Feathering the Nest: Perceptions of Proposals for Institutional Support Programmes for Women in Leadership Positions in South African Higher Education

Anita Maürtin Cairncross

University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa
Telephone: 027 021 959 2514, E-mail: amaurtin-cairncross@uwc.ac.za

ABSTRACT Using the paradigm of the feminist standpoint theory, this paper explores the perceptions of women in leadership in Higher Education about the need for the development of institutional structures to support them in leadership positions. Three open-ended questions were sent via e-mail to the respondents, who were purposefully selected as a convenient sample. The responses were analysed using a qualitative research design of thematic analysis. Provide research methodology. These findings provide recommendations with regard to the strategies proposed by women in leadership positions as to the ways in which Higher Education institutions may 'feather the nest' for women in leadership positions.

INTRODUCTION

The history of patriarchy, globally, is still evident within academia. It appears that in spite of ongoing attention, gender inequity still exists in the higher education sector (Dobele Rundle-Thiele Kopanidis 2014; Monroe and Chiu 2010). Several scholars argue that men continue to dominate in senior leadership positions at most universities globally and is the case at South African universities, while women still struggle to establish themselves within the 'centre' of the academic enterprise. Scholars highlighted the issues of androcentric ideologies and male values of promotion continue to inhibit women's advancement within these institutions (Dobele et al. 2014; Mabokela and Lenase King 2001; Mischau 2001; Morley et al. 2001; Park 1996; Subotzky 2001). The positions of power, and by implication, institutional strategic directions and directives, continue to be dominated by male voices. This situation is exacerbated by women's relatively recent entry into academia, where they have further been marginalized from the senior leadership positions of academies. Women have had to struggle to play an active role in research, theory development and academic debates. Although women fulfil many responsibilities and play meaningful roles in the academic life of universities, their contributions have seldom been acknowledged (Louw and Zuber-Skeritt 2009; Mabokela and Lenase King 2001; Madden 2005).

Peterson (2015) reports that in Sweden, the leaky pipeline of women in senior management positions continues even though similar numbers of men and women obtain doctoral degrees only 22 per cent of professors were women in 2011. Recent studies concluded that career opportunities for women are 'as bleak today as they were 20 years ago' (Danell and Hjerm 2013: 1005).

Objectives

Clearly, gender relations have shifted over the last few decades, and women are now employed in greater numbers and their voices more represented than in the history of patriarchal academia (Aisenberg and Harrington 1988; Bagilhole 2000; Madsen 2012). Yet, there is a clear argument that women's voices, particularly the voices of women outside of the dominant western, northern context of knowledge production, such as women in South African historically black universities, remain largely marginalized (Kiamba 2008; Madsen 2011; Makobela and Lenase King 2001).

Thus, the importance of women in leadership positions is regarded as so important by some sectors that the Journal 'Advances in Developing Human Resources' dedicated a Spe-

cial Issue to the topic of women in leadership in Higher Education in 2011.

This provides the rational for the current project which focuses on exploring the perceptions of women in leadership positions with regard to their proposals for institutional interventions to support them in their positions. To this end, respondents were asked *'which strategies you would recommend to Higher Education institutions to develop to support women in leadership positions in these institutions?'*

Literature Review

Feminist Standpoint Theory Defined

This paper draws primarily on the principles of the feminist standpoint theory. This paper focuses exclusively on experiences of women in leadership positions in South African Higher Education with regard to their views on the proposals for institutional support structures. Given this focus, this section outlines the key tenets of feminist standpoint theory and its value to this particular study.

In essence, feminist standpoint theory has three makes three principal tenets. Firstly, according to these theorists, is that knowledge is socially situated. Secondly, that marginalized groups are socially situated in ways that make it more possible for them to be aware of things and ask questions than it is for the non-marginalized. And, finally, that research, particularly that focused on power relations should begin with the lives of the marginalized (Collins 1997; Harding 1991; Nicholson 2013; Ratcliff 2006; Khazan 2014).

The Value of this Paradigm in Understanding Women's Perceptions

Feminist scholars have developed a wide range of theoretical epistemologies in their attempts to understand the origins and the perpetuation of gender inequality in contemporary societies (Harding 2004). From the outset, it should be noted that feminism is understood and acknowledged in terms of its multiplicity rather than as a single theory or a single method. Since the early period of the second wave of feminism, one of the key areas of feminist work, is that which is referred to as the feminist standpoint theory, which has at its core, a 'woman-centered perspective' (Collins1997; Harding 2004; Hartsock 1998). In the last few decades, the feminist standpoint theory, together with broader feminism, has gone through many changes. Even though these changes and interpretations within the feminist movement have been a site of multiple debates, the focus and centrality of women and women's voices remains a primary feature of all feminist studies. Although the various strands of feminism each have their own particularities, these authors assert that the following commitments are common to the goals of all feminist studies:

- A major focus on the situation and experiences of women in relation to power in society
- A centralizing of women as participants in the investigation process
- An emphasis on developing interventions to improve women's positions in society.

Feminist standpoint theory, as part of broader feminist theories, occupies a significant place among the critiques of Western epistemology and ideology. Benhabib (1986) describes critique as a process that enables future social change. Within this understanding, critique is used to provoke and use ideological crises for social transformation. Furthermore, critique is also used to refer to processes and concepts that attempt to emphasize contradictions within the social order. These attempts do not necessarily heal or resolve the identified crises, but rather may be used as the means to the solution of the crises.

According to these critical theorists, the major objective of any research endeavour should be to create knowledge to facilitate the transformation of the social order as desired by the participants of the research.

Feminism, like other critical theories, rejects the notion of objective knowledge. From these perspectives, all people and all groups are regarded as socially situated and knowledge is regarded as a social construction (Harding 2004; Hartsock 1998; Ratcliff 2006).

Feminist Standpoint Theory: A Woman-centered Perspective

Woman-centered studies are a contemporary form of feminism in which the experiences of women, who are often in marginal positions in patriarchal societies, are brought into the research and knowledge production arena (Col-

lins 1997; Harsock 1998; Hendricks and Lewis 1994). This perspective recognizes the social positioning of women, and it acknowledges the various forms of subjection which women experience in their 'peripheral' positions in society. The focus of the debates and studies, located within this conceptual framework, are therefore not solely on gender, but includes the recognition of other forms of subjection. Among these forms of subjection are race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and physical competence which women experience (Harding 1991; Hartsock 1998). hooks (1984) has also emphasized the need to go beyond gender and to include other forms of subjection which include race and class into feminist perspectives.

These studies, namely, woman-centred studies, have highlighted the private/public divide, which may be understood as an extension of the traditional philosophical distinction between mind and body. It is argued that the mind-body dualism is based on the assumption that the mind and its activities are regarded as superior to the body and its activities and that the mind is equated with masculinity and the body with femininity. Within this framework, men are constructed as the creators of knowledge, while women's experiences are disregarded. On the other hand, 'women's experiences' are silenced and devalued in androcentric social orders. Societies have historically been stratified along gender lines where women and men are assigned different activities, and thus lead lives that are shaped and moulded in significantly different ways (Harding 2004; Nicholson 2013; Ratcliff 2006). Given the 'gender-biased' conceptualization of 'truth' and existing theories, the feminist standpoint theory attempts to eradicate the rigid gender-divide by emphasizing the importance of women's experience in the development of theory and the production of knowledge. Furthermore, feminist analysis may be interpreted as a form of deconstruction of existing 'truths' and theories. By these means the feminist standpoint theory attempts to reconstruct the way in which knowledge is presented and understood, when women's perspectives are included in the development of theories and in the generation of knowledge (Nicholson 2013; Ratcliff 2006). The feminist standpoint theory, like feminism more broadly, should be regarded as a critical theory as it often presents challenges to the hegemonic social order.

For feminist standpoint theorists, knowledge is perceived to be shaped by the social context of the knower. From this stance, the perspective of groups that are marginalized, (by race, gender or class), are regarded as being more accurate than people from groups that are more advantaged in the dominant culture. As mentioned earlier, feminist standpoint theorists focus on women's lives, and assert that women's lives have been erroneously devalued and made invisible. Consequently, women's contributions as the generators of evidence for or against knowledge claims have also been devalued and underdeveloped.

The feminist standpoint theory, however, does not claim that women's experiences in themselves provide a reliable basis for knowledge claims about nature and social relations (Ratcliff 2006). It is, therefore, arguable that it is neither the experience nor the discourse that provides the basis for feminist claims, but the articulated observations of and theory about the rest of nature and social relations. A feminist standpoint does not therefore exist in pure form in the consciousness of women. Rather, a standpoint is often regarded as the outcome of a struggle. In this way the development of a standpoint represents the process by which an oppressed group becomes not merely a group in themselves, but a group for themselves (Collins 1997; Harding 2004; Nicholson 2013; Ratcliff 2006).

Feminist standpoint theorists argue that particular forms of subjection that women experience as an oppressed, exploited and dominated gender has a distinctive content. This theory, while highlighting 'difference', cautions against reproducing patriarchal constructions of this difference as inferiorities.

Because 'standpoint' refers to position in society, it may be conceptualized as a way of making sense of the factors that shape social structures and identities. By focusing on factors that structure the relations between social positions and ways of knowing, feminist standpoint theorists, challenge the assumption that simply being a woman, guarantees a feminist view of the world. Instead, the feminist standpoint theory is a socially produced position and thus not necessarily available to all women. In this way, the notion of difference is introduced when the standpoint is interpreted in this way. Harding (2004) asserts that not only is there no 'typical woman's life', but women's experiences

of their lives are not necessarily the feminist knowledge of women's lives. She regards women's positions as 'strangers' to the social order as a potentially valuable position given the advantages in being a 'stranger' rather than a 'native'. A basis for this claim is that, while women are often excluded from the design and direction of the social order and the production of knowledge, a 'stranger' brings a combination of new factors to the research process (Reay 1996a, 1996b). These include a combination of nearness and remoteness as well as the concern and the indifference that are integral to maximizing objectivity. In this process, the 'natives' may confide more in the researcher, (who may in this situation be regarded as the 'outsider'), than they would with each other. Also, the 'stranger' researcher may be able to perceive behavioural patterns and belief systems which those immersed in the culture are frequently unable, or less able, to detect (Nicholson 2013; Ratcliff 2006; Reay 1996a, b).

Harding's work (2004) goes on to argue that the oppressed may have the capacity to 'see more clearly'. Thus, though some people may be socially more disadvantaged, they are epistemologically more privileged, because they may better positioned to produce maximally objective knowledge. From this perspective, it is argued that at times the distinctive feature of women's situations in a gender-stratified society, may be used as resource in feminist research. It is further postulated that these unique resources enable feminism to produce empirically more accurate descriptions and theoretically richer explanations of the social order, than do conventional research.

Some researchers provide a helpful manner to address some of the questions which Harding's perspective eludes to answer, especially with regard to questions about conflicting standpoints and norms or criteria to evaluate different knowledge. There should be vigilance against dividing the world straightforwardly into the oppressed and the oppressors. She argues that in reality, individuals are often both members of dominant groups as well as members of subordinate group.

Dialogue is a concept which hinges around the notion that each social group speaks from its own standpoint and shares its own partial, situated knowledge. Although the notion of dialogue does not offer a universal answer to the ways in which the issues of knowledge claims can be guaranteed, it does shift the discussion to a terrain where standpoints are debated rather than accepted at face-value. Like van Wyk (2013), who makes reference to dialogical spaces for the development of theories and learning experiences.

For feminist standpoint theorists, people's knowledge, perspectives and behaviour must be understood in terms of their social positions. This is because standpoint theory has as its central focus, social groupings rather than roles (Baldwin 2000; Harding 2004; Ratcliff 2006). Standpoints are therefore used to refer to one's view of the world. The feminist standpoint theory assumes that there are different types of knowledge and that all types of knowledge are regarded as partial, because people do not know all the aspects of the various possible perspectives (Baldwin 2000; Harper et al. 2001). It is argued that some people do, however, by virtue of their particular social location, have a more complete knowledge and understanding of reality than other people. Arguably, oppressed groups of people are said to have a more complete view of reality than oppressors in the same way knowledge of oppressed social groups often form the basis for the critique of the power structure of the group that constitutes the status quo. From this perspective, it is argued that women's experiences of the world are different from those of men's experiences with respect to gender, and are regarded as more complete, given their vantage point of oppression in patriarchal societies (Baldwin 2000; Collins 1997; Harding 1991; Harper et al. 2001; Nicholson 2013).

From the woman-centered perspective, feminist standpoint theorists claim that the existing social order is dysfunctional for women. This claim is based on the assumption that there is a closer fit for men, in the dominant groups and the arrangement of the social order, than there is for any woman. From this stance, the inequalities of the 'power system' are apparent and this is often regarded as the ultimate value of the feminist standpoint theory. Because it is from this vantage point that women's experiences may be validated and published in order to challenge the reigning androcentric social order.

When research starts with the 'dailiness' of women's lives, research processes may improve the recognition that some understandings of both women's and men's lives are very different

to accounts preferred by conventional society. The 'dailiness' of women's lives is explained by Harding (1991,) as:

I mean the patterns women create and the meanings women invent each day and over time as a result of their labours and in the context of their subordinated status to men. The point is not to describe every aspect of daily life or to represent a schedule of priorities in which some activities are more important or are accorded more status than others. The search for dailiness is a method of work that allows us to take the patterns women create and the meanings women invent, and learn from them. If we map out what we learn, connecting one meaning or invention to another, we begin to lay out a different way of seeing reality. This way of seeing is what I refer to as woman's standpoint (p.129).

The aspects of women's work, though they are not recognized and are 'invisible' to men, are the services that support the public sphere; thus relieving men of their responsibility to care for their own bodies and physical existence. This type of support facilitates the shaping of men's lives so that they are freed up and allowed to engage with the abstract rather than the concrete. Men are therefore able, and expected to, dominate the public sphere of the mind and abstract thinking. Because of women's positions and their traditional roles, their work is regarded as incomprehensible to men and thus rendered invisible from the 'male-stream' point of view (Harding 2004). This notion is concurred with by Hewlett and Buck Luce (2005) who report that while 37 percent of professional women have taken time out ('off ramps') from their careers, (the statistic rising to 43 percent among women who have had children), only 24 percent of men have taken off ramps from their careers (with no significant difference between those who became fathers and those who did not). Since society exercises many forms of oppression, science reflects these axes of oppressions. Knowledge thus cannot be said to be 'value-free'. Many feminists, like Harding, insist that researchers acknowledge that values that are imported into science are androcentric, and not democratic values.

Feminist standpoint theorists regard knowledge as a constructed as dependent on contextualized experience. It is argued that because experience is seldom neutrally transmitted, knowledge cannot be and is not neutral or val-

ue-free. The inclusion of women into research projects is an attempt to challenge traditional research enterprises because of the knowledge, experience and understandings that women bring into the projects. 'Adding' women fundamentally alters the state of the research process because the theoretical and methodological rules, (that traditionally excluded women), are challenged. The perspectives of theorists like Hartsock (1998) and Harding (1991) provided initial ground for feminist epistemology that emphasized that women did not necessarily know better but that women know differently.

Often conventional research strives to maintain a power hierarchy with the researcher being 'outside and neutral' to the research process. Feminist research, on the other hand, posits self-reflexivity as a central feature. Feminist epistemology acknowledges that the research process is as important as the outcome of the research process. The inclusion of self-reflexivity in the research process is an attempt to minimize the power hierarchy that is endemic between the researcher and the researched in conventional research studies (Denzin and Lincoln 1998; Harding 2004).

The Value and Critique of Feminist Standpoint Theory

The key value of the feminist standpoint theory is that it provides a forum for women's voices and experiences as subjects and objects of research enterprises. In this way the feminist standpoint theory attempts to challenge the various axes of oppression that women experience. This perspective also gives credence to women by using their unique resources and particular location within power relations for knowledge production (Denzin and Lincoln 1998; Hundleby 1997). Furthermore, the feminist standpoint theory argues for researchers to foster more egalitarian, (or at least less oppressive), social relationships and meanings during research processes. This conceptual framework, because it is concerned with women's concrete, materially-grounded experiences, has its origins in a politically informed and theorized position regarding the perspectives and standpoints of women. While there are strong areas of discontent with traditional interpretations of the feminist standpoint theory, a silence on these debates would retain women in their marginalized positions in peripheries of research.

The traditional conceptualization and interpretation of the feminist standpoint theory, often created perceptions that this variation of feminism was too totalizing and unifying of women and their experiences. This interpretation often led to problematic situations when attempts to distinguish between competing claims from the various 'voices' of women were made (Collins 1997; Nicholson 2013; O'Leary 1997; Reay 1996a, 1996b). When gender was regarded as the sole source of marginalization, interpretations with regard to the experiences of 'women' as a single category, becomes problematic. Such versions of feminism were criticized for ignoring the differences between women in their assumption of a singular category of 'woman' For example, the experiences of white, middle-class women versus the 'voices' and experiences of black, working class women were very different (O'Leary 1997; Reay 1996a,b).

More recently, researchers are cautioned to be wary of approaches that attempt to develop a totalizing, unifying framework that 'speaks' for all women. Over the last decade or so the 'difference debate' has been central to feminist theorizing. The 'difference debate' in South Africa is primarily used to refer to race and racism, and the power relations between black and white women, in particular, are challenged within these debates (de la Rey 1997). Feminist theories now go beyond binaries (male-female; dominant and marginal social positions) to include multiplicities. In this way, contemporary interpretations and practices of feminist standpoint theorists do not totalize women as a single category but rather recognition is given to the differences between women; and acknowledgement is also given to variations of differences and the multiple axes of oppression and marginalization that women experience (Harding 1991; Shefer 1998).

A further criticism of the traditional interpretation of the feminist standpoint theory is that misinterpretation and oversimplification may occur with regard to women's marginal positions in society. Critics may argue that the theory inadvertently advocates that women's marginal positions are advantageous (Collins 1997; Harding 2004). This criticism was based on Collins' (1997) concept of the outsider from within, a concept that may be misunderstood as women's peripheral positions providing them with increased resources in research enterprises. Contemporary feminist standpoint theorists point out that notions of advantage or an idealization of women in the marginalized positions in society is an oversimplified interpretation of standpoint theory. Such an oversimplification may mislead women into believing that they do not have to challenge the status quo. This critique of traditional interpretation of the feminist standpoint theory is continued by the argument that an epistemic advantage can only be based on knowledge and that people in marginalized positions are frequently denied access to knowledge and to exercise their intellect.

Although the various points of critique of feminist standpoint theory are acknowledged, the theory remains valuable, because unlike traditional research, it draws women from the peripheries to the centres of research (Harding 2004; Hartsock 1998). The central contribution of these discussions is not that women 'know' better, but rather that women know 'differently'. The contribution of their experiences and cognitive styles would be to enhance and to introduce more 'balanced' research enterprises, than traditional research. Because it may be argued that traditional research is based on androcentric research styles, and that many theories were developed through male interpretations, it could be argued that men have dominated the 'sites' of knowledge production. For these reasons, feminist standpoint theory should not be disregarded for its flaws, but rather be recognized for its contribution (Handrahan 1999; Reay 1996a,b).

The positive aspect of the feminist standpoint theory lies in the acknowledgement that it provides a space for women's voices to be heard. Thus the dialogical space is created within this research paradigm (van Wyk 2013). It also provides an opportunity for women's experiences and opinions to be raised and documented.

Contextualizing Women Academics in South African Universities

Within the South African context, HBUs have, from their very origins, inherent inadequacies that further obstruct women's publication endeavours. The socio-political origins of HBUs, such as the lack of facilities, understaffing, and the historical, educational and socio-economic disadvantage of the majority of students and staff, present particular barriers to publishing (Mabokela and Lenase King 2001; Subotzky 2001). Although there is an understanding that

the occupation of senior positions is a mechanism for women's full inclusion into the executive leadership of the academy, it needs to be regarded with scepticism, given the feminist argument that 'the master's tool cannot dismantle the master's house', there is a strong argument for its value in and outside of traditional male academic values. On one level, women's occupation in senior leadership positions may facilitate a decentering and destabilisation of authoritative, dominant male voices. On another level, it is argued that shifting the dominance of men in positions of power will also facilitate a challenge to androcentric policies and practices in academia. In this way, according to Mama (2000):

the proverbial maid needs to know her master well enough to anticipate his every whim, writers from the periphery are required to be versed in all the master texts ever produced in the belly of the beast that devours us (p.20).

By occupying positions of leadership women in academia could use the position of the 'outsider from within' in male-dominated academies. This, while there is still a need to reflect critically on the nuances around senior leadership in academies, it may be argued that more women in leadership may facilitate shifts in modes and standards for hierarchy and leadership in academic institutions. Furthermore, the analysis of the relationship between power and institutionalized discourse provides an important tool for disaggregating women's positions in academia (Preece 2002). Institutional atmospheres have to be created to sustain and support women in 'entering the centre' of academies.

Veiled 'Othering' in Institutional Cultures

Although overt gender discrimination apparently does not occur in universities, patterns of behaviour which may not be not overtly sexist, but which continue to privilege men, are reportedly common in most departments and institutions (Mabokela and Lenase King 2001, Kiamba 2008; Madsen 2012). Men still predominate in positions of power and the culture at institutions remains gendered, reflecting its historical roots as institutions designed 'by men for men' (Bagilhole 2000). Although the term 'power' often has negative connotation in Western society, it must be realized that 'power' cannot exist on its own as it is a relational reality (Potgieter 1997; Shefer 1999). The grappling with and dismantling of androcentric power at different levels within the social order has been a constant goal for feminist theorists (Due to the slow changes in staffing patterns, the dearth of women in senior positions in universities is still evident at global, African and national universities (Kiamba 2008; Madsen 2011; Makobela and Lenase King 2001).

Although the majority of women, across the globe, are employed outside the home, they are still primarily responsible for child-rearing and home-making activities. This has traditionally been referred to as the 'double load' or the 'juggling act', which women evidently experience on a far greater scale than their male counterparts (Aisenberg and Harrington 1988; Schumpeter 2014). Historically, an academic career was perceived to be a career option which lent itself to combining motherhood and work. This is because the hours are flexible, the work has a degree of autonomy and for many academic women staff members the holiday periods coincide with the school holidays (Park 1996). In recent times, this career option has become less favourable to women because of diminishing resources, lower salary scales than for many other occupations and the strong competition for permanent positions (Acker 1990; Bagilhole 2000; Khazan 2014).

Clearly, gender relations have shifted over the last few decades, and women are now employed in greater numbers and their voices more represented than in the history of patriarchal academia (Aisenberg and Harrington 1988; Bagilhole 2000; Madsen 2012). Yet, there is a clear argument that women's voices, particularly the voices of women outside of the dominant western, northern context of knowledge production, such as women in South African historically black universities, remain largely marginalized (Kiamba 2008; Madsen 2011; Makobela and Lenase King 2001).

Due to the slow changes in staffing patterns, the dearth of women in senior positions in universities is still evident at global, African and national universities. Table 1, from the Department of Higher Education and Training below illustrates the number of women in executive positions in South African universities.

As is evident from the Table 1, that 42 percent of the total number of staff in executive positions, are women.

Thus, the importance of women in leadership positions is regarded as so important by some sectors that the Journal 'Advances in

Table 1: Data from the South African Higher Education Management Information System

DATABASE:
HEMIS PRODUCED: 2013/09/04-08:01:00 AM

Personnel category	Gender		
	Total	Male	Female
1.2 Executive/Administrative	1985	1122	843

Developing Human Resources' dedicated a Special Issue to the topic of women in leadership in Higher Education in 2011.

This provides the rational for the current project which focuses on exploring the perceptions of women in leadership positions with regard to their proposals for institutional interventions to support them in their positions.

METHODOLOGY

In this paper the researcher has reviewed current literature and provided perceptions from women who completed an open-ended questionnaire. This paper will provide an overview of the responses to one of the three questions namely, *which strategies you would recommend to Higher Education institutions to develop to support women in leadership positions in these institutions?*

Research Design

A qualitative research design was used as the qualitative data was analysed done using thematic discourse analysis which was conducted using the themes that emerged from the responses.

Data Collection Methods

The survey questionnaire containing three open-ended questions were sent by e-mail to approximately twenty women in leadership positions or had previously occupied leadership positions in South African Higher Education institutions. The sample was a convenient one as it was purposive because the respondents were accessible and available to the researcher who is working at a Higher Education institution. In the e-mail, the researcher assured the respondents who were all known to her, of the confi-

dentiality and anonymity of their responses. The sample size is relatively small as the findings of study were intended to provide a 'snap shot' of perceptions of women in these positions. The response rate was 85 percent.

The three open-ended questions were: Firstly, 'what do you regard as barriers /challenges to women's leadership in Higher Education?' and secondly, 'which strategies you would recommend to Higher Education institutions to develop to support women in leadership positions in these institutions?' The third question was 'which support mechanisms you use in your leadership position to deal with challenges related to the position'. The findings presented in this paper will only focus on responses to question two namely, which strategies would you recommend to Higher education institutions to develop to support women in leadership positions in these institutions. The responses to the other questions will be disseminated subsequent papers.

The qualitative data was analysed done using thematic discourse analysis which was conducted using the themes that emerged from the responses.

Biographical Data of the Respondents

Respondents were from both the administrative sector as well as the academic sectors, respectively, in Higher Education institutions. The lecturers included in the sample had been in leadership positions in their departments in recent years. Table 2 provides the positions of the respondents.

As per Table 2, two respondents (11.8%) were White while 12 (70.6%) were Coloured , while only one African woman (5.9%) responded to the questionnaire.

The response rate was 75 percent with the majority the respondents referring to mentoring programmes for women, which they believed would 'feather the nest' for women in senior positions. A few of the respondents were more skeptical in their responses indicating that Higher Education did not have the will to support women.

It is clear from the responses that institutional cultures would have to 'shift' to embrace women as an important component of the staff in senior positions in Higher Education.

Table 2: Information on respondents across historical racial categories and roles

Position	Historical racial categories				Grand total
	African	*Coloured*	*Indian*	*White*	
Dean		1		1	2
Departmental Chairperson		4			4
Deputy Dean		1	1	1	3
Deputy Registrar		1			1
Director	1	2	1		4
HoD		1			1
Lecturer		1			1
Supervisor		1			1
Grand total	1	12	2	2	17

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There were several themes that emerged from the data that was generated from the responses of the respondents. Some of these themes related to the importance of leadership development interventions, opportunities for networking and the importance of women supporting women. Other themes that emerged from the responses related to the work-life balance with regard to the availability of flexi-time, institutional support interventions to assist with the understanding and operationalizing of their roles well as the availability of mentors and /or coaches to support women in leadership positions.

Leadership Development Interventions/ Programmes

The majority of respondents referred to the importance of institutional leadership development programmes to ensure that women are prepared and understand their roles. The quotations below illustrate the proposals from respondent responses:

HEI's should give women on an going basis access to development opportunities that will help them to improve their skills base and to understand the HE environment strategically both at an institutional and national level. The latter is a critical aspect to consider as many women would need to move from one HEI to another if they are to have wider access to a limited number of top jobs in this sector [Respondent 3].

Leadership development programmes (LDP) - in my experience, this was a fantastic way to build collegiality across faculties and between support staff and academic staff. It enables par-

ticipants to feel part of a greater collective, to develop a more collegial institutional culture, and to develop a flatter institutional structure. I think women tend to value relationships and collegiality a lot; (when I meet up or work with participants from our LDP[sic Leadership Development Programme] cohort, I still feel a tremendous rapport and that translates into greater collegiality)[Respondent 7].

Leadership development programmes must be relevant to women's development and these sentiments are conveyed by the following excerpts:

That people learn through leadership workshops how to respect each other again. That leadership respects the labor laws of the country and so that the environment we work in is not threatening and unstable. That leadership development programmes are really that and are not just a compliance game to make us look good outside [Respondent 12].

I really don't know what strategies I would recommend as more courses and workshops simply add more burden and time away from home. Also, each situation is context specific, I would imagine [Respondent 9].

The Importance of Women Supporting Women

Respondents who referred to this topic were forthright in comments relating to this matter as is evident in the following excerpts:

One of the problems at our institution, I think, is the fact that generally the women are divided. Those who carry the "women's issues" banner don't necessarily have the backing of other women – there's no confidence in their ability to express the issues in a way that will promote the cause. So, the women are divided,

unorganised and scared to address the race issue [Respondent 1].

Some responses indicate that women often do not feel supported by other women who are in senior positions as alluded to in the following quotations:

women executive members   do not necessarily treat other women just below them any better than men do too [Respondent 9].

Mentorship programmes are needed for women – 'real and relevant' mentoring by other women who are in more senior leadership positions [Respondent 5].

consistent and effective (real) mentorship from senior women leaders [Respondent 2].

Institutional Support Specifically for Women to Assist Them in Understanding and Operationalizing Their Roles

Many of the respondents felt that institutions should introduce specific initiatives and interventions to support women in their leadership roles. These interventions, they felt, should be specific to women as women have career paths that are convoluted and not linear. Furthermore, because women are still primarily the care givers, they indicated that there needs were different when compared to what was available in the androcentric cultures which still prevailed in South African universities.

Institutions should look at women individually and give time-off to women who want to develop themselves further. Women should be treated differently to men with regard to t time-off and support programmes. Bursaries and funding should be made available for those women who has the need to develop themselves further, as such departments where these women are appointed should assist. The leadership should be supportive of women who find it difficult to develop themselves – but are keen. Support could be provided in time-off and appointing replacement staff (maybe a junior person also in need of experience) [Respondent 5].

I think an expectation of an audit trail to document all decisions made, proper audits of these, more women in authority outside the institution for example, serving on boards such as the Health Professions council of South Africa (HPCSA), the South African Qualifications Association,(SAQA), , etcetera also heading enquiries, accreditation programmes and au-

dits of the institution and of other institutions - this will improve the power base of women in and beyond their institution - this recognition I found also improves the visibility and image of the person in the organisation [Respondent 3].

Regular management meetings (a one-on-one meeting) to establish the needs of the leader [Respondent 17].

This point is succinctly expressed by Respondent 11 in the following excerpt:

there needs to be a leadership network (formal) for women in deans, dvc [sic deputy vice-chancellor], senior manager positions. Ring fenced funding for women to attend both local and international conferences and seminars on leadership .if you are talking about women who are being groomed and not in these positions as yet then we need something like our women in research academy which is a space for women to engage with other women but also where they are exposed to strategies on how to manage your career in academic leadership. Women need to understand that there is a huge difference between being an academic and a head of department t versus a dean for example. I am not sure if good academics should take on what we call "leadership positions" as it takes very good scholars out of academia. So a strategy would be to evaluate them differently when a woman who has for example been a head of department applies for promotion. Ring fenced funding and good supportive policies always a good starting point [Respondent 11].

Some of the other matters that will be additional benefits of institutional interventions are expressed by the following responses:

Ensure that the institutional culture is less hierarchical, less dictatorial, and more collegial and address Institutional bureaucracy and inefficiencies; lack of administrative support [Respondent 7].

Career planning should be a crucial component of such programmes as is elucidated by the following excerpts:

Succession planning as a part of policy should be instituted so that woman can plan their trajectories and really see what is possible [Respondent 12].

Training that prepares you for the "next level" for example, what are the requirements for Deans or Directors, etc. Interventions for successor plans [Respondent 14].

Mentoring of women to fulfil leadership roles – identify women for these roles. Succession planning for women to be appointed to leadership positions and supporting women in leadership roles to manage / balance work and family responsibilities [Respondent 15].

Some of the core findings of this research relating to proposals for institutional support for women in leadership positions are aligned to findings of Hewlett and Buck Luce (2005), when they report that the top five reasons that women leave the 'fast lane' were: Family time (44%); Earn a degree, other training (23%); Work not enjoyable/satisfying (17%); Moved away (17%) and Change careers (16%). On the other hand, the top five reasons that men leave the 'fast lane' were: Change careers (29%); Earn a degree, other training (25%);Work not enjoyable/satisfying (24%); Not interested in field (18%) and Family time (12%).

This illustrates organizations need to develop specific and 'customized' strategies to retain women in leadership positions and to accommodate women's experiences and career trajectories. These would include strategies and mechanisms to assist women with 'on ramp' processes when they return to their careers after 'off-ramping'. This is often because women take the 'scenic route' as it were as many highly qualified women describe their careers as 'non-linear' which refers to the reality that they do not follow the conventional trajectory long established by successful men.

Availability of Mentors and/or Coaches

Women should also be encouraged to seek mentors (regardless of the mentor's gender or location). Research I have conducted in this field suggest that successful mentoring relationships evolve organically to ensure that the best fit is found for both the mentor and mentee [Respondent 3].

The themes of mentoring and networking were often interlinked in the responses as is evident in the following response:

programmes such as the Higher Education Resources Support –South Africa (HERS-SA) ACADEMY- [sic a Mellon Funded initiative], fulfils this aspect and it also gives women access to networking opportunities with women from other institutions [Respondent 3].

Having access to life coaches who really understand the Higher Education game to support women [Respondent 12].

Mabokela and Lenase King (2001) concur with the view that mentoring is often included in institutional l Staff Development programmes. In South African settings, enhancing Staff Development often means preparing staff to meet the needs of their institutions which are especially important in the Higher Education environment which is dynamic and thus has become more complex and demanding.

Mentoring of women by senior women (or men) in a sort of coaching relationship [Respondent 6].

Networking and Collaboration

The respondents felt that they would benefit from opportunities where they were able to network with other women in leadership positions. These networks would provide for information sharing and support and institutional initiatives would also provide 'spaces' for dialogues on career and succession planning. These sentiments are illustrated in the quotations, below:

There may have to be multiple-level strategies, for those entering academic leadership positions, support networks are important. Of course, it is about what type of support is needed. Scholarship is rather independent [Respondent 10].

Recognize and acknowledge women in leadership. Develop networks for women leaders to meet and talk and expose women to leadership opportunities [Respondent 8].

The importance of networking is acknowledged by Castillo Baltodano et al. (2012) who purport that two strategies would assist in the development of women for leadership positions in higher education and these are effective leadership development programmes and support programmes to encourage them for senior positions. This is alluded to in these findings when respondents referred to the need for networking opportunities and the availability of mentors and coaches to support them in leadership positions.

Understanding the Importance of Work-Life Balance: Option of Flexi-Time

The literature refers to dailiness of women's lives which alludes to women still being the pri-

mary homemaker as well as having a career. Women often carry more of the child and parent –caring responsibility in families and as concurred with by Hewlett and Buck Luce (2005), women are more likely than men to have 'interruptions' in their careers because of family responsibilities. The effects of the 'mommy –track' on women's careers are also alluded to by Kanzan (2014) and Schumpeter (2012) and it is therefore understandable that some of the respondents, referred to this aspect as is illustrated in the following excerpts:

The possibility of flexi-time to accommodate barrier w.r.t [sic with regard to] time [Respondent 2]

Institutions that are responsive to women's family responsibilities – this institution is generally good in this regard

Respondent 16 did not specifically respond to the questions in the questionnaire but preferred to make general comments about her views with regard to women in senior positions in Higher Education. An excerpt of her response is expressed as a conclusion to the findings of this project, as stated below:

Respondent 16 makes a recommendation that *Institutions of higher learning simply have to accept that women are now in leadership positions, not as accessories, but as people who are here to drive a deeper organisational change. This requires a fundamental shift in universities as institutions, university cultures and aligning university strategies so that they speak directly to this challenge. They must invest resources in programmes that support women to become future leaders, not just piecemeal efforts, but real investment which aim at producing the next set of higher education and societal leaders. These programmes should be flagship programmes from the office of the VC, so that the political commitment is made clear. Department should also be provided with ringfenced funds to develop young women academics holistically. And already a lot of these programmes have been rolled out in various universities, but the singular direction, political will and sustainable flow of resources to these programmes is often still not there. But for me as a black women, who is still seen as an alien in these passages and boardrooms, the biggest challenge remains the deep seated claim that racialised patriarchy continues to make.*

These responses indicate the proposals that women regard as important institutional support structures that will 'feather the nest' of Higher Education institutions in order for women to excel in their leadership positions.

CONCLUSION

The findings highlight the resilience required by women in leadership positions in Higher Education. The challenge for women in leadership positions in Higher Education remains within the narrow margins of the administrative (senior) ranks in Higher Education. This paper illustrated some of the proposals made by women in leadership positions which they recommend as institutional programmes and interventions. They indicated that the introduction of such initiatives and opportunities would support them in their roles.

The feminist standpoint theory, as a conceptual framework provided a 'space' where the respondents' 'voices' could be heard. The examination of the qualitative data does not provide the reasons and this paper aimed to provide a 'snapshot' of the reasons behind the numbers that are illustrated in the statistics that indicate the low numbers of women in senior positions in Higher Education.

The findings of the paper concur with other scholars that the influx of women in academia has not been accompanied with cultural transformation in the expectations for gender roles. From the findings and discussion the proposed institutional initiatives being recommended by the respondents, (who are all in leadership positions in Higher Education), would go a far way in supporting them. The 'mommy track' and the 'double load' are also is also acknowledged as having impacts on the careers of women. The respondents expressed that they often felt 'unsupported' in their leadership roles, by the institutions in which they work.

THE WAY FORWARD

Leadership development programmes and interventions for women in leadership positions in Higher Education are integral due to the challenges and changes being experienced in this sector. Within this constantly changing Higher Education environment, leaders are required to have exceptional sets of leadership capabilities

and competencies to assist their institutions to rise to new heights of excellence and innovation. One reason for the continued lack of prepared leaders is that there are few women to take up these critical leadership positions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that such a study be conducted using a larger sample and in more South African Higher Education institutions. It would be useful if a longitudinal study to a ten year period is implemented to assess and compare data across the time period. This type of paper will elucidate the impact of the implementation of institutional Leadership Development initiatives for women in leadership positions.

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