all three narratives the family-work balance dilemma affected the participants in this study, but it is observed in the case of Liam and Leon in particular because they were married and had family responsibilities to mother or assist greatly in the family. Liam and Leon struggled greatly with this dilemma as they spent more time at work than with their family. Leon has a supportive life partner who understood when she had to be at school often, and she only found the balance in the last four years. Though Ndoni was not married, this family-work dilemma affected her as a single parent, and she had no one to care for her children in days where she was attending late management meetings. What is common

is that these female principals spend more time at work, with the hope to be forgiven for not being there in the family. Yet they are still expected to play their family roles.

We learn that the matriarchal role of women affects their leadership experiences. They are holding a scale: on one side they have to be fulling their family roles and on the other side they have to work extra hard to be good leaders. Recent studies coincide with this study's findings that women face conflict in balancing family responsibilities with work demands (Shava et al., 2019; Watson et al., 2017). Some women choose between family and career advancement, as they find it frustrating to balance the two (Rarieya, 2007). The participants managed to meander around this dilemma, despite the fact that they choose to spend more time at work than at home.

6.5.2 Glass Ceiling due to the organisational barriers

The societal barriers that the participants experienced are transferred to their organisational experiences as secondary school leaders. In this study, it is observed that the participants experienced these organisational glass ceilings: the masculine identity of leadership; rejection from parents, teaching and non-teaching staff; and resistance from other male principals. These barriers within the macro-level influence the micro-level of female principals' experiences and professional identities. The common organisational barriers for Ndoni and Leon consist of masculinity within the organisational level. Ndoni was affected by this barrier as she was called by a derogatory name. They did not like her as she was a woman and other women could not win favours from her. Ndoni narrated:

> *I can see the distance from almost everybody and other people are saying ngeke sitshelwe ilomfazi [this woman will not tell us]. I have never been called by that word before. I could feel that when people use that word it is like they are swearing, and this guy said that, 'as a woman principal it is hard for the women'. The women want to behave in a certain way towards a male principal, like getting used to them. (See chapter 5, p 51).*

Ndoni experienced rejection of her leadership as a female principal; she was not respected. This is due to the masculine orientation of school leadership that excludes female participation. A similar barrier was experienced by Leon. At Nuwe Hoogte Hoerskool, she stepped into leadership after a male principal and Leon had to prove that she is capable of leading the school.:

Organisational barriers are influenced by the school culture. The school that I applied for after Rain Hill College. I think the governing body saw my leadership and they looked past my femaleness and my women-ness. Now being a principal at a co-ed school, with quite a number of male members of staff as well as male members on the management and that really if I were to say that there was any barrier, it would have been in that ten years. As I led at an Afrikaans school, which was pretty much a patriarchal community. I had to attempt to equip myself with the necessary skills attempt by equipping myself with the necessary skills, making sure that I could speak into the world of the male. They will respect you if they know that you can be respected. (See chapter 5, p 62-63).

Drawing from Leon's narrative, we learn that the school culture affected her leadership as a female principal. The school was so patriarchal to the extent that she had to prove that she can be respected. Masculinity in school systems results from gendered organisational cultures that push women to the periphery of leadership and view them as incapable (Gandhi & Sen, 2020; Liang et al., 2016). We also learn that this masculinity in schools largely affects female principals in co-ed schools, as Leon did not experience this barrier in a girls' school. Women leading in secondary schools experience some disrespect as observed in Ndoni's narrative that she was even called by a derogative word. An interesting factor that arises from this study is that it is easier for female principals to lead in girl secondary schools than lead in co-educational secondary schools. Co-ed secondary schools generally have a patriarchal culture, where female leaders are not fully welcome. Hence, Leon felt that she received the leadership position at that co-ed school just because they looked past her femaleness. However, she had to learn to speak into the lives of the male colleagues through speaking their language. Ndoni, on the other hand, is leading at a co-ed school and her leadership narrative has organisational barriers that are endless.

Resistance is a factor that comes up in two participants' narratives, with the other participant having more resistance. Liam experienced resistance from one educator who seems to be negative about things that are happening within the school. This affects Liam in her leadership as she has to deal with this staff member. Therefore, Liam alludes:

There is this educator with a strong-willed characters not necessary good ideas, but just to be otherwise. She is very stubborn, and she reflects everything that is negative about her, but she unfortunately she has a bad influence. Wherever she walks it is almost like a

bad vapour is left behind her. She is just a negative soul and if say anything in the staffroom, she thinks it is all about her. There is not much that I can do, I just have to work around that. (See chapter 5, p 70).

Liam had to deal with that one educator who resisted her leadership by causing a toxic environment around her. This educator is against everything in the school. The study revealed that, for female principals in secondary schools' experience resistance from other female colleagues. Interestingly, from Ndoni's story, she experiences resistance from female staff as well. Ndoni received feedback on why she experienced resistance from female staff members:

This guy told me that, as a woman principal, these people [female non-teaching staff] cannot get things from me with that kind of behaviour [seductive] because I am a woman. Then they are resentful towards me for no reason, it is just that I will not allow them to do anything wrong. (See chapter 5, p 51).

Women in Ndoni's school are struggling with the fact that they cannot get out of Ndoni the things they did from previous male principals. Alternatively, they reject her for that. Ndoni and Liam received resistance from other women within their school, thus contributing to their organisational barriers. Within the organisational level experiences, Ndoni also experienced some rejection from the parents. This is how Ndoni narrates her experience:

I could feel that the parents respect me less, but then two or three minutes into the conversation when they see that you know your stuff; then they say, 'you are like a man'. They start comparing me to a man, which I do not like. Why should it be men only who are strong, whereas there are strong women. (See chapter 5, p 52).

Initially Ndoni was less respected by the parents because she was a female principal at a secondary school in a township. This disrespect went as far as the non-teaching staff and parents. This is because she leads in a township boarding school. She experienced resistance from nearly all staff members, and she was seen as someone who is stepping in and changing things. They resisted towards her because she was setting the tone as she tried to fix things in the boarding house.

Interestingly, participants' resistance also came from male staff members. For instance, Ndoni was not accepted by men because they felt she did not deserve that role of being a principal in a secondary school. This become worse when she attended principal's meetings which are male

dominated. She has the confidence to stand up and speak despite the fact that the male principals do not like it. She does this because she knows and believes that they are all in the same position, therefore there is no need for anyone to be disrespected. Ndoni narrates based on this account:

> *The inspector once said, 'Ayi [he exclaims in admiration] Miss when you stand up to speak English bayanyanya [they get disgusted] the male principals at the back'. So, it is this male thing. Even though I do not look at myself as a female principal until people make me feel like that, so I just stand up there because I think I am a human being. The positions we hold are just the same; it is just that I happen to be female, but do not treat me in a certain way because of my gender. Treat me like a human being but I do not get a lot of it here. (See chapter 5, p 51).*

On another account Ndoni says:

> *There is no female principal in a boarding school, I observed this at the Association of Previously Disadvantaged Boarding Schools. I was the only female principal, and I could feel the men there, they did not even want me to raise my hand to speak. They hated it and they pretended as though I was not there. I can feel when people are speaking to one another and it is like a boy's club. Through the jokes that they are passing I can see that it is excluding me. When I make a comment, and my comments are about gender too, I would say, oh is it like that, so what do you say about me, when you refer to all of us as Eyi madoda asikhulumeni phela' [hey men let us talk], did you count me, and that makes them angry. (See chapter 5, p 51-52).*

In Ndoni's narrative, the male resistance does not end at the school level, but her experience is spread to the resistance from male principals in school leadership circles. She is viewed as an invisible shadow, as these male principals do not respect her. This resistance results in female leaders having to continually prove themselves as women, and their capabilities to lead (Rarieya, 2007). Female leadership in secondary schools is highly resisted with no concrete reason apart from the masculine identity of leadership that does not view women as capable for leadership (Davids, 2018). The participants managed to rise above in spite of the resistance they experienced.

Despite the rejection Ndoni is still confident enough to stand up for herself. These principals' meetings make her invisible as they excluded her opinion in meetings thus creating the 'boys club'.

Zikhali and Smit (2019) coincide with this finding as they allude that male dominated principal networks exclude female leaders in leadership discussion even when they attempt to contribute with their knowledge. Through Ndoni's narrative this study revealed that women are strong leaders. Ndoni is a very strong woman and she relied on policies as means of mitigating the resistance she received. Steele (2017) indicates that women are generally rejected in principal circles or meeting because they are females, and their views are not valued. Ndoni was rejected even when she came up with ideas that may assist, but those ideas are acceptable if they come from other male leaders.

Evidently, there is the presence of the boys' club in Ndoni's experience; however, it is a different case for female principals in girls' schools. The boys club does not exist because they all have one vision, which is making girls' school succeed. Liam had a different experience since she led in a girl's school only: *…I have never been affected by the so called boy's club, because being in a girls' school is different, because I link up with girl school principals, whether they are male or female. (See chapter 5, p 69).*

The participants experience a lot of challenges within their school environments. This is a result of schools not accommodating female leaders. The parents, male principals, teaching staff and non-teaching staff create barriers for female principals through rejecting their leadership. This resistance is drawn from the perceptions held on leadership that do not include women, instead posing oppression and resistance towards women (Cole, 2009). School systems are still reluctant to change which contributes greatly to the leadership narratives of female principals in this study, fostering issues of intersectionality.

As previous studies have concluded that women in most cases experience a lot of organisational barriers, but the findings of this study reveal that some women may experience more of these barriers than others. Liam and Leon experienced minimal organisational barriers because they currently lead in girls' schools. Liam had largely a smooth sail in her leadership journey. Leon experienced organisational barriers only in the ten years as a principal at Nuwe Hoogte Hoerskool. Ndoni on the other had experienced several organisational barriers. Here we observe that the contextual influence played a vital role in Ndoni's narrative of organisational barriers. Ndoni is in a township school that did not accept her appointment in the first place and continues not to accept her leadership.

6.5.3 Glass Ceiling due to the individual barriers

The barriers that the participants experienced at a societal and organisational level are transferred to the individual and professional identities at the individual level. This also goes vice versa, because this study revealed that female principals become reluctant towards taking leadership positions because they feel they are not ready yet. The participants in this study were reluctant only because they were not ready or had not orientated their career in that manner. The participants were not willing to move up too soon, until they are sure that they can do it. Leon would have preferred to allow someone known in the school to take Rain Hill's position as indicated earlier. She had not navigated her journey that way yet. Female teachers would rather remain as educators or middle managers longer before being in principalship. This is evident in the Ndoni's narrative:

> As females, we also feel we can only be HODs, just be responsible for a small group of people, but not to be a deputy principal let alone a principal. Yet women in middle leadership try their best. When I look at our school years back; the two females who were in the SMT were running the school, behind the scenes. I observed this because I became an HOD with them. (See chapter 5, p 52-53).

From the above quote we gather that female teachers would rather remain as HODs or members of the SMT, than being principals. They are reluctant to lead a large group of people; hence they would rather remain behind the scenes performing leadership roles without receiving credit for it. Through the meanings they attached to their narrative, I observed that participants are in denial of the internal barriers that they have. They think that they are not affected by internal barriers, yet unconsciously they are experiencing these. This is reflected in their willingness to stay in middle leadership while performing higher leadership duties, and not move up. Ndoni indicates that she has never consciously looked at herself in a gendered manner:

> I never looked at myself with a gender identity perspective, so I always did what I felt I was capable of. This draws to the whole idea of leadership; with the male teachers, they are expected to be leaders. A young male of 30 will apply to be a principal, but it is rare to find a female of 30 applying to be a principal until they really know themselves and who they are, then they can start applying. Females stay on post level one longer, I stayed for more than twenty years. (See chapter 5, p 52).

While Leon's narrative explains this:

> *I think it was just that I knew that I was confident in who I was. I was confident that I had done everything I could to equip myself to be in a leadership position. So, it was never really a conscious thing, that I felt that I had been disadvantaged because I am a female."* (See chapter 5, p 62).

In this study we discover that individual barriers happen unconsciously, hence, female educators take longer to become leaders, and that Ndoni never attached gender identity on herself. She viewed herself as person and a leader. Similarly, Leon had the confidence in herself, and being a female was an unconscious barrier. A similar observation is made by previous studies that female leaders often experience individual barriers unconsciously so (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). This study reflects the importance of women knowing their strengths and weakness to help them develop where they need to. On the contrary, recent studies suggest that female educators may lack confidence in taking up leadership positions, which results from traditional male supremacy at the macro level socialisation (Iyekolo et al., 2020; Reis & Hope, 2019). However, the participants had enough confidence they just wanted to feel completely ready to take up leadership positions.

Contributing to one of the participant's personal barriers, she talks about the eroding professionalism of principals. She says principals are not respected as they used to since teachers have more rights overpowering responsibilities. Liam narrates: *Another element is the professionalism and the regard that principals use to have at a societal level has been eroded. I think sadly teachers have as many rights as the learners these days. (See chapter 5, p 70).* This affects Liam as female principal.

Regarding the individual barriers, some of the participants show an element of being reluctant to take up leadership positions. They are reluctant because they are not ready while they certainly have the confidence to lead. These female principals took longer to attain leadership positions which is a result of them being reluctant. Hence, they would rather remain in middle leadership while performing higher leadership roles. In some instances, the participants are unconscious of their individual barriers which contribute to their professional identities.

6.5.4 Breaking the Glass Ceiling and changing the narratives of female leadership

One of the participants had to understand her school culture and respond by finding means to mitigate. She did this while she was in a co-ed school. She knew that the school culture was centred around rugby, so she sought knowledge about rugby to speak into the lives of those she led. Leon narrates as follows:

> *…what I used to do is to listen to what my husband said when he cheered at rugby. This include things like, 'the referee didn't make a good decision there or that player didn't play well'. Then I would go back to school the next day, and I would have a discussion with my male teachers and say, 'What do you think about that decision in that rugby match?' So, I spoke their language. This was a way of trying to earn their respect, by me changing and growing. (See chapter 5, p 63).*

From the above narrative, this study shows that female leaders are able to analyse the school culture and respond to it in a manner that will speak to the people they lead. We learn that in spite of the barriers that these participants experienced they managed to rise above and become resilient leaders. In breaking the glass ceiling, the other participant uses policies for a better leadership practice. Two of the participants allude that being consultative is important because you evaluate with the staff and use policies that will contribute to the school. This assists in ensuring that female principals' leadership is enhanced through effective functioning of the school. Ndoni allude to this as follows:

> *At school I did the same thing [evaluating policies], I worked on the policies. Since we had a problem with teachers absenting themselves and not filling in forms; so, I decided to get the teachers to be in class, you have to get the teachers at school. (See chapter 5, p 49).*

From Ndoni's narrative we learn that women read more and ensure that their practices are in line with what is required by policy. Female principals also value the importance of consulting expects in the field benefits female principals for their own growth. The participants cracked the glass ceiling to some extent as they came up with ways to rise above. Women rise above because they bring distinctive values and attributes into principalship than men do; they find ways to do better as women (Lumby & Azaola, 2014). Leon mitigated by learning the language of the staff at the Nuwe Hoogte Hoerskool. These participants are creative as women. They found ways as leaders.

We learn that they are strong women, and they find means to survive, despite them not being consciously aware of the individual glass ceiling before them. Contrary to what Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017) say, women often give up because of the countless barriers. At all levels of glass ceiling, these participants still remained resilient.

6.5.5 Female principals' footprints in secondary school leadership

These experiences are a learning momentum and growth pathway of the educational leadership of female principals in secondary schools. The participants believe that they leave numerous footprints from their leadership experience. These footprints draw from their current practices as principals and what they generally leave behind. These female principals in secondary schools, live their footprints while in leadership by setting a good example for other female educators and also changing the leadership landscape with their practice. Ndoni alludes to this as follows:

> *My footprints are already felt and since I am retiring, they are saying please do not be a stranger because we need you. They need me to mentor them. They do not want me to get lost on them, because they believe that they need me in their leadership positions. I have got that feeling that somehow people think I can do something to help them. (See chapter 5, p 54).*

Ndoni is aware that she has touched the lives of some educators who aspire to be principals, and she is prepared to provide mentorship. On the other hand, Leon leaves a footprint of leadership styles and skills that women can adopt in their leadership. Leon narrates: *The landscape of leadership allows more collaborative type of leadership, there is more soft skills. As a woman, I have that ability to step into that role. (See chapter 5, p 62).* Women have to observe and see which leadership styles and skills are need in their context as well as in a situation. A similar footprint is left by Ndoni, as she adopts multiple leadership styles depending on the situations and contexts. Ndoni narrates:

> *The type of leadership I have adopted in my school would be mostly situational leadership and enabling leadership. I generally respond to the situation as it presents itself. On a daily basis I am trying to create an enabling environment to allow teaching and learning to happen. I am very strong in interaction. I care for children and I am approachable to them. Hence, I think to create that enabling environment. (See chapter 5, p 54).*

From Leon and Ndoni we learn the importance of leadership styles and how female principals develop them. This influences the participants to work harder. We learn the importance of working hard to be a good leader especially for female principals. Liam emphasises the footprint of working harder, as says:

> *You have to work hard if want to be leader, and it does not get any easier; it gets hard; more challenging. In the old days, the perception was that the principal just sits in the office and gives orders, that do not exist anymore. I have to be out there and be prepared to work with people to show that it is about servant leadership. (See chapter 5, p 71).*

Through working harder, the participants are able to become influential. The participants in this study become role models in who they are, in work environment. Part of working hard they develop and set the tone for their staff members. The study also reveals that participants leave footprints of self – confidence as key to their female leadership experiences. When female principals believe in themselves, they can do exceptionally well in their leadership. Ndoni alludes to this:

> *It is important to have confidence and believe in yourself. Also knowing and implementing policies of the Department helps one in leadership. (See chapter 5, p 54).*

Regarding this footprint Leon says that, *"as women, we often do not realise how much strength we have; until we have to actually tapped into that belief in ourselves. Telling yourself that you can conquer the world." (See chapter 5, p 64).* Women still need to learn to be confident in who they are. This study shows that if female principals are confident enough, they are able to assert themselves as leaders, so that they are respected. Another striking footprint is that we learn that Leon leaves the footprint of allowing herself to be vulnerable and open to learning opportunities. This contributes to their leadership as Leon articulates:

> *...It starts with acknowledging that I do not know everything, I am learning every day, growing every day; and I am grappling on many days with things. You need to show other women that it is okay to be vulnerable and be kind to yourself. Surround yourself with people who fill the gap. (See chapter 5, p 63).*

It is important to acknowledge vulnerability and to be resilient. Female principals acknowledge that vulnerability is not a weakness, but an opportunity to grow and realise other people's strength and contributions to the school. Female principals in this study were able to break the class ceiling

and perform their duties. This allowed them to leave footprints for other female teachers aspiring to be principals. Literature seems to be silent about the above-mentioned footprints left behind by female principals in secondary schools.

6.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the second level of analysis in narrative inquiry. Polkinghorne (1995), refers to this as the analysis of narratives. The discussion of the findings was centred around the research puzzles. Common and unique themes emerged when I examined and analysed the narratives. The next chapter brings the study to conclusion, by summarising the study, drawing of conclusions; then implications of the study are provided.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the findings that are centred around the research puzzles. Therefore, the lived experiences of female principals in secondary schools were presented and discussed. This final chapter intends to conclude the study. This chapter offers four features, namely, the summary of the study, conclusion drawn from the findings, implications of the study and personal reflections derived from the study.

7.2 Summary of the study

Chapter one provided an orientation and overview of the study. Issues relating to the experiences of female principals in secondary schools were introduced, especially the conflict between gender policy and its implementation. This included the background, statement of the problem, rationale, research puzzles and conceptualisation of key terms.

Chapter two offered a review of international and national literature relating to educational leadership and the leadership of female principals in secondary schools. This literature included the upward movement of female educators which is full of hurdles and barriers.

Chapter three elaborated on the theoretical frameworks used to frame this study, which is the Complexity Leadership Theory and the Intersectionality Theory.

Chapter four presented an outline of the research design and methodology utilised in the study. The study employed an interpretive paradigm which allowed me to capture the lived experiences of female principals in secondary schools. The chapter also presented the two methods used to generate data that formed the narratives of the participants. These methods are narrative interviews and collage portraits. It also provided the method of analysing the field texts, which was done through narrative inquiry analysis (narrative analysis and analysis of narratives), and the process of selecting participants. The trustworthiness, limitations and ethical considerations were discussed in this chapter.

Chapter five offered the first level of analysis which was the narrative analysis. The narratives captured the lived experiences of the participants, including their collage portraits as part of the

narratives. The personal and professional experiences of the participants were presented. These narratives were drawn from narrative interviews and collage portraits inquiry.

Chapter six presented the analysis of narratives which is the second level of analysis in narrative inquiry. The narratives of female principals were further examined to identify arising themes. Accordingly, the findings were presented in a thematic form in relation to the research puzzles.

7.3 Conclusions drawn from the findings

Below are the conclusions drawn from the findings of this study as per each research puzzle.

7.3.1 The leadership development avenues experienced by female principals before their appointment to principalship

This study has shown that the participants acquire their experiences from being post level one educators. At times being placed in rough teaching conditions as level one educators, they try their best to be exceptional educators. They put the effort in ensuring that they perform their duties when given a chance as level one educators. Predominate to their experiences as female educators, their motherly role stood out as one of them took time out to raise her child. Their experiences as level one educators gave them an opportunity to develop and grow their potential. We learn that the more female educators remain in one school, they gain the trust of the parents and staff, which then allows them to acquire leadership positions with minimal hurdles. These female principals remained as teachers or middle leaders for too long until they were ready to become leaders. However, while in that wait, they performed management and leadership roles.

One of the significant findings that emerged from this study is that the school context greatly influences the acquisition of leadership positions for female principals. As for some, it was easier to step into leadership, while others experienced resistance and hurdles in their acquisition. Nonetheless, contributing to the findings is that the female principals worked harder to be recognised as fit for leadership. Their hard work was recognised by those around them, who later influenced or pushed them to apply for leadership positions. We gather that female educators need a push for them to really acknowledge their readiness to take up leadership positions.

It was also shown that, when female educators become principals, they make it a point that they speak into the lives of those they lead. They do this by understanding the school culture and also by being consultative. Female principal use different leadership roles that are influenced by their

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current situation or context. In that way, they know their followers and they influence them. Contributing to the knowledge on female leadership, this study observed that female principals use policies to ensure that schools are functioning as they ought to. However, in some contexts, they lack the support of the members of the SMT because these members had their own desires for the position. Another element is that female principal's leadership is often rejected because of leadership's masculine identity, especially in co-educational schools.

7.3.2 Female principals' experiences of leading secondary schools, and how these experiences shape their leadership practices

In this study it is evident that the minimal impact of gender policies in educational leadership affects the advancement of female educators. Since leadership is drawn from a masculine perspective, then female educators struggle in their upward movement as policies do not fully support them. This study has shown that it is important that there are mentorship programs for female principals, as the female principals in this study lack mentorship from the DBE. They sought other mentorship platforms and support circles in their leadership. This helped to further develop what they had acquired as post level one educators. Most striking is that female principals lack role models of their kind. Some female principals are not supporting female novice principals. This contributes to the hurdles for aspiring female leaders and in the under-representation of women in educational leadership. The current findings clearly support the relevance of on-site training. Female principals in this study relied on the on-site training they received as post level one educators than the training they received as principals. This experience makes a convincing case for more on-site training for principals in general and female principals in particular.

7.3.3 Lessons learned from the stories of female principals regarding their leadership experiences and practices in the midst of gender-related issues

One of the significant findings that emerged from this study is that female principals experienced barriers within the three spheres: societal, organisational and individual. These barriers have been alluded to from the earliest studies conducted on female leadership. In this study it is observed that societal barriers are minimal and focusing on gender stereotypes and the dilemma of family-work balance. This study concludes that women are still fighting against gender stereotypes and their feminine roles at home. In some cases, female principals are not accepted because of the gender stereotypes that perceive them as incapable of leadership. They are also faced with ensuring that

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their work-life does not interfere with their family life. The conclusion drawn in this study is that at times they choose to spend more time at work than with the family. At other times they withdrew from work to fulfil family duties.

In this study, it is evident that the organisational barriers for women in leadership still exist and are strongly influencing the leadership experiences of women. Women are not accepted as principals due to the school culture and the context of the schools, which uphold masculine identities of leadership. This study has shown that female principals' leadership is rejected by parents, teaching and non-teaching staff, and other male principals. Again, this is influenced by the context of the school. As those who lead in girls' school do not experience as many barriers as those in co-ed schools. Hence, this study concludes that female principals are accepted as leaders in girls' schools as they experience minimal barriers there. However, they are rejected in co-educational schools as they experience numerous barriers there. Another major finding was that female principals' leadership experiences are also shaped by their individual barriers. They become reluctant to take up leadership positions due to that unconscious barrier of being a female. This contributes to them taking longer to become leaders as they would rather remain un-appointed but still perform leadership and management duties.

Part of the lessons that can be learned from the narratives of female principals is that the participants allowed themselves to be vulnerable, and thereafter they were resilient, and they devised mitigation strategies. The participants were vulnerable in their leadership experiences as female principals. They used their vulnerability in a positive manner by looking at the weakness and rising above. They became resilient despite the challenges they faced. They are strong women who leave footprints of resilience for other females aspiring to be principals. We learn that these participants found mitigation strategies that worked in favour of them as female leaders. Female leaders' narrative can change the perceptions of female leadership in secondary schools.

7.4 Implications for further research
Since this study was a small-scale study that explored the lived experiences of three female principals in secondary schools in Two Districts in KwaZulu-Natal, the findings do not reflect an overall view of female principals in South African schools, since the findings cannot be generalised. The sample was limited, since the intention was not to generalise, but to narrate in depth their lived experiences. This study offers three levels of implication.

7.4.1 Person implications

I would love to further explore this type of study with a bigger sample. In that way I will have a wider view of the leadership experiences of female principals in secondary schools. There is a greater need to explore female principals' leadership experiences in secondary schools in South Africa using a large scale study.

7.4.2 Practical implications

The study highlighted that present gender policies do not fully minimise hurdles for female educators aspiring to be principals. This could imply that the DBE should create more support platforms for novice female principals; this can contribute to reducing contextual factors that contribute to the difficulties that women face in their advancement. There is also a need to tell such success stories of female principals and their positive contributions in educational leadership.

7.4.3 Theoretical Implications

Despite the struggles experienced, female principals showed a great degree of resilience, which implies that further studies may provide data on the resilience of female principals. The study also highlighted that female principals created their own support circles to assist them in their leadership journey. For further edification, more research should be done on the informal support structures of female principals.

7.5 Personal reflections on the study

My personal journey in this study gave me a chance to learn and tap into the experiences of female principals. When I choose this topic and began to read literature around the phenomenon, I felt motivated to understand educational leadership with a gender perspective. From the literature, I gathered that female leadership research is vital because it distinguishes experiences based on gender construction. This gender construction of leadership has resulted in women facing scrutiny of the leadership abilities when seeking to be appointed into leadership positions (Coleman, 2003; Moorosi, 2010). Therefore, it observed that preference is given to men, and so women do not get sufficient exposure and preparation for management and leadership positions (Coleman, 2003). Despite the above, I learned that female leaders are resilient leaders who also contribute greatly to the educational leadership discourse. Engaging with the participants gave me a deeper

understanding of the untold stories of female principals. Each story gave me a unique perspective of female leadership. Listening to these stories made me aware of the positive and negative experiences of female principals in secondary schools. During the analysis process I began to own their stories. I became emotionally attached to their stories as I retold them and analysed them because I knew how much these stories meant to the participants. Among the many things that I learned in this research journey include the following: female leaders are capable; they allow themselves to grow; and they develop mitigation strategies. All this will definitely assist me as I aspire to become a principal in the future. This research journey made me more passionate about female leadership experiences, including their success stories and their resilience strategies.

7.6 Chapter Summary

This study concentrated on the lived experiences of female principals in three secondary schools. Three research puzzles guided the study. This study adopted a narrative inquiry methodology using three participants. The study revealed female leaders have unique experiences of leadership. However, there are common elements in their leadership, including the barriers they experienced. This study has clearly revealed the need for further research on female leadership in schools. Lastly, a short reflection was provided on the research journey.

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DATA GENERATION TOOL

Narrative interviews and collage inquiry will be used to generate data for this study. Interviews will be conducted on three separate days. On the first day, participants will be asked to tell a story about their experiences in aspiring and acquiring leadership positions. On the second day, the participants will tell their stories of marginalisation in the field. On the third day, participants will be asked to tell their life stories using collages, these will include possible barriers in their upward movement.

Day 1 – The transition story

During narrative interviews, participants will be required to narrate a story about their lives as people in terms of who they are and what social groups they are affiliated to. They will include their experiences in aspiring and acquiring leadership positions. Thereafter, participants will construct a collage to narrate a story on certain aspects that they may have left out during the construction of their stories.

Guiding interview question:

1. Narrate your journey from being a post level one educator to being a novice principal in a Secondary school (The transition story of good and challenging moments).

Day 2 – The Glass ceiling and the foot prints left behind

Participants will tell their experiences of marginalisation as female principals. The gender-related barriers they might have experiences.

Guiding interview questions:

1. Narrate the barriers you have experienced as a female principal at a societal, organisation (school), and personal level; how have these barriers influenced your leadership experience?
2. What can other women aspiring to be principals learn from your leadership practice in the midst of gender-related barriers (the foot prints)?
3. Tell me your view of the presence of role models for female principals in Secondary schools?

Day 3 – The moulding and breaking

Participants will be asked to narrate their experiences as using collages and explaining why what the collage illustrate to them and how it connects with their story and journey into leadership.

Guiding interview questions:

1. Tell me your life story depicted by this portrait collage of prominent events you wanted to share (Personal and Organisation influence) with me.
2. Tell me more on how your upbringing influenced your career path and advancement (personal, family and society's role).

Portrait Collage Guideline:

Participants will be given magazines, where they will cut pictures that best describe or relate their lived experiences. These pictures should depict their experiences and barriers at a personal (their upbringing, confidence); organisational (upward movement in their working environment; mentorship and networking environments); and societal level (The cultural and patriarchal influences on their journey). This should be creative and be a story of its own.

ETHICAL CLEARENCE CERTIFICATE

UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL ™

INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

04 September 2020

Miss Sbongimpile Benedictor Mdabe (214575972)
School Of Education
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Miss Mdabe,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00001819/2020
Project title: A narrative inquiry on female leadership experiences from three secondary schools in two Districts in KwaZulu Natal.
Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 22 August 2020 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 04 September 2021.
To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,

Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

INSPIRING GREATNESS

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION CLEARANCE

KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE
EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Private Bag X9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200
Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201
Tel: 033 3921062 / 033-3921051

Email: Phindile.duma@kzndoe.gov.za
Buyi.ntuli@kzndoe.gov.za

Enquiries: Phindile Duma/Buyi Ntuli

Ref.:2/4/8/4183

Sbongimpile Benedictor Mdabe
P.O. Box 25084
SEAVIEW
4073

Dear Ms Mdabe

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF FEMALE LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES FROM THREE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN TWO DISTRICTS IN KZN",** in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 07 August 2020 to 10 January 2022.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma/Mrs Buyi Ntuli at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

Dr. EV Nzama
Head of Department: Education
Date: 07 August 2020

GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER

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APPENDIX D

LETTER TO GATEKEEPERS (PRINCIPAL) AND INFORMED CONSENT

Education and Development Studies Cluster,

School of Education,

College of Humanities,

University of KwaZulu-Natal,

Pietermaritzburg Campus, KwaZulu Natal

16/08/2020

15 August 2020

Dear Phenomenal Female Principal

My name is Sbongimpile Benedictor Mdabe a Masters student from the Educational Leadership, Management and Policy Discipline, School of Education, College of Humanities, University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (214575962@stu.ukzn.ac.za/0799570021). I am conducting a study titled **"A narrative inquiry on female leadership experiences from three secondary schools in two Districts in KwaZulu Natal."**

Studies have revealed that female principals in Secondary are below 50% in educational leadership. There are various contributing factors to their minimal representation; however, the prominent factor is contributed by the masculine identity of leadership. This factor constitutes of barriers from the societal, organisational, and personal spheres, which result in women avoiding to take up leadership positions. Therefore, the lived experiences of female principals in secondary schools are influenced by these spheres.

In view of the foregoing, I intend to narrate the lived experiences of female principals in secondary schools. The objectives of this study are:

1.   To understand the leadership experiences of female principals in secondary schools

2. To narrate the experiences of female principals in breaking the glass ceiling in educational leadership, and overcoming gender-related challenges

3. To examine the gender-related barriers that these principals might have encountered during and after the appointment.

You are invited to please participate in the study as a female principal who is leading in a secondary school. To gather information, I will use narrative interviews and portrait collages. These interviews will be recorded and used for research purposes only. Interviews will be conducted in a period of four weeks from 21 September 2020 to 09 October 2020, and each interview will take about 30-45 minutes. For the collage portrait you will be given magazines where you can take pictures which relate to your lived experiences.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number 00001819/2020).

Please note that:

- Your participation is voluntary. If you do not participate you will not be penalized in any way.

- Your confidentiality is guaranteed through the use of pseudonyms.

- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only.

- Data will be in the form of interview transcripts and portrait collages. These will be stored in a secure storage and destroyed by shredding after 5 years. Digitally recorded data will be deleted after five years.

- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.

- This study will provide no direct benefits to participants.

- In the case where Zoom meetings are used, you will be compensated for the data.

Thank you

Yours faithfully

Ms. S B Mdabe

My contact details are as follows:

Email: 214575972@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Cell phone: ███████

My supervisor is Dr. P Mthembu. She is a lecturer, in the School of Education, College of Humanities, Pietermaritzburg Campus, University of KwaZulu-Natal

My supervisor's contact details are:

Email: mthembup@ukzn.ac.za

Phone number: ███████

You may also contact the Research Office at:

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics

Govan Mbeki Centre

Tel +27312604557

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you for reading this document about this research.

DECLARATION

PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM FOR CONSENT OF PARTICIPATION:

I _____ (Full names of participant) have been informed about the study entitled "A narrative inquiry on female leadership experiences from three secondary schools in two Districts in KwaZulu Natal" by Sbongimpile B Mdabe. I hereby confirm that I understand the nature and purpose of the study and I have been given the opportunity to narrate my leadership experience. I agree to voluntary participate in this study. I am also aware that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any point should I wish to do so, without any undesirable consequence. I am also aware that there are neither any foreseeable direct benefits nor direct risks associated with my participation in this narrative study. If I have further questions/concerns or queries related to the study; and about my rights as a study participant, I understand that I may contact the researcher at 0799570021 or the institution at:

Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Administration

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbheki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Tel: 0312604557 – Fax: 0312604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

I therefore understand the contents of this letter fully and I DO GIVE CONSENT / DO NOT GIVE CONSENT for the interviews to be audio recorded and to share a collage of my experiences.

_____   _____

 Signature   Date

TURN-IT-IN CERTIFICATE