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Investigating the experiences of female Heads of Departments leading at an Independent High School in South Africa

by

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Research Report

Submitted to the School of Education, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Education

Supervisor: Prof. Brahm Fleisch

September 2024

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own work, supervised by the Faculty of Education, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Division. It is submitted to the School of Education, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Education. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

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Abstract

Throughout history, women have faced various challenges because of their gender. With society developing and people becoming more aware of gender diversity and equality, organisations still have not purposefully remedied how women are seen in society. More specifically, schools, particularly primary schools, have long been the domain of women due to the stereotypical notions that women are natural caregivers and there to nurture children. However, leadership and management positions within schools have traditionally been dominated by men as many independent schools in South Africa were developed during the apartheid administration, which disadvantaged people of colour, more specifically women of colour. This research report investigated the experiences of female heads of departments (HODs) leading at an independent school in South Africa.

Through the use of transformative leadership as the theoretical framework for this study, it became apparent that women's experiences are unique to their gender and often shared with other women. This study used a qualitative research design by looking at seven HODs. Data was obtained through semi-structured interviews and observations. With this, central themes of their experiences, challenges, and strategies used by female HODs in independent schools were collated thematically.

This study revealed that gender-biased perceptions of women leaders exist in several forms of discrimination even though they are in leadership positions. Additionally, the challenges these female HODs faced were aspects that dealt with society's beliefs impacting their ability to lead confidently. These women also have perceptions of male privilege, the demands of working in an independent school, the need to prove themselves as a leader and gender-pay discrepancies.

The women in this study also gave insight into their perceptions of male arrogance, recognising a gender shift in school leadership and examining the role of school existence and traditionalism in their role as leaders. The study revealed that the women in this independent school feel better equipped and are better managers than their male counterparts. The women leaders recognised the value of emotional intelligence and also strived to implement various strategies in how they led to ensure that they could manage their positions effectively. These strategies included building relationships with colleagues, students and parents; open communication; adopting

multiple leadership styles; and caring for and empowering students. All these strategies were implemented to mitigate their challenges as female HODs in an independent school.

Acknowledgements and Dedication

Firstly, I would like to dedicate this research report to my late mother – Michelle Reddy. It saddens me that she passed away at an age which was younger than I was when writing this research report. I do not doubt she would have been proud of all I have accomplished.

Secondly, I would like to acknowledge my parents and sister for their continuous support and motivation through the years I have worked on this. I started with my Master's degree at the beginning of the COVID year, which tested my mental well-being in every sense. They continued to motivate me and hold me accountable for completing this academic qualification.

Thirdly, thank you sincerely to the incredible women who participated in this study. Your insights and experiences were a complete eye-opener for me, and I have learned invaluable lessons and awareness from this research.

Fourthly, thank you to my supervisor, Professor Brahm Fleisch, for taking me on as a student at such short notice. I appreciate his patience and invaluable guidance in completing this research report.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the immense intrinsic motivation I demonstrated throughout this research project. The amount of time and effort that went into this report to complete it in less time than I originally planned. I changed divisions amid the pandemic to follow a new passion within Management and Leadership Studies, knowing I would always be under severe pressure to complete this research report. Through the constraints of our electricity crisis in this country, the new school I started teaching at and the unforeseen personal challenges that came my way – I successfully completed this research project.

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Glossary

College:

A school division catering to students from eight to twelve. This is traditionally known as a high school.

College Head:

A person appointed to manage and lead the college. This is traditionally known as a high school principal.

Deputy Head of Academics:

A person appointed to manage and lead the college in an academic capacity.

Environment:

The site and physical space in which people find themselves.

Gender-Based Violence:

A violent action towards women.

Head of Department:

A person appointed to manage and lead a specific subject within the college.

Independent School:

A private school that parents pay for and follows the IEB curriculum.

Acronyms/Abbreviations

BEE: Black Economic Empowerment

DBE: Department of Basic Education

EI: Emotional Intelligence

GBV: Gender-Based Violence

HOD: Head of Department

IEB: Independent Examinations Board

ISASA: Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Background

The inequalities and gender discrepancies between men and women have been unmistakable for a long time. Through years of social construction and societal beliefs, men have been considered superior to women (Leonard, 2002). These socially constructed ideas that women are inferior to men are still prevalent today. More recently, there has been a widespread demonstration of the shift in the paradigm of empowering women to bring about equality between men and women (Steyn, 2015).

On the other hand, as seen in many schools in South Africa, the teaching profession is dominated by women (Moorosi, 2010). Davids and Waghid (2020) contend that men occupy most leadership positions. Indeed, in recent times, the push and activism for equality and gender representation at management levels have been immense. A balance between male and female leaders should have been seen more prominently; however, it is evident that society continues to subtly hold the notion that women are unsuitable for management positions (Buthelezi, Mhlongo, & Msweli, 2021).

In addition to women in leadership, this study looked closely at female leadership in independent schools. Many independent schools (also known as private schools) have been around in South Africa for a long time (Gous, Eloff, & Moen, 2014). Many of these schools have been associated with prestige, religion and an extensive array of facilities that most public schools cannot offer. Before 1994, many of these independent schools were aimed at minority white children and filled with white teachers (Gous et al., 2014). Even in those times, male principals and HODs were still dominant at the heights of Apartheid.

Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic may have helped to move some schools more technologically inclined, the margins between independent and public schools became greater due to the financial guarantees within almost all these independent schools. Zuze and Juan (2020) confirm that the rise of independent schools is due to their ability to provide opportunities beyond public school means, such as a differentiated curriculum and, more recently, the plethora of technological resources such as iPads, laptops, smartboards, and electronic storage devices. Interestingly, Zuze and Juan

(2020) suggest that experience and type of management (such as principals and HODs) add to the appeal of an independent school.

In current times, independent schools are still associated with prestige, creating social inequality and exclusivity against an ailing public schooling system. Many more newly developed independent schools have not been built during the trenches of the apartheid regime. This means that independent schools have more autonomy in what they would like to achieve in providing an education that may differ from the traditional independent schools that have been around for more than 50 years. There has also been a significant increase in affordable independent schools that market themselves differently to develop a culture of inclusivity (Zuze & Juan, 2020).

Existing literature focuses on historically disadvantaged schools as well as rural schools that lack many resources and infrastructure such as textbooks, proper classrooms and usable toilets. This research does not intend to discredit the injustices these schools face; looking at female leaders' function in well-resourced independent schools will undoubtedly broaden the scope of female leadership.

In the context of women in leadership and independent schools, this research aimed to investigate the experiences of female Heads of Departments leading at an Independent High School in Gauteng, South Africa

1.2. Problem Statement

The teaching profession has long been perceived as a career dominated by women (Eboka, 2016); however, as Steyn (2015) suggests, there are several discrepancies within the profession. One of the main discrepancies in schools includes male-dominated management positions, whereby there is a blatant difference between the lack of women leaders within schools, as this was one of the main reasons for this research study. These management positions include school principals and heads of departments (HODs).

Additionally, The limited literature on female leadership focusing on independent schools (private schools) within South Africa signalled a deeper underlying issue (Buthelezi et al., 2021). This research further examined a contrasting side of public schools, namely elite independent schools. The research focused on well-resourced

independent schools within one of the wealthiest suburbs in Johannesburg. The problem investigated by this research was the experiences, perceptions, and challenges of women HODs in an independent school.

1.3. Purpose and rationale of the study

At a personal level, I have worked under different HODs; three of my HODs were women, and two were men. There were differences in the manner in which I approached them. Upon further self-reflection, these differences between my women and men HODs motivated me to conduct this research, specifically focusing on women. This research provides a broader and more in-depth perspective of how women HODs lead.

On the other hand, at a professional level, within the teaching community from various other independent schools, there were similar discrepancies in how they approached women HODs in contrast to male HODs. There were opinions on significant differences in how women HODs lead compared to their male counterparts. Their views and opinions have led to further discussion that female leadership is a genuine issue within schools and a current social issue.

Moorosi, Fuller and Reilly (2018) infer that even though women are significantly outnumbered in management and leadership positions within schools, the continuously developing body of knowledge on female leadership may help empower schools to empower women and, more so, young girls into developing leaders. There was a profound interest in how women manage schools, as the school setting is often predominately male-led at the highest level (Steyn, 2015). The discoveries drawn from this report will add to the scarce research on women's leadership within schools and inform policyholders to promote greater levels of gender equality within the school leadership environment.

There have been strides in increasing the number of research studies looking at women in leadership, suggesting that female leadership is a complex issue that is currently under-researched and still a scarce body of knowledge (Moorosi, 2010; Ndebele, 2018; Moorosi, Fuller, & Reilly, 2018; Moyo & Perumal, 2020). The higher the number of female teachers employed, the higher the inequalities that exist at the management and leadership level.

At a conceptual level, school leaders should become obligated to look within their organisations and identify and remove existing injustices (Shield, 2016). This can be accomplished through transformative leadership, which is one of the critical leadership theories for eradicating social injustices such as gender inequality at a management level within schools. This research will help to understand the experiences and challenges of women HODs within an independent school. Furthermore, this research will give insight into how women HODs cope with significant social pressures. At the same time, this research will contribute to the discourse of eliminating the challenges through the transformative leadership theory.

1.4. Research Questions

Main research question:

> How are female HODs leading at an independent high school in Gauteng, South Africa?

Sub-research questions:

1. What are the experiences and perceptions of female HODs leading in an independent high school in South Africa?
2. What challenges do female HODs encounter in leading independent high schools?
3. What strategies do female HODs use in leading at an independent school?

1.5. Aims and objectives of the study

Aim: To explore how female Heads of Departments (HODs) lead at an independent high school in South Africa.

Objectives:

1. To determine the experiences and perceptions of female HODs leading in an independent high school in South Africa.
2. To discover the challenges female HODs face in an independent high school.
3. To examine the strategies utilised by female HODs in leading at an independent school.

1.6. Significance of the study

This research aimed to enrich the knowledge base on female leadership and identify how women HODs lead in an independent school. While there was a limited amount of literature on female leadership, there is continuously growing literature on how women lead in schools (Ginya & Perumal, 2015; Moyo & Perumal, 2020; Naidoo & Perumal, 2014).

The common theme was that women are significantly under-represented at the management level, whereas females dominate school teaching positions (Steyn, 2015). Previous studies on female leadership, such as Zikhali and Perumal (2016) and Botha and Afework (2020), have demonstrated that female leaders generally feel that they experience more challenges than their male counterparts, are respected less and are still expected to carry out traditional manners such as politeness and showing a caring nature.

Literature on women's leadership is generally framed in Western conceptual frameworks (Cunningham, 2021; Eagly & Carli, 2018; Moorosi et al., 2018) and does not reflect the unique African context in which female leaders in South Africa find themselves (Moyo & Perumal, 2020; Zuze & Juan, 2020). The research further aims to encompass the unique experiences of female leaders within a South African context.

This study was unique as it examined an independent school where females dominated management positions. While HODs could be seen as middle management, compared to school principals or deputy heads, the trend in this independent school was considerable as many other independent schools do not have much women representation at an HOD level. Similarly, this study was significant as it looked at the affluent aspect of female leadership, whereby these female HODs lead in a well-resourced school and within a community with more modern customs.

1.7. Theoretical Framework: Transformative Leadership

This research study was guided by a theoretical framework. Varpio, Paradis, Uijtdehaage, and Young (2020) define a theoretical framework as “A theoretical framework is a logically developed and connected set of concepts and premises—developed from one or more theories—that a researcher creates to scaffold a study” (pg.990). In this instance, a theory is selected to ground a study in supporting how a

study is conducted, the analysis of the outcomes and how the study is influenced by the premises suggested by the selected theory.

This research is grounded on the theoretical framework that transformative leadership should be adopted to challenge social injustices (Shields, 2016). The issue of a lack of representation of female leaders within schools needs to be addressed. Whilst this form of discrimination against women is not uncommon, it stems from societal norms that have been passed on from generation to generation (Sinyosi & Potokri, 2021).

According to Caldwell, Dixon, Floyd, Chaudoin, Post, and Cheokas (2012), *transformative leadership* is defined as "an ethically based leadership model that integrates a commitment to values and outcomes by optimising the long-term interests of stakeholders and society and honouring the moral duties owed by organisations to their stakeholders" (pg.176). With this, transformative leadership is a theory that focuses on the foundations of leaders' being more righteous, equitable, and aware of the inequalities within an organisation to bring about sustainable and long-term social justice for all.

In attempting to reform the injustices females face within schools, Shields (2016), Shields (2017), and Montuori and Donnelly (2018) contend that leaders should adopt the tenets of transformative leadership. These tenets associated with the transformative leadership theory outline how schools can act as organisations of a democratic society and exhibit inclusion (Shields & Hesbol, 2020). At the same time, transformative leadership could redefine how female leaders are seen in the public domain and potentially eradicate gender inequalities within school management.

To further express the transformative leadership theory, Shields (2011) initially proposes eight fundamental tenets. These include acknowledging power and privilege; articulating both individual and collective purposes (public and private good); deconstructing social-cultural knowledge frameworks that generate inequity and reconstructing them; balancing critique and promise; effecting profound and equitable change; working towards transformation: liberation, emancipation, democracy, equity, and excellence, and demonstrating moral courage and activism (Shields, 2011). These tenets of transformative leadership are discussed below.

One of the first tenets of transformative leadership is the acknowledgement of power and privilege. This means those who have the power within an organisation to dictate,

shape and influence how an organisation is managed should self-reflect and become more aware of their advantaged positions (Shields, 2011). This means that HODs and school principals should acknowledge their power and privilege over the school environment and recognise that their decisions are highly influential not only on the students and teachers who work there but also within the community in which the school is situated.

Correspondingly, Shields (2011) argues that transformative leadership demands an articulation of purpose, such that leaders need to set clear intentions for an institution and how they will accomplish the institution's purpose (pg. 13). In the case of a school, Shields (2011) strongly argues that schools should aim to become establishments that express equity, democracy, and social change at every level to facilitate societal change. This way, deep-rooted issues and societal transformation can be more meaningful as schools can act as agents for change. A clear issue is to readdress the imbalances of female leaders within schools, such that those within management must create transparency regarding how this issue becomes reformed.

Similarly, transformative leadership relies on deconstructing social-cultural knowledge frameworks that generate inequity and reconstructing them. By effectively criticising social norms and attitudes that have been long-withstanding and 'sensitive' topics that are difficult for some people to talk about – breaking down these constructs and changing these pre-existing knowledge frameworks will aid in reform (Shields, 2011; Varpio, Paradis, Uijtdehaage,& Young, 2020). However, reform will only be conducive if all stakeholders (all staff, all levels of management, students and parents) within an organisation participate in this process, even if some may find it challenging to address points of privilege and power (Shields, 2016).

Likewise, Shields (2011) suggests that balancing critique and promise is arduous. Here, transformative leaders need to be brave enough to recognise the diversity within schools and the purpose of attaining good academic results, as well as the difficult task of balancing those state requirements to that of making students more aware of the social injustices within the community (Shields, 2011). While this may seem impossible, Shields and Hesbol (2020) and Shields (2017) strongly argue that the goal is attainable through purposeful and meaningful strategies that require a courageous leader to question the normative.

The transformation of the education environment requires long-lasting and sustainable reform that will entirely restructure the injustices that some people face within society. Shields (2011) asserts that significant and equitable change is a process that requires conscious and proactive reform – strategies that are fully effective at the very foundations of societal issues, as well as being more explicit about the change that needs to occur for transformation.

Additionally, the transformation of schools should not rely on school improvement plans or the capacity to attain high results; instead, the focus should coincide with developing schools as a place of democracy and social justice Drinkwater & Waghid, 2024). Whilst many may argue that schools have been deeply entrenched organisations of socialisation (Zuze & Juan, 2020), transformative leaders' decisions must be spirited and morally inclined for social justice purposes.

Similarly, Shields (2011) affirms that a transformative leader's moral courage and activism are a strong premise for deforming the societal norms of injustices. Transformative leaders must build new knowledge frameworks that promote equality, democracy, and inclusivity of all people, not just those previously disadvantaged (Shields, 2016).

Although Shields (2011, 2016, 2018) transformative leadership tenets provide a fair and solid foundation, the focus looks at transformative leaders that help shape students who are agents of social change. Shields's (2011, 2016, 2018) contribution to the theory is significant but lacks depth on how the application of transformative leadership can influence adults (like teachers and leaders) to become agents of social change.

Another reasonable criticism of transformative leadership questions whether only those in leadership positions, such as school principals, have the power to interrogate an organisation's need for democracy and social change (Shields, 2017). School leaders are diverse in their approaches and often have pre-existing ideas on managing a school effectively, which could mean that school principals and HODs can completely disregard the transformative leadership theory if they would like. However, Montuori and Donnelly (2018) assert that everyone has the ability to lead in a transformative manner through interactions with people and, more importantly, self-reflect on their assumptions and thoughts.

In the same way, the transformative leadership theory exists to address and reform various inequitable practices and encourage inclusiveness and social justice (Shields, 2011). The notion of ‘inclusive’ is so broad that transformative school leaders may find it challenging to deal with various inclusion issues that may arise, like transgender students and teachers, or even contentious issues like racism within schools (Shields, 2017).

Another critique is that the transformative leadership theory is a Western leadership theory that does not consider African traditions’ cultural complexities and context (Ncube, 2010). Whilst the transformative leadership theory provides a platform for creating a democratic and inclusive society, we need to use these tenets in a way that suits our African tradition of ‘togetherness’, ‘relationships’ and ‘serving in a way that serves others to achieve a truly transformative organisation (Ncube, 2010).

The use of the transformative leadership theory builds on the premise that with practical implementation, not only will it empower female school leaders in eradicating gender inequality, but the transformative leadership theory seeks to directly readdress people’s mindsets (Shields & Hesbol, 2020). For this reason, restructuring the way people perceive females within a schooling context may affect other organisations and students' ability to restructure and recontextualise the role of women in management.

Conclusion

The research study will be further explored in the following four chapters. Chapter two will include the literature review, which will critically analyse the relevant literature related to this study. Subsequently, chapter three will outline the research methodology used. Chapter four presents the findings and data analysis, and chapter five concludes this research study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review aimed to find pertinent sources and research articles on female leadership and critically analyse the existing literature. This process allowed this research study to focus on the crucial and relevant body of knowledge, including identifying gaps in which the researcher may place in this research study. Additionally, the literature review helped identify similar and different themes in female leadership studies and how these may or may not contribute to this research study.

The critical evaluation of each source and its significance to this study was evaluated, as searches through research articles that were done in recent years that included studies linked to female leadership in South Africa, other countries in Africa and eventually a small body in some Asian and American studies. These were important to get a global perspective on the existing literature and to bring the South African and African contexts of the experiences of women leaders closer. Some aspects that were not thoroughly analysed included the effects of apartheid on South African women in general, sexual orientation and gender classification that affects women leaders, women in corporate leadership roles and the role that students play in schools that have women leaders.

This literature review includes related aspects linked to the aims of this research study and was guided by the research questions posed earlier. The literature review outlines women in leadership and their experiences, the multitude of challenges they encounter, and some strategies that women leaders use in leadership.

2.1. Women in leadership and their experiences

This section discusses women in leadership and their experiences in leading at school. Throughout history, females have been subjected to several forms of discrimination, mainly due to their gender (Eagly & Carli, 2018). In the context of this study, gender refers to the social constructs of women and men based on their roles in society and their personality traits. In contrast, sex refers to the biological composition of males and females regarding their genetic sexual reproductive organs (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 2018). It is with this understanding that this research study is aimed at women as a gender. Even with racial differences considered, women have been associated with

low-status jobs such as cooking, cleaning, looking after their family, acting as the primary caregiver, and ensuring that a man's needs are met (Steyn, 2015).

In addition, Mapolisa and Madziyire (2012) suggest that women's experiences as leaders are beyond their leading capabilities, but instead focus on a variety of expectations imposed on them as women. These include offering a gentle and nurturing approach to leading a school and ensuring their families at home are cared for after school working hours. This idea of women working and leading beyond school affects their ability to lead confidently and adequately, given the societal stereotypes such as being able to cook, clean and look after their children (Naidoo & Perumal, 2014).

The notion of male superiority and the long-withstanding ideologies of the responsibilities of women have been built on many years of male dominance and power – simply because of a man's perceived natural affinity for physical strength and inability to bear a child (Ginya & Perumal, 2015). Correspondingly, culture and religion have continued to play a role in how society perceives and treats women (Tsoka, 2010). These include prejudice against women from doing certain types of jobs like factory workers or office jobs, further limiting women to housework and caregiving for their children, as well as cleaning, cooking and being the primary person responsible for the upbringing of the children (Eagly & Carli, 2018).

What may look like unacceptable actions and injustices against women now, the patriarchal society that we live in, is still profoundly entrenched beliefs that benefit men (Mapolisa & Madziyire, 2012). These beliefs and associated practices against women continue as we see that some cultures still do not allow girls to attend schools, that females are not allowed in corporate jobs and that women should be fully covered in public (Alyami & Floyd, 2019). More recently, the United States government has voted against any form of abortion, drawing mass attention and resistance from feminists alike. Whilst these prohibitions are historically traditional, this suggests that there are still male-rooted principles in our society and that there are still many subtle forms of discrimination against women in contemporary societies.

One such example is schools, where women have commonly been known as children's caregivers and providing for children's welfare from a 'natural' and 'motherly' perspective (Olujuwon & Perumal, 2015). This stereotype persists in our society today

as women largely dominate the school environment, particularly in primary schools (Steyn, 2015). Women are seen as the caring and patient gender that can help children learn best, whereas men, on the other hand, provide a more rigid and assertive stance with children, like disciplinary issues (Botha & Afework, 2020).

In contrast to women's dominance in school, leadership and management roles are dominated by men (Steyn, 2015). Traditionally, men are seen as emotionally and intellectually strong enough to be leaders, whilst females are submissive enough to be followers of male leaders (Sinyosi & Potokri, 2021). In South Africa, the laws of Apartheid strongly enforced discrimination against women – especially among women of colour. As a result of post-apartheid reform, South African stakeholders and policy-makers continue to build a new system that allows for new opportunities for females who have been so gravely disadvantaged (Mestry & Schmidt, 2012).

Gender inequalities aside, there has been an increase in female managers and leaders within corporate, entrepreneurial, and business spaces (Flabbi, Macis, Moro, & Schivardi, 2019). Patriarchy, however, remains prevalent in schools, particularly in school leadership. Financial, business, and education opportunities are being given to young women to pursue careers they would not have been able to 20 years ago while empowering them to be leaders and activists in their fields. In contrast to the corporate sector, schools should be used to act as agents for these changes in promoting and empowering young female students into leadership opportunities. Schools are not setting an example for these young girls regarding gender representation at a management level by having men dominate these leadership and management roles in schools (Mestry & Schmidt, 2012).

There is considerable research on how women educators experience gender discrimination in the system. More compelling, though, is how the existing female teachers who have been through a system of discrimination and injustice continue to experience such barriers in a schooling system that is still men-dominated in terms of management and leadership positions.

The problem is not unique to South Africa. A growing body of research suggests that forms of gender discrimination are widespread across the continent. If we look at South Africa's neighbouring countries such as Lesotho, Zimbabwe and the upper reaches of Africa like Kenya, Ethiopia and Nigeria, there are still strong societal beliefs

that females are not competent enough to be leaders (Moyo & Perumal, 2020; Zikhali & Perumal, 2016; Olujuwon & Perumal, 2015; Botha & Afework, 2020). These cultural beliefs within communities make it challenging for women to lead in their schools.

There is a growing body of research on gender discrimination in the school workplace in historically disadvantaged communities in South Africa (Ginya, 2017; Zikhali & Perumal, 2016; Naidoo & Perumal, 2014; Themane & Mathedimosa, 2017; Moyo & Perumal, 2020). There is an absence of research focusing on how women lead in middle-class schools, which lie within a wealthy and well-resourced community.

This review of the literature on women's leadership experiences made it clear that there is a literature gap – particularly in South Africa, of women's leadership experiences and perceptions in middle-class schools.

2.2. Challenges that women leaders encounter

This section discusses the challenges women in leadership encounter in their positions as school principals and HODs. The experiences and perceptions of women leaders are severe, and specific challenges are encountered day-to-day in their positions as leaders. Sinyosi and Potokri (2021) explain that the challenges imposed on women negatively impact their ability to lead productively and successfully. Public activism and widespread policies are meant to enable equality amongst women and men within leadership, but deeply ingrained societal and institutional factors inhibit a genuinely equitable society for women leaders in schools.

2.2.1. Lack of resources

Naidoo and Perumal (2014) emphasise that the lack of financial security characterises disadvantaged communities where female principals to lead. The lack of resources such as books, access to libraries, sometimes electricity and water, and physical classrooms pose enormous challenges for women to manage (Naidoo & Perumal, 2014). These challenges go beyond just the school environment and follow through within the communities these schools are. This implies that communities show excessive unemployment, high levels of teenage pregnancy, a lack of essential services such as proper health care, and many child-headed families (Naidoo & Perumal, 2014). As a result, female principals must fully and empathetically understand the predicaments that the students, parents as well as staff encounter.

Similarly, Moorosi (2012) and Olujuwon & Perumal (2015) concur that the lack of resources hinders a female principal's ability to lead as they would like in a school. The lack of resources brings about frustration from teachers to teach effectively in their classes; it also adds to a negative attitude and negatively impacts the productivity of teachers when they do not feel supported and provided with the necessary resources to teach effectively (Maas, Schoch, Scholz, Rackow, Schüler, Wegner & Keller, 2022). In contrast to only women principals, Maas et al. (2022) posit that the lack of resources and socioeconomic issues affect all principals and their ability to lead people who may be demotivating. This means that social, financial and resource support is essential for all leaders, irrespective of gender.

There is also a contrasting view that although women principals, much like their male counterparts, experience systematic challenges when there is a lack of resources, women leaders experience greater levels of resistance from students and teachers (Olujuwon & Perumal, 2015). Women in leadership positions tend to be more scrutinised by the community and teachers within the school because of their gender. Parents within these communities rely more on female principals to understand socio-economic factors more thoroughly. Therefore, women leaders feel obliged to be more understanding simply because they are women.

2.2.2. Cultural and traditional stereotypes

Coupled with the lack of resources, women leaders face strong traditional stereotypes that have been entrenched within society (Alyami & Floyd, 2019). These traditional stereotypes mean that women are often subjected to patriarchal systems that perpetuate the dominance of men, such as the notion of a high school principal being aggressive and assertive, rather than women who should occupy feminine-orientated jobs like teachers (Mapolisa & Madziyire, 2012). These stereotypes continuously challenge the role of women in leadership, as many people do not think women have the 'natural' affinity to lead.

Diko (2014) argues that people's cultures and beliefs about women filter down to how people see themselves and others within society. This suggests that traditional and cultural practices, particularly those in rural and under-developed areas, are preserved in institutions such as schools. Contrastingly, there is an increase in female principals in more urbanised areas due to stricter policy regulations; however, women leaders

are still heavily undermined, challenged in their decisions and often lack respect from subordinates (Ndebele, 2018; Diko, 2014). Interestingly, Buthelezi, Mhlongo, and Msweli (2021) suggest that women leaders do not receive the same level of respect as compared to their male counterparts; then again, more concerning is that women leaders experience disrespect and insubordination from other women and not only men (Buthelezi et al., 2021).

Women have been subjected to historical and traditional value systems that further disseminate male superiority and female inferiority (Ndebele, 2018). These findings are coherent with Sam, Amartei, Osei-Owusu, and Antobre (2013) as they contend that women's gender stereotypes are dominated by the fact that men see themselves as guardians over women and that traditionally and culturally – this should be maintained. On the other hand, Buthelezi et al. (2021) theorise that men firmly adhere to their cultural traditions and practices to avoid seeming ‘weak’ or ‘unable’ to other community members. Therefore, there is an emphasis on men to hold these traditional values firmly and to put women ‘in their places’. At the same time, this way of thinking can be outdated, and there is the reality that these cultural stereotypes are deeply entrenched in society – especially in South Africa, where there is an array of different cultures.

To add to the general stereotypical roles women are faced with in South Africa, it was found that many girls and women are also victims of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), such as rape and sexual assault (Dartnall & Channon, 2021). It is with this despondency that South Africa is notoriously known for these violent acts against women and girls, which has demonstrated that we find ourselves in a systematic issue of treating females as submissives in a country. Additionally, significant inequalities that exist between males and females in terms of leadership positions, salary scales, job opportunities and Gender-Based Violence incidents can still be found in the depths of South Africa. This means that the South African cultural system as a country and within communities is heavily ingrained with historical patriarchy.

On the contrary, some women feel optimistic about following their culture and traditions, even when it entails ensuring their husbands are well taken off (Dillaway & Pare, 2008). This means that while for many women, culture and traditional customs often hinder them from leadership, some women happily accept this as they do not

see themselves as being leaders and managers. (Ciciolla, Curlee, & Luthar, 2017). There is a strong sense of acceptance amongst some women in attaining 'motherhood' whilst also, later in their lives, pursuing careers and possibly in management.

2.2.3. Gender-salary gap

The sensitive issue of equal salaries between people is a debate that is not discussed enough, given the confidential nature of this topic and the legal implications that businesses and companies put in place to ensure that salaries are not discussed amongst people. Historically speaking, Han (2020) reasons that women have been paid less for a long time than their male counterparts, even if they have the same qualifications and years of experience and are employed in the same position. Whilst many companies have put reform plans in place to address the gender salary gap, many argue that the reform is not being done fast enough (Adelekan & Bussin, 2018). A recent and celebrated example of reform of salaries is the United States Women's National Team for soccer. For a long time, the women's team was paid significantly less than the men's team, even though their job titles were identical. After years of public outcry and a robust legal appeal, it was finally agreed that the case for equal pay as the Men's National Team would be approved (The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 2001; Coyne, 2018).

In South Africa, HODs working in public schools (Department of Basic Education) have a salary schedule that pays them according to several criteria, such as their notch and level of teaching. Importantly, though, no discrimination exists between men and women HODs working for the DBE. HODs employed within the same notch and post-level earn the same salary irrespective of gender.

In contrast to the DBE salary schedules, no public salary schedules are made available for HODs who teach at independent schools. ISASA, the dominant association overseeing independent schools in South Africa, does not publish nor advise on salary schedules. Due to the lack of transparency and confidentiality, Adelekan and Bussin (2018) postulate that salary scales could result in speculative discrimination between male and female HODs in independent schools. Since independent schools fall under the formal sector in South Africa rather than the public sector, it could also be argued that the salary scales between men and women are

traditionally different. Therefore, there is a possible discrepancy between the salaries of female HODs and their colleagues.

By the same token, a formal sector like independent schools can argue that policy reforms ensure equitable salary comparisons between male and female HODs; however, there is an evident lack of clarity about what women HODs earn. Han (2020) suggests that the formal (private) sector is far more complex in salary structures than the public sector, given that businesses and companies receive different incomes. For example, independent schools rely solely on fees from parents who bring their children to the school. This income determines the teacher salaries budget; therefore, independent schools depend on this income. As a result, if a school has higher fees than another, this usually translates into higher salaries for HODs, which is why there is no transparency regarding salary scales in independent schools. Nevertheless, this argument of different incomes does not clarify whether female HODs are paid the same as male HODs.

2.2.4. Organisational structure

The daily tasks that women leaders are a part of form a lifestyle many did not necessarily ask for; however, a patriarchal system imposes certain societal norms like cooking and looking after the children, which affects more than just the abilities of a woman leading in her role. This means that they cannot socialise informally compared to their male counterparts. While socialising outside the workplace may seem questionable, it is argued that these social gatherings create men-dominated social groups. As a result, this informal social setting allows men already in leadership positions to help groom and develop other men into leadership and management positions (Shields & Hesbol, 2020).

Subsequently, these informal social interactions between men, like going out for drinks, meeting at the golf course, or watching a soccer match, may perpetuate quicker progression of men into leadership positions than women. Social gatherings, like the ones mentioned previously, create social cliques that allow men to develop informal personal relationships with each other whilst at the same time transferring soft development skills between each other, such as policy discussions, biased premeditated decisions, and possibly even manipulative acts towards women (Katherine, Welton, Pei-Ling, & Young, 2010). On a more positive note, Shields and

Hesbol (2020) suggest that women should learn from the ‘playful’ and often ‘informal’ nature of male-dominated social gatherings to build better relationships with each other.

It can also be argued that women could arrange for informal social gatherings with other women, like a ‘play date’ between kids of different mothers. These ‘play dates’ will allow their children to bond with other children whilst they can interact with other women or the possibility of hiring an Au pair for the evening. While this may be true, especially in a developing society that encourages independent women, Stuhlhofer (2022) suggests that social and independent women are still frowned upon, especially in public spaces. On the other hand, organisations (like schools) should purposefully initiate, encourage, and create organisational structures supporting informal social gatherings that will allow women already in leadership positions to mentor and collaborate with other women (Cummings et al., 2010).

One could derive a simple solution from this, suggesting that male leaders could intentionally and willingly devise plans to empower women (Moorosi, 2018); however, because of the patriarchal nature of society, internationally and especially in South Africa, where patriarchal cultural values are still practised, men may not want to engage with women ‘informally’. Men would also not want to socialise outside the workplace due to differences in interests and even a fear of speculative adultery from co-workers.

2.2.5. Young induction into leadership

For a long time, the notion of ‘experience’ has proved the foundation for leaders. Hyvönen, Feldt, Salmela-Aro, Kinnunen, and Mäkikangas (2009) contend that whilst it is not common practice, a young person’s employment in a leadership role does happen, and in recent times is becoming increasingly popular. Due to the societal pressure on young women to put their careers on hold and start a family instead, young men have the opportunity to learn years’ worth of skills without the societal pressure of becoming pregnant, taking maternity leave and often, leaving a job to look after their children (Mapolisa & Madziyire, 2012). Bush (2007), Wills (2015) and Yip, Liu, and Nadel (2006) suggest that leadership and management skills can be learned and acquired, which tend to benefit men more; however, neither alludes to the age or level of experience associated with leadership and management skills. At independent

schools, the induction of young people into management roles is far more pliable as the organisation (school) creates its policies and requirements regarding these positions.

To begin with, some of the common advantages of older managers include more experience, having stable families and high job satisfaction, being heavily skilled, reliable, highly respected because of age, having higher levels of commitment, wiser decision-making and managing conflict better (Macdonald & Levy, 2016; Raymer et al., 2017; Yip et al., 2006). Subsequently, it could be argued that some of these advantages are outdated in thinking about older managers and linked to individual perceptions of older people rather than necessarily older managers.

Although some of the above challenges may be true, there are also some associated disadvantages with older managers. These include lack of innovation and motivation, natural cognitive decline, resistance to change, lower productivity due to lack of competition, difficulty dealing with negative feedback or critiques, technologically inclined and refrain from youth input in decision-making (Macdonald & Levy, 2016; Raymer et al., 2017; Yip et al., 2006). While there may be several generalisations with these advantages, like resistance to change, it could be argued that not all older managers showcase this trait. It could even be argued that some young managers may resist change.

The disadvantages and advantages of older managers, research and critiques on younger managers have also been explored. Some advantages associated with younger managers include the need for improvement within an organisation, innovation, more open to negative feedback, more technologically inclined, more willingness and adaptability to change, better physically and cognitively astute, and may provide several years to an organisation (Macdonald & Levy, 2016; Raymer et al., 2017; Yip et al., 2006). These advantages provide a positive outlook for employing young people as managers; however, many of these are interpersonal skills that older managers could learn.

Further to this, some of the disadvantages of young managers include lack of experience, inability to handle stressful situations, unsatisfied in terms of job satisfaction and seeking employment elsewhere, lack of leadership and management skills, erratic, high dependence on technology, a sense of entitlement and not

professionally developed. Additionally, most cultural traditions proscribe young people as leaders or supervisors over older people as it is seen as disrespectful and a lack of work ethic (Macdonald & Levy, 2016; Raymer et al., 2017; Yip et al., 2006). A longer, more extensive list of disadvantages has been provided, and it can be argued against the authors that many of these are once again seen as generalisations and traditional perceptions. For example, suppose a young manager finds an organisation, namely a school within close travelling distance from their home. In that case, this is a favourable situation for them – in turn, this could be one factor influencing their job satisfaction. Otherwise, the notion of not being 'professionally' developed may also be considered towards some older managers.

Young women who may be inducted into leadership roles, such as a HOD early, could benefit from many factors (Buengeler et al., 2016). These may include good organisational skills, proficient soft skills, willingness to impress and prove their capabilities, attractiveness to parents and high probability of not having children – which could result in commitment to the school and high productivity (Macdonald & Levy, 2016). Diko (2014) argues that the opportunities for young women to empower themselves in leadership and management positions are filled with challenges and obstacles that easily prevent them from gaining access to opportunities; often, discreet preventative methods are used against young women.

2.3. Approaches used by women leaders.

Following women leaders' challenges, this section shows the approaches female principals and HODs use to lead and manage schools. These specific strategies are adopted to ensure they can do their job effectively and to the best of their ability. Curiously, due to the obstacles women leaders face, it is asserted that women unconsciously try to prove themselves and consciously make an effort to showcase their capabilities as leaders (Buthelezi et al., 2021). This is concerning; even though women leaders may be proficient in their positions as managers, they subject themselves to harsh internal scrutiny to receive acceptance and approval from others.

To expand on female leaders' strategies, Moorosi, Fuller, and Reilly (2018) contend that female leaders encouraged pupil-centred approaches to ensure that all students felt like they were a part of the school community. This way, it encourages all students to become more involved with the school environment as well as all stakeholders like

parents and staff to ensure that students reach their full potential – ultimately creating a positive school community with a driven purpose of seeing all students succeed (Moorosi et al., 2018). In support of this, Lumby and Azaola (2014) posit that women leaders take it upon themselves in their natural mother-like way to drive a sense of community to develop important relationships with staff, parents and students such that social issues may be resolved within the school community.

Conversely, the mother-like community spirit that women are driven towards adds to the notion that women leaders are too emotional and often too involved in their personal lives to be able to make objective decisions (Shields, 2014). While this strategy of women leaders may further perpetuate assumptions about females, women leaders firmly believe that the power of these relationships with the students, their staff and the community – will add an intangible value to the respect and trust that they harness as school leaders (Lumby & Azaola, 2014). Additionally, it cannot be assumed that all female leaders have a student-centred approach. The approach of leaders also needs to take into consideration their personalities as individuals.

Women are presumed to make emotional decisions that others can easily influence (Buthelezi et al., 2021), suggesting that women are not adept at managing, as they are assumed to be easily manipulated and unsuitable to lead. Women leaders, however, have appreciated the rise of emotional intelligence as a desirable leadership trait among managers and employed leaders. Sánchez-Núñez, Patti and Holzer (2015) contend that emotional intelligence is a prerequisite for ensuring effective school management and successful leadership. With this, leaders need to have well-developed ‘soft skills’ that can relate to people and make contextual decisions at the moment with people in mind. On the other hand, McCleskey (2014) asserts that EI is a developing construct that has not been thoroughly explored enough to distinguish its impact within the workplace. At the same time, having an emotionally intelligent leader posits that individuals can manage and process their emotions and those around them (Chen & Guo, 2020).

In the same manner, women leaders strive to be good role models in the hope that their students and subordinates will foster their actions (Moorosi et al., 2018). This means that even though women leaders face restrictions, they can try to change the narrative of injustice for their students and the people they lead (Botha & Afework,

2020). By doing so, they can empower young girls and other women who are staff members, but equally importantly, they can educate males about the injustices that females often face.

It was found that women leaders adopt an array of leadership styles based on the context in which they are needed (Mestry & Schmidt, 2021); however, it can be argued that this implementation style is flawed as it comes across as disorganised and a leader that is too reliant on contingency measures rather than active measures to ensure that the school runs as effectively as possible (Mestry & Schmidt, 2012). Eagly (2018) further suggests that women struggle to foster a leadership style that is unique and suitable for them, demonstrating a lack of confidence and trust in themselves.

Finally, Reed and Blaine (2015) suggest that women have developed more resilience than their male counterparts and adopted facets of leadership style that encouraged togetherness and morale amongst all stakeholders. Eboka (2016) suggests that aspects of transformational and transformative leadership styles are adopted to encourage positive working relationships and considerably influence teacher morale. As a result, women leaders believe that through this, sexism, and prejudice against them will decrease. However, Eagly (2016) contends that people discriminate against women leaders more discreetly, passively, and subtly so they cannot be held accountable.

Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, it is evident that women face enormous gender issues above the challenges associated with leadership and management. The sphere of independent schools, which are well-resourced, may alleviate the challenge of resources for women leaders, but it may also bring to light if there are any similarities or differences in the experiences of women leaders. Similarly, women leaders endure strenuous societal stereotypes, pressures from long-withstanding traditions, gender-pay issues, organisational structures that limit their progress and even encounters with other women (Eagly & Carli, 2018; Moyo & Perumal, 2020; Sam et al., 2013). These challenges imposed on women influence how these women lead within schools. There is a strong growing body of literature on how women lead and what this means in a South African context.

Similarly, women commonly need to implement various strategies to lead successfully. Female leaders also strive to build positive relationships that role-model inclusivity and education about the injustices that women face to educate everyone to bring about sustainable long-term change for women leaders. The literature review examined how women leaders have historically led in disadvantaged schools and asked whether or not these patterns are unique to public schools or whether they are also experienced in independent schools. Additionally, this research study will determine if these are similar or different to my findings of women leaders in a middle-class independent school. The study will test the literature and add to the existing knowledge of women's leadership. The next chapter discusses the theoretical framework of this study.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the pertinent literature related to this study. The current chapter follows the research design and methodology used in the research study and will discuss the research paradigm, research methodology, research design, selection of participants, research instrumentation, data analysis, ethical considerations, issues of trustworthiness and the limitations of this study.

3.1. Research Paradigm

A research paradigm allows for research to be conducted meaningfully, that makes sense for the researcher and those who will interact with the research (Castillo-Page, Bodilly, & Bunton, 2012). The constructivist research paradigm was chosen for this research because of how women lead in an independent school. According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), the constructivist research paradigm allows the researcher to entirely focus on the social reality that is constructed by the research participants (pg.33). The constructivist research paradigm was suitable for this study as meaning was constructed and derived from the participants' experiences, such that their views and social constructs of the world around them are heard and clarified in a way that made sense.

3.2. Research Methodology

A research methodology is an approach that researchers use to collect and analyse their data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study has chosen to take a qualitative research approach. A qualitative research approach means to inquire about and better understand the investigated phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As a result, qualitative research approaches aim to collect and analyse data using an inquiry method (Erickson, 2012). This proposes that qualitative data is sourced from understanding people, actions, experiences, and thoughts (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). For instance, qualitative data relies on detailed descriptions, words, and expressive language to help people make sense of their social settings, such as schools (Nieuwenhuis, 2016).

Therefore, a qualitative research methodology was best suited for this study as it captured the essence of female HODs' experiences, challenges, strategies, and other specific events that occurred within this scope of study. Additionally, qualitative

research informs the researcher about the socially constructed ideas of people and their experiences within the context (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). As a result, a qualitative research methodology such as this aimed to uncover how female HODs were leading at an independent school, whereby meaning and detailed understanding were derived from the female HODs' experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

3.3. Research Design

A research design is a framework for researchers to use in their study to refer to specific strategies and methods to address their research questions effectively (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A phenomenological research design was used as the foundation for this study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) assert that phenomenology is the study of a person's particular experiences and how their experiences form the foundations for a specific phenomenon (pg.31). In further support of this explanation, Creswell and Creswell (2018) contend that a phenomenological research design is when the researcher describes their personal interactions and direct encounters of individuals with the associated phenomenon within their everyday lives.

A phenomenological research design using a qualitative research approach, this study explored female leaders' various first-hand experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As a result, it was possible to collect their lived experiences and interpret how these female HODs understand how they lead their challenges and their strategies in leading at an independent school. As a result, the qualitative research design of phenomenology allowed this study to gather rich and insightful information about the experiences that these female HODs have in their everyday lives. In turn, the experiences provided sufficient background to the phenomenon of female leadership and the inequalities that exist for females in leadership positions within schools.

3.4. Selection of Participants

A purposive sampling strategy was used for this research. Purposive sampling entails selecting a group of participants who align with pre-selected conditions with a particular phenomenon within the scope of research (Creswell, 2014). This form of sampling was best suited to this study as the research focused on a unique and specific context in which the participants are – female HODs within an independent school in South Africa. The following criteria were used to select the participants: the participants were women, they were a subject HOD, they had more than five years of

teaching experience, had more than three years of HOD experience in the school, the women were not my line managers, and they worked in the same independent school. As a result, eight participants were identified; however, only seven were sampled from an independent school, as the other potential participant declined to be involved in my research study.

The research site for this study was an affluent independent school situated in northern Johannesburg. The overall school contained a primary school and a college (high school) located in a newly developed wealthy suburb in northern Johannesburg. The school had many resources like three laboratories, two soccer fields, a theatre, a thousand-seater hall, an aquatic centre which contains two Olympic-sized swimming pools, Astro fields, netball, and tennis courts, and two cafeterias. This study focused solely on the college, as this is the phase I have taught since 2018.

The college was a relatively new school that started its operations in 2019. As of July 2022, the school had a student count of three hundred and eighty-two and a staff complement of thirty-six teachers. More notably, there were twelve HODs, of which nine were women and three were men. There were also three senior management positions within the college. A female teacher occupied the Senior Deputy: Head of Academics role, a male teacher occupied the Head of Administration position, and finally, the Head of the College (HOC) was female. The school's name has not been mentioned in this research study to protect the school's identity.

3.5. Research Instrumentation

This study used two qualitative research instruments: semi-structured interviews and observations.

3.5.1. Semi-structured interviews

Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) contend that semi-structured interviews provide a platform for respondents to express themselves in their own words and deliver their responses in an approach they feel most comfortable. Upon completing the semi-structured interviews, this research gained in-depth insight into how women HODs lead in independent schools. The use of semi-structured interviews allows some free and personal responses one would not get from a formally structured interview whilst probing further if the conversation diverts from the actual question posed (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & de Lacey, 2016).

Since several COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted, the interviews were conducted face-to-face. The interviews were conducted in a specific classroom, and a cell phone was used to record the interviews. Each interview took approximately sixty minutes out of school teaching and learning time. Each teacher was asked for permission at least three weeks ahead of time to get a specific time that worked best for them and did not inconvenience them. When doing the interviews, each teacher conducted their interview in their classroom to ensure that they felt comfortable and that we were alone, as this was also to safeguard the interview's integrity.

Once each interview was complete, the recordings were stored in a password-protected OneDrive folder. Thereafter, all recordings were personally transcribed and professionally transcribed electronically by an online platform called *Transcribe*. This allowed for an opportunity to reflect fully on the interview transcripts and compare them to the professionally transcribed interviews. These electronic transcripts were stored again on the password-protected OneDrive folder and shared with the respective supervisor to be stored safely on a personal password-protected PC for five years.

3.5.2. Observations

Similarly, Wästerfors (2018) suggests that observations are an essential qualitative instrument, as they capture the realities and everyday interactions of people in a specific setting (pg. 2). By using observations, this research instrument was appropriate as it was able to capture imperative details of the organisation that may not come out in interviews, but also to underpin the actual events that occurred within the school context.

To clarify, the *observer as a participant* as the researcher was a teacher at the school. Using observations from staff meetings, break time conversations, and everyday interactions with these female HODs provided further insight into how they lead at an independent school. A permission letter was sent to this school to gain consent to perform the observations within the school. Thereafter, an approval letter from the school was returned to confirm that the study could be conducted at the school.

This qualitative research instrument also helped the researcher immerse themselves in the research setting to gain much greater detail and understanding (Moser & Irene, 2018). The observations were conducted over two months, and all data was captured electronically and saved in an electronically password-protected OneDrive folder for

analysis. To record the data from the observations, the descriptions of the observations were as detailed as possible and included reflection on the observation to use when analysing the data (Moser & Irene, 2018).

The data collected by using both qualitative research instruments was rich, provided an in-depth view of the social issue, and provided detailed information on the studied phenomena (Maxwell, 2018).

3.6. Data Analysis

Clarke and Braun (2017) suggested that a thematic approach helps analyse and deduce the relevant information pertinent to the research phenomenon by using the themes gathered from the data. In this instance, these significant themes included female HODs' experiences, challenges, and strategies they used. However, many sub-themes were extracted from the interviews and observations.

The interview transcriptions and observation field notes had to be read for the data to be analysed, and critical information was highlighted. Thereafter, crucial evidence was grouped and collated into central and sub-themes. Subsequently, interview transcriptions and observation field notes were reread, and any additional findings were extracted and added to the coded themes. This data analysis method was used to extract descriptive coding to help identify interrelated themes relevant to the study between the interviews and the observations.

The following table outlines this information to provide a detailed description of the coding processes during the research study.

1. Data was gathered through the use of semi-structured interviews and observations.
2. Transcripts were read from beginning to end.
3. Texts were highlighted with three different colours to represent big concepts: a. Blue – positive experiences b. Green – Strategies the HODs used c. Yellow – Negative experiences
4. Selected each quotation and numbered them accordingly
5. Reduced overlapping quotation codes 6. Codes were then grouped into four themes linked to the research questions

Once the data was coded, the process of Triangulation was used. Heale and Twycross (2015) explain *Triangulation* as a means of having multiple sources of data. In this instance, data was collected through the seven interviews and the observational field notes. These data sources allowed for central and beneficial themes to be extracted during this research's data analysis component.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

Mertens (2018) argues that understanding all possible ethical considerations is essential to any research. Firstly, I applied for ethics clearance from the University of the Witwatersrand before I conducted the data collection. This was beneficial to my research as it ensured that this study met the university's ethical standards and research. Once I received an ethics clearance and protocol number (2022ECE050M) from Wits University, an introductory and permission letter was sent to the school to notify the school of my research and asked for a signed permission to conduct my research.

The HODs were also given introductory letters and letters of consent to participate in the research. This research study obtained signed consent from participants and the school to participate in the study and the audio-recorded interviews. Their participation was voluntary, and teachers were informed that they would not be treated differently if they chose not to participate. The HODs were aware of the research, observations, and interview participation.

Given that the research participants were humans, I needed to ensure the anonymity of their identities (Mertens, 2018). To protect their identities, each HOD was referred to by pseudonyms, such as HOD A and HOD B. Similarly, the school's name was not mentioned to protect the school's identity. Furthermore, the confidentiality of their information was a crucial component of ethical considerations. Therefore, all digital transcripts of interviews and observation field notes were kept on a password-protected OneDrive and stored on a personal password-protected PC and in the encrypted cloud storage. After this, it will be destroyed five years after this research report is submitted.

3.8. Issues of Trustworthiness

Noble and Smith (2015) contend that validity and reliability within qualitative research are often integrated into one central idea of data's trustworthiness. This advocates that

the qualitative data collection process should be credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable to achieve a trustworthy study (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). The following measures were put in place to ensure that this study was trustworthy:

3.8.1. Credibility

Credibility refers to the accuracy and truthfulness of the data obtained, which is captured through consistent engagement with participants (Cypress, 2017). To increase credibility, triangulation was used to correspond to the data from each research instrument. Additionally, transcripts from each participant's interview were given to them to view and confirm the correctness of their interviews.

3.8.2. Transferability

Cypress (2017) suggested that a study achieves a degree of transferability through thick descriptions illustrating the study context, research sample and data collection methods (pg. 124). This instance provided precise and descriptive information about the context and the purposive sample of seven female HODs at an independent school. That data was collected through observations and semi-structured interviews.

3.8.3. Dependability

A research study requires dependability in that the data has been used effectively, and the information from the data is consistent with the analysis (Cypress, 2017). As a result, to ensure that the study demonstrated dependability, all transcriptions of the interviews, observation field notes, and the thematic coding used for Triangulation were kept securely in the password-protected OneDrive folder.

3.8.4. Confirmability

Cypress (2017) suggested that other researchers verify findings extracted from the research instruments to reduce bias. As a result, using Triangulation and allowing my supervisor to review my findings increased this research's confirmability. Additionally, given that I worked at the school as a teacher, this information should be made aware within the study to recognise potential bias.

3.9. Limitations of the Study

The limitation of any research is an informed prediction of the constraints imposed on a study (Crawford, Burkholder & Cox, 2020). Firstly, the limited time to conduct interviews and observations within this school was essential for this research report.

To minimise the time limitation, I needed to ensure that my data collection time frame was adhered to strictly, and I scheduled the necessary interviews accordingly.

Secondly, only seven women HODs in this school were selected as part of the sample, which was a limited number of participants; the site of this study was one independent school, which could imply broad views of these types of schools could have been made. To minimise this limited sample, the interview questions were pertinent to the scope of this research so that more meaningful and focused answers were obtained.

Thirdly, these women leaders were employed in the school. They may have found some of the questions sensitive and personal, and given that the school also employs me, my responses from the interviews may be at a surface or superficial level. To mitigate this limitation, the respective female HODs' identities were kept strictly anonymous. If when a participant chose not to answer a question, I moved on to the next question.

3.10. Delimitations of the Study

Crawford, Burkholder, and Cox (2020) contended that a study's delimitations help researchers focus on a particular area that allows for the research to be manageable and relatable to the research topic. In this case, the delimitation of this research focused on the limited amount of time I had to complete this research report (within eight months), as well as the scope in which I was working, namely the experiences of female HODs at an independent school. Through this focus, there was trust that the research provided helpful information on the phenomenon of how women HODs are leading at an independent school.

Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, many aspects were included in this research study's research design and methodology. The constructivist research paradigm was selected to interpret and derive meaning from the women HODs' interviews and observations. Additionally, a qualitative research methodology was chosen based on the suitability of this study. In terms of the research design, a phenomenological design was used to ensure that the interactions and personal experiences of the women were captured with meaning and authenticity. As a result, seven out of eight women participated in this study and were selected based on their leadership positions as HODs and various

other aspects. These women taught in an independent high school that was established in 2019.

The research instrumentation to extract data from the women HODs selected were semi-structured interviews and observations. These techniques were successful, as rich data was extracted from these different forms of research instruments. Alongside the rich data that was collected in this research study, a thematic approach was used in data analysis for themes to be extracted and analysed.

Lastly, ethical considerations were considered, including possible issues of trustworthiness of this study, which were addressed. This chapter also outlined the limitations and delimitations of the study to ensure that the research was mindful of the generalisability of the findings from the research study.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Discussion

This chapter presents and analyses the data gathered to investigate the views, perceptions, and beliefs of female HODs leading at an independent high school in South Africa. This research study was initially guided by the research questions outlined in Chapter One, as follows:

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of female HODs leading in an independent high school in South Africa?
2. What strategies do female HODs use in leading at an independent school?
3. What challenges do female HODs encounter in leading independent high schools?

However, once data was collected and analysed, this research focus was re-examined and narrowed into the following focus of work. Namely:

1. What challenges do women HODs encounter in leading independent high schools?
2. What are the experiences and perceptions of female HODs leading in an independent high school in South Africa, related to gender and leadership?
3. What are the strengths of female leadership?

This chapter presents interpretations based on data collected through semi-structured interviews and observations of women HODs. To reiterate the context of the participants and their background information, eight women HODs were interviewed and observed. Their ages ranged from 36 to 54. Additionally, the HODs had varied leadership experience at the school and other schools; their leadership experience ranged between 4 and 21 years.

Four dominant themes and subthemes were extracted from my findings. This discussion begins by examining the challenges that women HODs face. Then, they shared their perceptions of male incompetence, arrogance and confidence, the gender shift in school leadership, and finally, the role of school existence in employing female leaders.

4.1. The challenges encountered by female HODs.

One of the most prevalent themes that developed during the interviews was that the female HODs interviewed encountered some common challenges. These challenges

ranged from the perception of male authority to the demands of working in an independent school, the need to prove oneself as a female leader, and salary inequality. These challenges are discussed in more detail below.

4.1.1. The perception of male privilege

Female HODs have had many interactions with men throughout their time as teachers and now leaders. These interactions include those with parents, students, colleagues, and higher management. One of the main themes that emerged from the interviews related to what can be characterised as perceptions of 'male privilege'. How does 'male privilege' feature in women leaders talk? Lowe (2020) asserts that the notion of male privilege is contextual within the social community, whereby a social group is advantaged over another social and is often invisible to the advantaged person. Whilst there has been a historical notion of privilege amongst white heterosexual men as being privileged, the women in this study did not explicitly state that this existed within the school community.

There was a collective view from the interviewees that men responded and interacted with women differently than other men. In one instance, interviewee C stated that a male student did not trust her ability to mark assessments correctly. One of the 'stories' she told is that of a learner who went to a male teacher to get the assessment remarked on and moderated. She felt the student did not trust her professional experience as a teacher because she was a woman. Even though the teacher is the HOD of the subject, the student found her guidance and marking inferior to that of the male staff member. With interactions like this, she felt that there was often a blatant bias against women leaders – even though she had more experience than her male subordinates.

Similarly, another HOD mentioned, "And it's an argument, or they ignore you, or they have an excuse, and you don't get that as often with me". Here, the HOD refers to the students in her class who do not listen and ignore her instructions. She compares herself to a male teacher and suggests that men get different responses from students, whereas she finds the need to justify herself continuously and her actions.

She also suggested that male parents interact differently with her as they would with a male teacher, even though she is the HOD. She indicated that a male parent is generally stern, impolite, and sometimes verbally aggressive to her and other female

teachers. Her remarks suggest that there is a common perception that male privilege still exists and that it is common among fellow teachers, parents, and students. Her views are identical to Diko's (2014) assertion that women leaders are challenged despite their leadership positions. These findings are consistent with HOD's explanation, asserting that male parents respond and interact differently to male teachers. She stated that:

> Male teachers don't get asked twice about something. It's normally a closed case and people move on. But if it was me, the father was going to question me, and I would need to provide billions of reasons as to why I am right.

In further support of the above statement, HOD E declared:

> So, I can guarantee, you and I, and I may have many more years of experience than you, but you're man, there's a kid and he's misbehaving, and I go talk to him and you go talk to him. His reaction and his response will be very different.

The HODs noticed that male students already hold preconceptions about women and that women are seen as less authoritative compared to male teachers. It could be argued that it is out of fear that there is a sense of compliance towards a man rather than a female teacher, even if the female teacher is older and is more senior than the male teacher. These preconceptions about male and female teachers may stem from upbringings and how women are perceived at home, in families, and through the media. Alyami and Floyd (2019) suggest that male students approach women's authority differently than males. As these findings suggest, there is a general trend among male students to not respect female teachers, including female HODs with the same level of respect as their male counterparts.

By the same token, through observation, it was apparent that when a male HOD addressed an issue in a staff meeting, his issue was dealt with more seriously and considered, such that the other staff agreed with him fully. However, his tone during this moment in the staffroom was assertive and loud, drawing the attention of all members. In contrast, the same issue was brought forward by HOD C in an earlier staff meeting, but the matter was subtly dismissed without any resolution or follow-up. Through this observation, it was seen that generally, people take notice of assertive and loud men. In contrast, women who are more polite and reserved in bringing up an issue are often not taken as seriously.

Another point was made about the male authority that female HODs have experienced. HOD F stated, “I think, yeah. I think if you and I had to go for a senior deputy position with the same qualifications, same experience, you would get it. Cause you male”. She further qualified her statement by suggesting that men get what they want, and they do everything in their power to get a position like a deputy head position. Through her statement, there was a strong implication that men have a natural affinity for benefitting in being appointed as managers due to their gender as a being a man.

Ginya and Perumal (2015) assert that men feel more confident in their approach – especially towards leadership positions because they feel entitled to lead. With this, the HOD implied that men demonstrate a false sense of confidence and walk into an interview for a management position because they feel like they are entitled to it. It could be argued that this type of perception around male privilege exists for men because of their upbringing and possibly their background – which motivates men to apply for management positions because they are perceived as being natural leaders and the heads of an institution.

On the other hand, it was suggested by the women in this study that even though men are incompetent, they are employed in management positions because people think that they can do the job better than women. Many HODs strongly asserted that men have an assured presence about them. This results from men's confidence in themselves, even if they cannot manage effectively. The confidence men give off assures any potential employer of the perception that they are good leaders and managers. For example, an interviewee mentioned that:

> They can speak very well, they can convince you, and they are very confident in their abilities even though the ability doesn’t exist, and they get promoted quite often and people look up to them, but people haven’t worked with them. They’re not able to do the job, but they will get promoted.

As a result of male confidence and arrogance, HOD C suggested that men get promoted into leadership roles over women because they exude more confidence, even when they are incapable of doing the job in the first place. She considers that men often appear competent even when they lie about their ability to manage within that role. She mentioned that men would figure it out or learn in that position because

they believe in themselves. In contrast, she believes that women are more cautious and subdued, even if they can be in higher leadership roles.

Additionally, the ‘boys club’ notion was common during the interviews. All the women strongly believed that an unspoken form of male supremacy exists in school management, namely in the form of ‘the boys club’. Whilst there are many variations of how these HODs explained ‘the boys club’, it became evident that they had discernment of this phenomenon between the relationships that male staff build amongst each other. HOD C described her idea of ‘the boys club’ as follows:

> So, the boys’ club is, we play golf together. Uh, we socialise on weekends. And we are, you are my own. So I will promote you if that makes sense. And your views are heard and, uh, held up to a high standard because, well, we are friends.

Her statement implied that male staff play golf together and develop friendships, resulting in social cliques that begin outside the school environment. The statement above further emphasises that the friendship between these men leads to opportunities like promotions and protecting each other in certain circumstances. While she had not provided any evidence to support her claims, she and the other women in this study strongly believed this happens frequently amongst male social groups. Shields and Hesbol (2020) postulate that men form part of informal social groups that consciously assist the preparation of other men for leadership positions. Similarly, HOD E also suggested,

> I have seen because you remember the boys club is a real thing. It’s a real thing. In any school it’s happening here. It is a real thing, and to be part of the boys club is like a SABS stamp of approval.

Besides the perception of the existence of ‘the boys club’, an HOD felt significantly disadvantaged by the current ‘boys club’ when she attended an interview as she stated that:

> Oh, I’m not friends with these people. I don’t play golf with them. That’s exactly what I thought. I don’t go drinking with them nothing, but I know people who interviewed that do that. So, I’m already felt it a disadvantage. Interesting, hey?

This illustrates that in a formal process like an interview, this HOD had already felt less confident about her chances in the position before the interview began. Therefore, her belief in herself and her skills would have been undermined because she did not believe that she would have a fair opportunity at the position – since she was not a part of the social cliques of the interviewers. HOD G also mentioned, “So you won’t find women doing, you’re not gonna find all these female heads getting together for tea”, which shows that the female HODs felt particularly unhappy about the reality of ‘the boys club’ existence at this school. Whilst the alleged existence of a ‘boys club’ is hugely problematic for the female HODs, Moorosi (2018) suggests that women can create social groups that can also empower other women rather than necessarily bring down the social structures of men. This suggests that the ‘boys club’ can coexist equally alongside women, in which women can create their own traditions and new social groups that may empower them. Therefore, instead of trying to end the long-withstanding notion and perception of a ‘boys’ club’, women can establish a platform that they can build and compete with the powers they feel so firmly is a disadvantage against them.

Contrastingly, one HOD mentioned, “Um, I don’t know. It’s just my experience throughout the years, eh, where girls used to be ugly to me, males always used to be nice”. Her views are that gender-based disempowerment also comes from women themselves. She believed men are often friendlier and more respectful to her in the workplace, whereas her female colleagues are usually disrespectful and impolite. Her views are consistent with Buthelezi et al.'s (2021) suggestion that women experience defiance from men and other women. The participant felt that as much as men are generally defiant towards women managers, she reiterated that other women are also defiant towards them. Her idea of this was surprising as she would not have expected other women to be a challenge. This experience of a female HOD is startling as one could have assumed women could be nicer and more understanding to each other, given that their shared experiences, namely challenges, could have been an issue that could unite women and empower each other. Contrary to this, other women also make it difficult for other women to be leaders.

The experiences of these women are often gendered events that the female HODs perceive from their own lenses. Their perceptions of male authority and privilege may play a vital role in their challenges as leaders within the departments and schools they

teach. It was also clear that even though none of the HODs was explicit in their statements about male privilege, there was an overwhelming sense that there were many different pieces and examples to exemplify that the HODs felt strongly about the disadvantages they face in being female leaders.

4.1.2. The Demands of a Working Female in an Independent School

All HODs that were interviewed felt privileged because of the opportunities that an independent school provided for them. There was a consensus that the resources available at this school made their job as HOD much more manageable in an independent school. Therefore, this consensus between all HODs aligns with Naidoo and Perumal's (2014) investigation, which alludes to females in disadvantaged schools experiencing challenges with a lack of resources. This may be true for underprivileged schools, but this was not true for the women working in this affluent independent school.

There were differences in their ability to work as a HOD in a public school, with some HODs suggesting that they would not work as effectively as they would in a public school. They believed that the systematic issues of government and the country's public sector were beyond anything they could change at a school level. Some participants mentioned that working in a public school would significantly challenge cultural and traditional systems much more than in an independent school. This means that it would be more difficult for men in a public school to work under a female HOD. Whilst there was no contextual evidence to support their claim, their belief in the independent school being empowering for a woman was intuitive here.

Whilst the demands of working at an independent school were described differently, Part of this empowering nature links to the transformative leadership theory. They believed they were afforded greater opportunity and freedom to make various changes and challenge societal norms within the school because of their positions as leaders.

In contrast to the above, HOD B maintained that the pressures and demands of a HOD in an independent school are much higher than those of a public school and that the uniformity of a public school is an attractive prospect. She mentioned that the planning, policies, and guided documents from the Department of Education are clear enough for all teachers to follow. The lack of autonomy for teachers in public schools eases the burden of HOD compared to those at independent schools with more flexibility and

autonomy. Female HODs working in independent schools find the demands and interactions with other stakeholders of the school strenuous (Zuze & Juan, 2020). To support this, HOD C maintains, “They won’t physically, they won’t, don’t come and harass you the way the private school parents do”. With this statement, she references that parents in public schools are more aware of the challenges teachers and HODs face, whereas, in independent schools, many parents do not care about teachers' challenges. Parents will raise every concern they have for teachers to sort out.

Whilst their views may be echoed by all teachers who work in an independent school and not just female HODs, her views are also similar to HOD E, who revealed, “You work, you work. They, the deliverables, it’s a, it’s a business as much as it is an educational environment, it’s a business”. This implies that independent schools are much like businesses, and parents expect the best regardless of the nature of the business. However, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the way parents view women, particularly, is of concern – even if certain expectations are placed on the institution. As a result of the increased pressure and demands of working in an independent school and the generally hostile approach by parents towards female HODs, working in an independent school as a female leader is extremely difficult.

4.1.3. The Need to Prove Oneself as a Leader

Women have long felt inferior to men because of the societal pressures on making male leadership the driving force of any organisation. Every HOD in this study exemplified the need to continuously prove themselves, even if they knew they were highly competent.

It was also suggested that female HODs tend to overexplain and justify themselves to the point that it makes other people question their position within that role. This is a common trait that adds to the stereotype that women are not confident in their approaches, creating an issue of trust between them and the subordinates (teachers) they manage within their departments. Buthelezi, Mhlongo and Msweli (2021) suggest that women make unconscious efforts to prove that they are adequate in their positions as managers and leaders. To show that they are capable by justifying their actions and decisions, their actions have an opposite effect by questioning their authority. In support of this, one HOD stated that,

> I found that I had to prove myself to them, and I had to prove myself repeatedly. So, I had to prove to them that I knew what I was doing, that I could be trusted, um, that I wasn't just making things up.

As a result, the women in this study were under more scrutiny as managers because of their gender rather than what they could do as HODs. The lack of confidence and assertiveness amongst women managers make it difficult for the teachers who work under them to believe that they can lead the department – ultimately creating a lack of trust between the HOD and the rest of the department. This destructive generalisation of the actions and personalities of women leaders can play a role in the relationship between the HOD and the rest of the team.

In one of the interactions with a female HOD, I pointed out an error that she had made to the HOD. Whilst I was polite in my approach to her, observing the situation proved that she did not want to be wrong or take criticism willingly. Throughout our conversation, she passively spoke to me about what she went through to ensure that she was correct and that the mistake she made was not her fault. She explained herself and justified every point she made – even though at the end of our discussion, it was simply feedback from myself about how I sorted out the situation. This was surprising as she was defensive, and whilst this was one observation, it was observed several times that women over-explain themselves, much to the annoyance of some staff members.

In addition, women face the dilemma of choosing their family and professional position as HODs. It became apparent that many HODs stayed at school much later than other staff members, constantly busy with work. HOD G suggested that she works so hard because she does not want to be questioned about her family commitments and her family. She stated, "So you almost overcompensate… you are aware all the time that you don't, that your family commitment doesn't affect your, your role, your managerial role … So, you do prioritise your work over your family". Her feelings indicate that women work incredibly hard because they do not want to come across as weak or emotional, nor do they want to give the impression that their family commitments come first (Botha & Afework, 2020). This was a heartbreaking discovery during the observations and interviews, as I could only nod in agreement with the female HOD on an issue I would not have previously considered.

4.1.4. Salary Inequality

Salary gender differences have been a premise throughout history. The notion that 'women get paid less' has been heard before. However, I did not honestly believe that in these modern times, such injustices still exist against women, especially in an affluent independent school like this. Adelekan and Bussin (2018) suggested that independent schools can be treated as formal businesses, and as such, salaries are confidential and discretionary. One of the HODs felt that salary discrepancies between men and women were a big challenge in creating equality between men and women and for them to be seen as equals at the least. She stated that:

> But we get paid less as females. Yes. And I can prove this to you. Because I'm working at the same school as my husband. I'm an HOD. He's an HOD. I'm an HOD of a bigger department than his. I have more responsibilities than he does. I work hard. He's out of here by half past two every day.

Her response shows that the pay discrepancies between herself and her husband are an issue that she is aware of. While it could be speculated that he may have had more experience or negotiated for a better salary when he was employed at the school, this finding is still valuable as it is an example that demonstrates that females get paid less than their male counterparts. Furthermore, another HOD explained that men get paid more in leadership positions based on the premise of supply and demand. She said that:

> Um, and so, and generally their salaries are higher than females. Um, uh, which I can't give you statistics cause I've nev…, this is talk, this is what we talk about. So, there's no like definite, but because of the kind of supply demand concept, right?

She further explained that because fewer men are generally in schools, they are seen as more valuable, and at the same time, she clarified that she does not necessarily have the facts to support her answer. However, it was vital for her to mention this because, in her case, she may not have the evidence to support her claim about men earning more. Something, along with historical inequalities, makes her believe that male HODs earn more than female HODs. The views of the women in this study revealed that the historical nature of unequal salaries between men and women has a significant impact on how they feel about their worth as women leaders. They feel

that they are paid less because, even in modern times, they are viewed as inferior and less valuable compared to men because they earn less. Whilst a transparent salary policy range may be helpful for these women leaders, it may be difficult given the business-like structure of the independent school sector.

4.2. Female HODs' perceptions of male incompetence, arrogance, and confidence

Despite the strenuous demands imposed on HODs at independent schools and the multitude of challenges they encountered in their positions as leaders – a distinct, familiar premise developed throughout all the interviews completed. The women leaders in this study strongly believed that they were superior leaders compared to their male counterparts. In support of women being better leaders than men, one participant argued that women's organisational skills are better than men's. Similarly, another participant said that she feels that women are far more competent and work much harder than men. However, she did mention that this may also be dependent on personality. Despite possible generalisations, she maintained her view that women are much better leaders than men, as men overlook the small details most times. The interviewed women HODs resoundingly affirmed that they were well organised; they planned curricula excellently and ensured that their departments worked effectively. To support this, a participant stated:

> I do find that the female HODs are more, uh, constructive in terms of meeting deadlines, uh, running with the administration that needs to be done. Um, All the paperwork that's most important. You know, we always have to have the paperwork to justify this, that, and everything else. And, and with regards to females, I see, it's like you don't always have to go and ask…

Some evidence suggests that their ability to perform and function efficiently as managers may be due to their years of experience as managers. Macdonald and Levy (2016) suggest that experienced managers are better equipped to deal with administrative functions because these are skills they learned over time. As a result, their ability to run a functional department and keep abreast of their administrative duties as HODs may contribute to the HODs' views that they are superior to men. It could also be argued that the administrative skills they developed as women managers

could result from many of them being in some form of management role from a young age (Bush, 2007; Wills, 2015; Yip et al., 2006).

More fascinatingly, the female HODs perceived male HODs as incompetent in their positions as managers. Many participants viewed male leaders as 'lazy', 'late' and 'not detail orientated'. This can be illustrated briefly by a participant who suggested that:

> In my experience, I found that the males always do things last minute and they get it, by some way or the other, but it's always last minute.com. You always have to ask them twice over to meet with the deadlines or if you want something from them as well. And it's not necessarily only with the HODs, but um, if just focusing on that role.

This suggests that men are not conscious of deadlines and work towards them to the very last minute. She also reiterates that men must be reminded to submit things on time and be asked multiple times for their deliverables. Consequently, the HODs felt that men were inferior at leading because they lacked basic skills like time management and planning, which were essential in being an effective HOD. These findings contradict Sinyosi and Potokri (2021), who asserted that women feel and are viewed as inferior to men, whereas in this case – the female HODs feel superior to men.

An equally important premise developed throughout this research was the Emotional Intelligence (EI) prerequisite amongst HODs. Usually, women are referred to as being 'emotional' and, therefore, historically not seen as good enough to be a leader. HOD E said, "…I think that there is also a concept that men are less emotional, and more logical". However, the HODs believed there had been a shift in the perception of school leadership and the characteristics of an effective and good leader with high EI levels.

In this instance, the women felt that they were generally better at leading than men due to higher EI levels. One of the participants stated that:

> Um, there's been a shift in society towards emotional intelligence. Right? So as that shift is emerging in the world, some people are realising that actually women can lead, emotion is not necessarily a bad, being emotional is not necessarily a bad thing, right?

Sánchez-Núñez, Patti and Holzer (2015) contend that emotional intelligence is a prerequisite for ensuring effective school management and successful leadership. Another participant suggested that the world is shifting towards leaders and managers with high levels of EI and that the traditional negative perceptions of showing emotion as a leader are outdated. During the conversation, she also mentioned that male leaders were historically seen as better leaders because they are used to being aggressive and demanding and had no sense of emotion in the workplace – in which they were perceived as logical and unbiased when making tough decisions.

The HODs, in general, felt that the men were often unnecessarily harsh and too assertive in their approach to leading – as a result, they intimidated other people who worked with them, especially women. The women concurred that the tenets of EI had favoured them as managers and leaders amongst other teachers and students. In support of this, one participant said, “And, and I pay attention to that, and I think that is how you create, uh, structure and the kids feel safe; and the teachers feel safe”. They asserted that people responded better to them when they were kinder, polite, and, more importantly, when managers understood people’s situations.

Within their role as HOD, women found themselves better at building relationships and often providing a person of safety who can relate to students, parents and even colleagues. Consequently, HOD A recognised that:

> And, and I pay attention to that, and I think that is how you create, uh, structure and the kids feel safe and the teachers feel safe.

This statement suggests that while the attribute of a mother-like figure is a common conception about women, many of the HODs agreed that they are more caring than their male counterparts. However, they found that this virtue worked in their favour and made them better leaders. They used their caring nature to develop strong relationships with others, gain their trust, and ultimately lead within their respective departments. Moorosi, Fuller, and Reilly (2018) support the idea that women develop positive relationships with members of the schooling structure and people involved in the community to drive success. It follows that HOD C stated:

> So it is possible that I have a good relationship with somebody that maybe I am their head of department and they’re a new teacher. I can be kind and I can be, choose to tell them things in such a way than a harsher way. And form a

> relationship such, that based on the fact that they like me, they would actually want to do the work and meet the deadline for me.

As much as most of the HODs have suggested, relationships are essential for them to lead people. It has also been asserted that the relationships they build often become too personal, making it uncomfortable to manage underperforming staff or if their subordinates need to be reprimanded. Shields (2014) agrees that emotional connections between people make it difficult for women to make objective decisions, especially if some conflict develops. To illustrate this further, HOD G said, “Putting boundaries. I think the boundaries are a bit of a challenge when you are female. Especially with other females. Yeah, not males, funny enough”. This view suggests that female leaders find it difficult to manage other women because of the personal nature of the relationship that has been built between them.

On the other hand, their ability to build relationships makes them more understanding as leaders. This means that when a child was sick, or a teacher had to stay home to look after their children, women leaders were better at understanding the issue and sympathetic to the situation. In contrast, male leaders did not understand such situations, and therefore, women would not approach male HODs with the same personal issues. One participant stated that one of the teachers in her department was surprised at how understanding she was when she was told that she needed to leave early due to her child being sick. As a woman, she felt more understanding and approachable so other teachers in her department would feel safe enough to speak to her about personal issues.

The HODs believed that the ability to nurture and care for the students is a strong positive trait that benefits their roles and leaders within the school. Consequently, the trait of being approachable as a HOD is also vital to the students because they trust you more. The relationship between themselves and the students progresses into a positive relationship, which may help students with their own lives, from academics to mental health and even on the sports ground. These views are shared with Gómez-Leal et al. (2022), who assert that school leaders have the potential to develop a culture of relationship-building and foster positive relationships through their own regulation of EI.

This exemplifies a tenant of transformative leadership in practice as female leaders in this school create a community that embodies well-being, social equity and create agents of social change (Shields, 2018). The female leaders encourage those around them by developing mentoring relationships that role-model good actions in a way that may inspire other people to do the same.

Another example of the positive EI that women leaders demonstrated in this study is the tone in which they communicate information to their staff. One participant stated that the women leaders in the school ‘were softer’ compared to when you got an email from a man. She suggests that women have a kinder and more caring tone in their emails than men, who send out information that comes across as insensitive and harsh. She believes that staff respond more enthusiastically to emails with a positive tone and are willing to deliver on tasks and meet deadlines with no fuss. The positive and kind tone in which these women write emails prevents conflict between HODs and subordinates and encourages a positive outlook on completing tasks.

Another example of EI was suggested by HOD A in her approach to managing her team. She stated:

> So, and just to anybody, the approach has to be very gentle, whether it’s male, female, age, younger, older, whatever. So subtly I had to have these like afternoon sessions. This is how we do it, this is why we do it. And again, do the same thing over and over. Um, it was quite a long battle, but it eventually got through.

This implies that she calmly managed a subordinate who was not meeting the department's standards. Her technique was to implement a routine and continuously go through the issues with the person – the issues were eventually sorted out. She suggests that this subtle technique for solving issues worked for her to ensure that her department functions optimally. As a result, the person did not feel attacked or isolated; instead, she believed that this approach would help the person grow in the department and be more in tune with the tasks allocated to them. The HOD also did not want to come across as aggressive or forceful; instead, she wanted to mentor the sub-ordinate for long-term effectiveness within the department.

The HODs also considered that fostering healthy and positive relationships with students will impact the way in which parents interact with and perceive women

leaders. They trust that through the encouragement of bonds in schools, there will be more respect and admiration from parents because the HODs always show that they have their children's best interests in mind.

Similarly, female HODs' approach towards their students showed a high level of compassion, tolerance, and general well-being for all their students. HOD D stated:

> Because they need love. They need support. They are teenagers. Life is difficult enough. They don't know who they are. They don't know what they want. They're still figuring out absolutely everything about themselves.

The statement above implies that some innate motherly instincts enable them to support students beyond academics, holistically, and beyond the classroom. Coupled with HOD D's statement, the same sentiments are shared by HOD F, as she stated:

> So I will give them what they need and I will help them along the way, but it's up to them to grow themselves. If they can't, I will step in. And then help them. Um, otherwise, yeah, I would let them grow themselves. Also, like changing things up a little bit.

Equally crucial to the array of strategies the women HODs implement in their roles, it became abundantly clear that there was a deep sense of empowerment and transformation for young girls from most of the HODs to address the inequalities they faced. There is also an instinctive need for women leaders to initiate change and make their students feel loved (Moorosi et al., 2018). In support of this notion, HOD D stated:

> The only way for me to do that is to ensure that everyone of my students, and when I say mine, I mean the school students in my subject see themselves somewhere in the work that we do. So a very big part of what's happening in my department for my leadership is that transformation. We will not, unless it's prescribed for Matric, we will not do works written by old white men living in England. I want Black authors, I want Coloured authors. I want Indian authors. I want every single, I want every gender. I want transgender. I want all of it.

This showed a strong willingness from the HOD to ensure that all students are included in her classwork and immerse themselves in the subject. This notion is a tenant of transformative leadership as Shields & Hesbol (2020) contend that a leader's ability to demonstrate inclusiveness and eradicate injustices shows a willingness to transform

an organisation. In this case, to transform the curriculum for students to expose themselves to a wide range of authors, they may relate to in the real world.

At the same time, HOD D uses this opportunity as an HOD to lead her entire department in making the necessary changes to how they teach—specifically, the set work within the subject. She is also clear about what she does not want. However, she is also aware of the diversity issue and wants to ensure diversity within the curriculum being delivered to students.

Equally, HOD F believed that her presence as a female leader would empower other female students to think about being managers in their lives and that it is possible. She stated, “you want them to sit in the class and think, I’m female, there a head that’s also female. I can also do it”. Her view of inspiring other females aligns with Shields’s (2016) and Lumby and Azaola’s (2014) view that women leaders aim to empower other girls within the classroom and school environment to dissociate the injustices that they have faced as women.

4.3. Gender shift in School Leadership: More Female representation at the junior management level but limited in senior roles.

The third theme that emerged was the dominance of women's leadership at the HOD level, but female leaders were scarce at the senior level. Steyn (2015) asserted that men exclusively dominate leadership and management positions, but the female HODs in this school have an opposing view. The HODs acknowledged that strides were made to increase women's representation at the junior management level. However, women in this school were significantly underwhelmed by the low number of women in senior-level management.

The HODs maintained that they experienced more women in HOD positions at independent schools. However, there are significant contrasts between women and men at higher levels of management, such as deputy heads, heads of school or executive heads of schools. This finding was significant as it illustrated that there are more females at the HOD level; however, there is still a lack of female representation at the senior management level. HOD B stated that:

> And it’s been, there’s more females that are HODs in, in the schools that I’ve been in, they are more females that are HODs, but the senior management was still male. But in terms of the HODs were more female in, you know, in terms of

> there. So it wasn't an, an, um, a foreign environment, if I can say, if you became an HOD, it wasn't unusual as a female.

This illustrates that independent schools have included women in leadership positions such as the HOD level; however, their power and influence as women are still limited by the senior positions held by a majority of men in senior management. In agreement with the dominance of women as HODs, One participant said that:

> But, uh, from the time that I've been in an independent school, um, there, there was a clear shift. And it's been, there's more females that are HODs in, in the schools that I've been in, they are more females that are HODs, but the senior management was still male. But in terms of the HODs were more female in, you know, in terms of there. So it wasn't an, an, um, a foreign environment, if I can say, if you became an HOD, it wasn't unusual as a female.

She was impressed that the school has made strides in appointing several women as HODs. Her views about employing women into junior management roles are comparable to that of another participant who suggested that she has seen that there are a lot more women as HODs than males, especially in independent schools. Therefore, it was not surprising for her that the school employed more women in junior management positions like HOD. This important theme will need to be tested more broadly to see the implications of women that dominate at junior levels compared to the low number of women representations at a more senior level.

By contrast, another HOD suggested that she was denied a senior management position because she was a woman. She implied that the school would not consider another woman in a senior management position because too many women would be on the executive committee. The HOD felt that the school wanted more control over the number of women in senior management so that the number of men would still dominate and be in control as they still have the stronghold in the running of the school, irrespective of the dominance of women in HOD positions. With her views, it could be contended that the school has placed the trust of women in managing the day-to-day activities in schools. However, many felt that men in senior and higher management still ultimately make more important decisions. HOD F further used my gender to insinuate that I would get a senior management position ahead of a woman because I am a man. As suggested earlier in this chapter, she asserted that men are more

aggressive and outgoing in showcasing their leadership abilities, which is why they get promoted to senior managers.

Consequently, although women occupy most of the junior management positions, many of the HODs feel there is still some reluctance within this school's board to appoint more females to senior management positions. This could be due to personal biases or the fact that the females in HOD positions are adequate in their positions as HODs but not suitable for senior management – the reason for this could be purely speculative. However, it was insinuated by the HODs that the school board is not yet prepared to let go of their patriarchal stereotypes.

Naidoo and Perumal (2014) asserted that there is a lack of representation of women at the management level. On the contrary, the issue that these women leaders currently face is the lack of promotion of women into senior management positions, even though many of them believe that this will take time to change towards including women in these roles. Women are now dominating leadership roles in schools by having many more women employed in HOD positions, even though the leadership role of HOD is not necessarily a senior management role.

4.4. Examining Female Leadership's dominance in schools: The role of School Existence and Traditionalism

The prevalence of women's leadership in schools depends on the institution's age and culture. This shift is more common in newer schools, while it has yet to occur in older, more traditional schools. Alyami and Floyd (2019) suggest that traditional stereotypes about women are deeply entrenched in society. However, Botha and Afework (2020) contend that women leaders are changing the narrative for students, community members and the people they lead. Transformation in schools has become an essential aspect of modern education, as it enables staff and students to adapt to the ever-changing world around them. The HODs felt that in older and more traditional schools, the systems in those schools had perpetuated a patriarchal culture. This means that schools that were established many years ago still contain high levels of men in management, even in junior positions like HOD.

In contrast to their experiences at traditional schools, the HODs agreed that, in this case, the school could be considered as young as it was only established within the last six years. Consequently, the patriarchal nature of traditional schools was not

evident in this school because the school that they are currently in has not been built on those traditions and systems that oppressed women. Instead, the women feel empowered in their roles at this school, even at a junior management level. One participant stated that:

> …I think it depends on where you are. I think if you look at a new school like this, More females, um, but if you look at an old traditional school, more males.

With this, she believed that the shift of women into management roles depends on the school and the culture it develops. She suggested that a new school would be more open-minded to the possibility of hiring a woman manager – as is the case in this school. However, she reiterated that older and more traditional independent schools may not be too keen on hiring a woman into management because of the historical culture embedded in that school. Employing women in HOD positions and into more senior management roles, according to the female HODs, may disrupt the longstanding culture and go against the alumni and community members that have built these traditional schools. In contrast, new schools lack the historical relevance of being male-dominated. Her thoughts align with Mapolisa and Madziyire (2012) and Sinyosi and Potokri (2021), which suggest that traditional societal values are still imposed on women, and in this case – older schools hold on to these values.

Shields and Hesbol (2020) and Shields (2017) strongly argue that transformative leadership is attainable through purposeful and meaningful strategies that require a courageous leader to question the normative. In this instance, there was a clear strategy to employ more female leaders in challenging the norm found in most independent schools. With this, it is suggested that the school head values the role of women in leadership and their impact in challenging traditional norms in educational leadership.

Despite the school being headed by a woman, given that the executive head of the school is a man – the female HODs suggest that his presence and influence in the lack of hiring and promoting women into senior leadership roles is significant in that he still may hold discriminatory views about women and their inability to lead effectively. In light of this, many of the participants were hesitant to discuss further the role of the male executive head in this school as they avoided follow-up questions and changed the narrative during conversations and interviews. Their avoidance of

discussing the impact played by a man as an executive head over the school and their roles as HODs illustrated that even though the HODs felt that they were competent and successful leaders, the challenge of being led by a man from the very top of the management hierarchy may still pose very difficult challenges.

4.5. Summary

To conclude this chapter, it discusses several challenges experienced by female HODs. These challenges ranged from their perception of male authority to the demands of working in an independent school, the need to prove themselves as leaders, and salary discrepancies between men and women.

Secondly, the chapter focused on perceptions of female HODs of male incompetence and their arrogance. Besides the traditional stereotypes associated with women, the HODs believed that men are inadequate as leaders within schools and exude a false sense of confidence to attain leadership positions. The HODs felt strongly that women are better at leading than men.

Thirdly, this chapter discussed how women lead with emotional intelligence, which is becoming a sought-after skill in management. The women believed that their natural affinity and self-regulation benefited them as school leaders.

Fourthly, there was a resounding appreciation for females being appointed at the junior management level, such as HOD. However, there were concerns about discrepancies in the number of males at the senior management level.

Lastly, this chapter discussed the dominance of women leadership in this school because it was a newly established school with a newer culture. In contrast, traditional schools are unlikely to be dominated by female leaders.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

5.1. Summary

This research investigated the perceptions, views, and beliefs of female HODs in an independent school. The study focused on the dominant presence of women in the school environment; however, there was a lack of female representation at a senior management level. The study explored a scarce part of the existing literature about female leadership, which currently focuses on women leading in underdeveloped and rural schools.

At the same time, the limited literature on female's leadership studies and the way they lead suggested common experiences, such as traditional stereotypes and preconceived ideas of women, that do not support their value as leaders. Naidoo and Perumal (2014) confidently asserted that females are still subjected to various challenges, such as lack of resources, traditional views of women, and male societal norms.

This study was built on the premise of transformative leadership as a theoretical framework to put a lens on how females lead and the purpose of their actions within their positions as HODs to develop democratic citizens and change the narrative of how females are viewed in society. Through this lens, a qualitative research approach was used to obtain rich data from seven women HODs at the independent school through semi-structured interviews and observations as a participant.

5.2. Major Findings

This research study revealed that the female HODs in this school had experienced many similar challenges even though they led in different departments. The participants found that cultural and traditional norms affected their ability to lead as females, but more so, the effects that culture has on other people by not respecting them as women. Similarly, Eagly and Carli (2018) posited that women experience such harsh levels of discrimination in the workplace because women have been historically seen as primary caregivers.

Moyo and Perumal (2020) suggested that women continue to face acts of discrimination in their leadership positions because they are females. Similarly, the women in this study felt that there was a constant need to prove themselves as effective HODs simply because they were women, and then male HODs would not be

subject to the same scrutiny. Additional challenges that this research demonstrated were that women HODs in this study felt more pressurised and had higher expectations when working in independent schools because of the corporate nature of independent schools – which men in executive positions primarily manage. Another challenge the women experienced was the salary inequality between male HODs and female HODs, irrespective of their years of teaching experience.

On the other hand, a common narrative and perception amongst the women HODs in this study revealed that they were better managers and leaders concerning their high level of organisation, effective administrative skills and, more interestingly – higher levels of emotional intelligence. The women were adamant that their intuitive levels of EI were a driving factor for them being better suited for leadership positions – especially in a school situation. These findings were similar to those of Sánchez-Núñez, Patti and Holzer (2015), who argued that EI is becoming a sought-after leadership skill in modern times.

Through the interviews, it became clear that the women felt confident in the ability to be a HOD but also to disrupt the old traditional narratives of being “too emotional to lead’’. With this, the teachers felt strongly about their suitability to lead as transformative leaders, as they can build relationships with students, empower their students, and staff, and adapt to parents' demands whilst still caring for students to make the school environment a positive space for all to work in – was in their favour as women in HOD positions.

Furthermore, the interviews that were conducted demonstrated that there is a gender shift in school leadership as more women are being employed in junior management positions such as HODs. The outcomes from their experiences contradict Steyn's (2015) and Naidoo and Perumal’s (2014) findings that there is a lack of female representation at the management level. However, the women in this study were aware of the discrepancies in female numbers at senior and executive management levels, which they felt was slowly but surely changing.

Lastly, this study showed that the school's existence determines the dominance and culture of females in leadership in terms of age and the absence of traditional old-school systems. Mapolisa and Madziyire (2012) and Sinyosi and Potokri (2021) asserted that conventional beliefs are still carried in older organisations. This school

is relatively new and is still developing a culture amongst students, parents, staff and all stakeholders. The women leaders in this study felt that this was an advantage for them as they could move into senior leadership roles and be more respected as women. The HODs felt strongly about being led by a female principal, as they believed she was the one who gave them that confidence and empowered them to lead as women.

5.3. Limitations

This study posed four significant limitations:

1. This study was conducted over a short period, and as such, the data collection process, namely the field observations, was time constrained. As a result, only a small number of valuable insights were seen.
2. The research study focused on one independent school. This independent school is headed by a female head who has employed many women as HODs. Therefore, the experiences in this independent school may differ from those of other, more well-established independent schools.
3. The sample size consisted of a small sample size of seven women HODs. This means their experiences should not be deemed accurate for all female HODs in other independent schools, as the results cannot be fully generalised in other instances.
4. The research site is the same school where I was employed. This meant that the female HODs were also colleagues. Therefore, there may have been a limitation in the information provided in their interviews and being careful in their actions when I was around.

5.4. Suggestions for future research

This research study provides the following suggestions for future research:

1. The experiences and views of female heads (principals) leading in independent schools.
2. The role of emotional intelligence of leaders in leading schools.
3. A comparative study of different independent schools with a male principal and female HODs.

5.5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the study discovered that women are making significant strides in closing the differences between females and males. This research study challenged the existing literature on female leadership and their experiences. Many of the cases presented in female leadership were from underdeveloped areas or public schooling systems, often presenting a harsh reality for women leaders.

This research study confirms that female leaders still experience an array of challenges and discrimination because of their gender. The participants in this study have various perceptions of males in the schooling environment. Additionally, this study can further extend the current focus literature within the field of women in leadership and what that means in the context of independent schooling in South Africa.

More importantly, this research has demonstrated new insights into the advantages of emotional intelligence as a desirable trait for a leader in schools – that the women in this believed they possess, as well as an opportunity for female leaders to establish a new culture of respect and transformation for women in newer schools. This study also found that the women in this school felt more competent and often powerful enough to question male leaders.

Society today has shown activism in supporting the need for female leaders and what they bring forward as leaders. The notion of leading and management is being extinguished and carefully relooked at from the old and traditional norms of male perspectives.

In this school, there has been a shift in terms of employing more females in HOD positions. However, there are still obstacles to getting women leaders into higher management positions such as head of schools or executive head. Female leaders bring emotional intelligence, care, compassion, and the drive for relationships that are not often seen in male leadership.

The ability of females to experience such challenges and discrimination and find the resilience to overcome these challenges speaks immeasurable volumes about women's power. It was evident in this research that the stereotypical narrative of male leadership is slowly being eradicated and that women in this study felt empowered. Many of the women who were interviewed were optimistic about the opportunities for

women in the future and the lack of male dominance in leadership positions. It was also revealed that if there is still a lack of awareness amongst men, there is an acknowledgment of privilege and naivety of men to see what is happening around them. In that case, women will continuously experience challenges in leadership positions because they are women.

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Appendices

Appendix One: School Permission Letter

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
Wits School of Education
Masters in Education (MEd.)

Steyn City School (College)
Cnr Cedar Road & Douw Steyn Drive
Riversideview, Fourways
2191

PERMISSION REQUEST LETTER

Steyn City School (College) is invited to participate in my Masters in Education research project. The topic is: *Female Head of Departments (HODs) leading at an independent high school in South Africa*

This research project is about female leadership and the inequalities that exist for female leaders as managers within schools. Females have largely dominated schools as teachers; however, males significantly outnumber females at the management level. For a long time, females have been subjected to traditional stereotypes, injustices and societal oppressions that do not see females as fit enough to be in leadership and management positions.

You have been invited to participate in this study because your organisation is an independent school and currently employs a significant number of female HODs within the college (high school). Your HODs' experiences and input in this research will provide a basis for this research and will be invaluable in exploring how female HODs lead at an independent school.

In addition, this research will provide critical information in evaluating and improving female leadership within independent schools in South Africa and inclusive policy improvements that will benefit your institution in the long term.

The face-to-face interviews will only be done one-on-one with the respective HOD in their private classroom at Steyn City School (College). Furthermore, the participant will be informed of their rights by receiving a participant information letter and consent form. These face-to-face interviews will not interrupt teaching and learning time and

will be scheduled at a convenient time for the respective HOD. They can withdraw from the data collection process at any time.

All information obtained during the course of this study will be kept strictly confidential. The information you give to me will be stored securely on a password-protected OneDrive folder and on a personal password-protected PC and will not be disclosed to anyone. All points of discussion and observations will not be disclosed to anyone nor used against you or them. Your institution may withdraw from the data collection process at any time.

To ensure anonymity, they will be referred to as HOD A, HOD B and HOD C without any specific order. I will also use a pseudonym (false name or number) to represent your organisation's participation in my final research report, and all resources will be destroyed after five years.

Given all of this, I would like to request permission for the following:

1. Conduct interviews with preselected HODs across the college.
2. Use their classrooms to conduct interviews.
3. Use email correspondence.
4. Act as an observer whilst collecting data.
5. Take photos or images of the school facilities (no logos will be shown).

I would greatly appreciate your assistance with a formal written permission letter for the above. If you have any queries or questions regarding my invitation, you can contact me on 084 534 3986 or email me lesliecnr@gmail.com

Thanking you in advance,
Leslie Cheston Nicholas Reddy



Researcher

Mr Leslie Cheston Nicholas Reddy

Student Number: 787213

Contact Details: 084 534 3986

Email: lesliecnr@gmail.com

Supervisor

Dr Z Moyo

Contact Details: 0732318631

Email: zvisinei.moyo@wits.ac.za

Appendix Two: Participant Information Letter





University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
Wits School of Education
Masters in Education (MEd.)

PARTICIPANTS INFORMATION LETTER

Dear Madam,

My name is Leslie Reddy, a Masters in Education student at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in the Division for Education and Leadership Studies (ELPS). My supervisor is Dr Z Moyo, and I am conducting a research study about female leadership.

You are invited to participate in my Master's research project. The topic is: *Female Head of Departments (HODs) leading at an independent high school in South Africa.*

This research project is about female leadership and the inequalities that exist for female leaders as managers within schools. Females have largely dominated schools as teachers; however, males significantly outnumber females at the management level. For a long time, females have been subjected to traditional stereotypes, injustices and societal oppressions that do not see females as fit enough to be in leadership and management positions. On the other hand, many independent schools have demonstrated a lack of female leaders within management positions.

You have been invited to participate because you are a female HOD teaching at an independent school. Your experience and input in this research will provide a basis for this research and will be invaluable in exploring how female HODs lead at an independent school.

This research will be conducted through individual face-to-face interviews, audio-recorded using my personal phone. Your participation during the interview is voluntary and the interview could take a maximum of 60 minutes of your time. My research will also require the use of our everyday interactions in the form of observations and our email correspondence throughout the duration of this research. You may withdraw from this study at any time.

All information obtained during the course of this study, will be kept strictly confidential. The information you give to me will be stored securely on a password-

protected OneDrive folder and on a personal password-protected PC and will not be disclosed to anyone. I will be using a pseudonym (false name or number) to represent your participation in my final research report, and all resources will be destroyed after five years.

This research study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are also welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0)11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Thank You,
Leslie Cheston Nicholas Reddy



Researcher

Mr Leslie Cheston Nicholas Reddy

Student Number: 787213

Contact Details: 084 534 3986

Email: lesliecnr@gmail.com

Supervisor

Dr Z Moyo

Contact Details: 0732318631

Email: zvisinei.moyo@wits.ac.za

Appendix Three: Participant Consent Form





University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
Wits School of Education
Masters in Education (MEd.)

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Research Topic: "*Female Head of Departments (HODs) leading at an independent high school in South Africa*" by Leslie C N Reddy.

I, _____, agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. Please tick the correct box below.

	Yes	No
1. I agree that my participation will remain anonymous.		
2. I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in his research report.		
3. I agree that the interview may be audio recorded.		
4. I agree for the researcher to use our email correspondence.		
5. I agree for the researcher to be an observer.		
6. I agree that the information I provide may be used anonymously by other researchers following this project, provided they receive their own ethics clearance		

You may withdraw from this research project at any time you wish to do so.

Full Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix Four: Approval Of School Permission Letter



T +27(0)10 597 1250
info@steyncityschool.co.za
www.steyncityschool.co.za

c/o Douw Steyn Drive & Cedar Road
Riverside View
South Africa

BY EMAIL

12 August 2022

To whom it may concern

PERMISSION FOR MR LESLIE REDDY TO CONDCT RESEARCH AT STEYN CITY SCHOOL

Steyn City School hereby gives approval to Mr Leslie Reddy to conduct research at Steyn City School towards his master's degree in education.

This approval includes permission for the following:

- Conduct interviews with relevant teachers with their permission
- Use a suitable school space to conduct interviews with teachers with their permission
- Use email correspondence at school using the school email platform
- Distribute questionnaires to relevant teachers

Yours sincerely



JULIET GLOVER
HEAD OF COLLEGE

Directors: Prof. E Links, I King
Associations: Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa (ISASA) | Southern African Heads of Independent Schools Association (SAHISA) | Independent Examinations Board (IEB)
Registration No.: 2015/016523/07

Appendix Five: Interview Schedule

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Questions to each HOD

1. Experiences
   1.1. What are you experiences in regard to female teachers being appointed HOD?
   1.2. In your opinion, why do you think males outnumber females in management positions in schools?
   1.3. Are there any differences between a female HODs and male HODs?
   1.4. Are there any similarities between female HODs and male HODs?
   1.5. What are your experiences with dealing with higher management?
2. Challenges
   2.1. If any, what challenges do you face as a female HOD (if any)?
   2.2. Do you think there are advantages of working in an independent school as a female HOD?
   2.3. Do you think there are disadvantages of working in an independent school as a female HOD?
3. Strategies
   3.1. What is your leadership philosophy?
   3.2. How would you describe your leadership strategies?
   3.3. How do you navigate the challenges you face as a female HOD?
   3.4. How do you handle conflict with your female subordinates?
   3.5. How do you handle conflict with your male subordinates?
4. Female leadership
   4.1. How do students view you as a leader?
   4.2. How do parents view you as a leader?
   4.3. Do you have anything else to add about female HODs?