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Inspectors of education's perceptions of female principalship in the Rundu region of Namibia

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ABSTRACT

While women constitute more than 51% of the population and far outnumber men in teaching positions in Namibia, very few occupy positions of leadership. Male candidates are still favoured for top positions, thereby denying women the chance to gain entrance to these positions. One of the reasons for this imbalance seems to be that, in spite of conscious political effort and legislation, women may still be perceived as less effective leaders than men.

This research focused on leadership in education, in particular school principals, and explored the perceptions of female principalship held by school inspectors. Three school inspectors from the Rundu Education Region were purposefully selected and interviewed. Inspectors were selected on the grounds of their considerable influence in the selection and appointment of school principals.

The study found that these inspectors favour school principals who show commitment to their work, have good interpersonal working relationships, are caring, good listeners, visionary and produce good results. The inspectors attribute female principals' success to their traditionally perceived characteristics, such as caring leadership and ability to develop good human relations. Instead of perceiving these qualities as professionally negative (as is sometimes argued in the literature) the inspectors see them as indisputable assets to leadership. The respondents acknowledge the cultural stereotyping that may have influenced male attitudes to women in the past, but argue that good leadership is not specific to gender, but part of the qualities a person possesses, regardless of sex.

This study concludes that, contrary to what has been reported in many studies, these inspectors perceive women principals as effective – equal to their male counterparts or sometimes even more effective - because they are caring, well organized and good at communicating and establishing relations with others. Though these qualities are different from the traditional masculine qualities which include independence and

emotional strength, the respondents recognize and legitimize them as preferred qualities in current effective leadership practice.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context

Historically, men have dominated management and administrative positions in public education (Enomoto 2000: 375). However, the recent growing number of women in leadership positions has attracted extensive research on female leadership.

Most research has probed the perceptions of female leaders themselves, trying to understand how they describe their way of leading (Rosener 1990, Greyvenstein 1996, Sherman 2000). In these studies, women reported themselves as more empathetic, collaborative and supportive than their male counterparts; they described themselves as team-builders and democratic leaders. Similarly, studies conducted in South Africa (Ngcobo 1996, Mwingi 1999) and Namibia (Udjombala 2002, Kauaria 2002) reported that female principals perceived themselves, and were perceived by their followers, to be capable, hard working and as committed as (if not more committed than) male principals. However, despite women viewing themselves as capable leaders there are still few women in senior management positions in education in Namibia. This research takes its cue from recommendations in the work of Burke and Collins (2001) and Ngcobo (1996), and probes the perceptions of those in authority – in this case inspectors of education – concerning female leadership, since they are seen to have influence in the appointment of principals. Burke and Collins (2001: 255) suggest that, although their study of gender differences in leadership styles of female and male accountants provided further evidence of the existence of gender differences in leadership styles, there is a need for further research in the form of asking managers' superiors and peers to describe their managers' behaviour. Similarly Ngcobo (1996: 93) suggested investigations be carried out into authorities' perceptions of female leadership in education. It seems that looking at self-reports of female leaders of their leadership may not depict a complete picture, since they may tend to describe themselves differently from how people see them in practice. Following the suggestions of Burke and Collins (2001) and Ngcobo (1996) cited above,

this research sets out to examine female leadership styles from another perspective, namely that of the inspectors.

There is also a need for this kind of research in Namibia, and in the Rundu Education Region in particular, since all sectors, including education, are undergoing reforms and restructuring to address matters of concern such as gender inequality. Gender has been regarded as a crosscutting issue and has been incorporated into the different national priority areas in the Ministry of Education Strategic Plan for 2001-2006 (MBESC 2001).

According to the February 2002 statistics, only 18 % of school principals in the Rundu Region were females. All inspectors were male. There are many reasons for these imbalances, though the outcome is likely to be a perpetuation of the status quo, since there are so few role models for aspirant women leaders.

In Namibia most women were or still are culturally exploited and from childhood are not considered as leaders. According to Kazombaue and Elago (in Totemeyer, Kandetu and Werner 1987: 97) boys are brought up to be responsible family leaders, to take over when the father is away from home or is no longer there. These cultural restrictions make it difficult for leadership roles to be ascribed to women and may still constitute one of the contributing factors to the small number of women leaders in Namibia.

The inspectors of education play an important role in the appointment of principals. They make recommendations to the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry for these appointments. They are also responsible for identifying and commending outstanding work (MBESC: undated). Due to this important role, and the fact that they are the immediate supervisors of principals, their perceptions strongly influence the appointment of school principals in the region. I was therefore interested in hearing whether they perceived women leaders as effective leaders or not, because one of the most common reasons presented in literature for the under-representation of women in leadership is the negative perceptions of women's leadership (Tyree in Hudson and Rea 1998: 1).

Thus, the need for further research suggested by researchers on this issue, the current situation of female leadership in the region and the fact that there is no known research that has been conducted on female leadership in this region, aroused my interest in investigating inspectors' perceptions of female leadership.

This study thus set out to understand how these male inspectors made sense of female principalship. This research is likely to be of interest to those who are in or who are aspiring to leadership positions in education in Namibia. It may help to develop our understanding of the complex issue of leadership, the nature of educational leadership and especially female leadership. I also believe that all sectors in government, including education, which are undergoing reforms and restructuring to address important issues, such as gender inequality, would benefit from the outcome of this study.

1.2 Research goal

My research goal was to gain an understanding of inspectors' perceptions of female principals' leadership in the Rundu Education Region of Namibia. I found it necessary to obtain the viewpoint of inspectors because, as stated above, they are the immediate supervisors of principals and have influence on the appointment of principals. They are also in frequent professional contact with principals, and observe principals at work. My interest was in finding out whether these inspectors perceived female principals as being effective, and what qualities they thought principals needed in order to provide effective leadership. I felt a need to understand whether they had negative perceptions of women leaders, which could be a deterrent to more women securing leadership positions.

1.3 Research approach

My research was conducted in the interpretive paradigm. Interpretivists seek subjective perceptions of individuals (Cantrell 1993:84). This paradigm was thus appropriate for my research because it enabled me to enter and grasp the subjective meaning and beliefs of inspectors about female principalship, rather than imposing my view of the world on these inspectors. Since my intention was to understand and interpret inspectors'

perceptions of female principals as leaders, the interpretive paradigm was appropriate to my study.

My study involved three school inspectors, purposefully selected from the entire sample of eight. Qualitative research typically uses small, information-rich samples selected purposefully to allow the researcher to focus in depth on issues important to the study. I therefore selected these inspectors in line with these expectations. One-on-one semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. These interviews were tape recorded, with the permission of the respondents, and transcribed word for word. I selected semi-structured questions, believing that they would allow respondents freedom to talk and give their own views in their own time.

After reading and rereading my transcripts I was able to identify significant issues, which I used as themes to structure my data presentation. To protect the identity of my respondents I used pseudonyms for both the inspectors and their circuits.

1.4 Outline of the thesis

In Chapter Two I present an overview of the literature on leadership theories in general and in the field of education and female leadership in particular. I present an account of what has been done in the field of educational leadership by women.

In Chapter Three I outline the research approach and design. I give a description and defense of the methodology I used, and show how data were gathered and analysed. I also point out the ethical implications I considered and further highlight the limitations of my research methodology.

In Chapter Four I present the data in the form of sub-headings or themes that emerged from the data. Respondents' words are used to enable the reader to hear their voices.

In Chapter Five I discuss my main findings in terms of my research goals and question, and the literature I consulted. I further establish whether my research goal has been addressed and research question answered.

In Chapter Six I summarise my main findings, present the implications of this study and make recommendations for practice. I further make recommendations for possible areas of research in the area of female leadership in education. Finally I give particular attention to the limitations of my study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Female leadership has become a popular topic for research over recent decades. The field of leadership has been historically dominated by males, but this is being challenged by increasing numbers of female leaders in the workforce. Racial and gender equality has become a key objective of national policy worldwide. Namibia is no exception; the Namibian Constitution authorizes affirmative action to achieve these ends. A number of post-independence statutes have implemented affirmative action, which generally has taken two forms: provisions which ensure the presence of women on important decision-making bodies and general authorization of affirmative action in specific fields (CEDAW 1995).

In this chapter, I present an overview of literature on leadership in general, with a particular focus on literature relevant to my research question and topic: female leadership in education. The chapter highlights the key debates in the field, and thereby provides a lens, or series of lenses, through which to examine the data that emerged from my study.

2.2 What is leadership?

Leadership is one of the most researched, talked-about and written-about topics. Therefore it is not surprising, as Hoy and Miskel (1996: 373) put it, that definitions of the concept leadership are almost as numerous as the scholars engaged in its study. While many scholars regard this open-endedness as frustrating, it is possible to find the range of understandings exciting and challenging, as Van der Mescht (1996: 4) remarks, and to accept the fact that leadership cannot be defined, though it can be described.

Some of the influential definitions in the field stress the centrality of the leader as person. Leadership is defined by Lussier (1996: 208) and van der Westhuizen (1991: 187) as the

process of influencing employees to work toward the achievement of objectives. The leader inspires, guides and equips his followers. Another typical definition of leadership (Gardner cited in Hoy and Miskel 1996: 374) is:

> Leadership is the process of persuasion or example by which an individual or leadership team induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader and shared by the leader and his/her followers.

These definitions highlight the role of one person who exerts leadership over others to carry out the leadership role: this person is called the leader and the others are followers. Therefore leadership is possible when two or more people are present. It can also be spontaneous and natural; one does not necessarily have to be formally chosen as a leader but might be one because of the way one influences others. Not only supervisors perform leadership functions, but many people along the various levels in an organization can be leaders. It is not necessarily forceful; followers choose to follow the leader out of their own will. In other words, leadership is not about commanding or controlling but about the acceptability of the leader to the followers, and involves coaching and collaborating so that others can be empowered too.

However, this emphasis on the role of the leader is often countered by arguments that leadership depends not only on the position, behaviour and personal characteristics of the leader but also on the character of the situation (Hoy and Miskel 1996). These debates are developed over the course of this chapter.

First, it is necessary to distinguish leadership from management, since the literature often refers to both concepts as though they were synonymous.

2.3 How is leadership different from management?

There is a tendency to use the terms ‘management’ and ‘leadership’ interchangeably, but these terms, though related, point to essentially different practices. One can be a manager without being a true leader because one may not have the ability to influence others. There are also good leaders who are not managers. For example, an employee in a group

might be an informal leader because he/she has more influence on the other team members than their manager. This does not necessarily mean a leader is someone totally different from a manager. One can be a manager and a leader at the same time. Leadership and management exist side by side in a dialectic relationship (van der Mescht 1996: 7).

Van der Westhuizen (1991:187) states that management indicates a job, a profession and a calling, whereas leadership is a characteristic. In other words, a person can be appointed as manager to carry out management functions like planning, organizing, budgeting, controlling, and the same manager can be a leader depending on how he/she influences the followers while carrying out these functions.

Leadership is people-oriented while management is task-oriented. Thus leadership is about empowering followers and management is about getting work done. Schmuck (1986: 5) contrasts management with leadership as follows:

> Management is executed and maintained through an organizational structure; its basis of power is legitimacy. In other words we obey managers because we see their exercise of power as legitimate or we obey to avoid consequences of not following their orders or requests but we may also follow them because they show leadership. In contrast leaders emerge because of the spontaneous recognition of followers that they, the leaders, will help the followers to move in a desirable direction. This means that a leader's power is derived from the people, not necessarily from the position one holds in an organization.

Perhaps the most significant point in Schmuck's argument is that leaders' power lies with followers: leaders command only insofar as followers are willing to follow.
Management is also typically situated at the top levels of organizations, while leadership may occur at all levels in an organization because a person can be a leader of his/her colleagues at the same post level.

The distinction between leaders and managers and what and how they try to influence is one of the continuing controversies that need to be noted (Hoy and Miskel 1996:374).

The basis of the dispute appears to be that managers emphasize stability and efficiency while leaders stress adaptive change and getting people to agree about what needs to be accomplished. As Duttweiler and Hord (in Southwestern Educational Development Laboratory undated: 3) put it:

> Research shows that in addition to being accomplished administrators who develop and implement sound policies, procedures, and practices, effective administrators [managers] are also leaders who shape the school's culture by creating and articulating a vision, winning support for it, and inspiring others to attain it.

This means it is important for an administrator or supervisor like a school principal to be both a good manager and a good leader. Hence in this study I use both concepts - leaders and managers - to refer to school principals.

2.4 An overview of leadership research

Here I briefly review leadership thinking pertinent to the notion of female leadership. Earlier approaches that were used to study leadership included the notions of leadership traits, situations and the contingency approach. Transformational theory was a later development.

2.4.1 Early trait research

This was the first generation of leadership theories. It was the application of the so-called "great man theory" (Lussier 1996: 209). These early studies were based on the assumption that leaders are born, not made (Lussier *Ibid.*). Trait thinking stems from Aristotle, who believed that from the hour of birth, some are marked for subjection, others for rule (Hoy and Miskel 1996:37). Researchers analyzed traits or qualities such as appearance, aggressiveness, self-reliance, persuasiveness, dominance, and intelligence to identify traits that all successful leaders possessed (Hoy and Miskel 1996; Lussier 1996). However, no one could produce an inclusive list of traits that all successful leaders possessed, so research based on traits has largely been abandoned, because no conclusion could be reached regarding the connection between a particular trait and leadership

effectiveness (Wu 2003:1). Blumberg and Greenfield (in Smulyan 2000: 12) suggest that we need to throw away the 'great man approach', in attempting to understand effective school leaders, and examine the systems within which principals operate.

However, what is noteworthy about trait thinking is the essentially 'masculine' nature of the traits highlighted (such as aggressiveness, self-reliance, and dominance) and, even though this theory has been discredited, its seeds are still germinating in our societies' minds and in organizations. For example, in my culture, traditional leaders like headmen and chiefs are still selected on the basis of characteristics that are considered as masculine, such as aggressiveness, competitiveness and dominance. If a proposed person is soft and kind he is considered more 'feminine' and this disqualifies this person from being selected. Earlier this year, our students selected their class leaders and both first and second year students selected males as their heads and females as vice-heads. The reason given for such selection was that women could not lead others; they could only act in the absence of the leader. The obvious assumption here, as Curry (2000: 10) puts it, is that good leadership is perceived as essentially masculine: to be a good leader one must be male and born to greatness. Therefore it not surprising that there are more great men than great women leaders.

The construction of leadership as masculine has played a major role in widening the leadership gap between men and women. Blackmore (cited in Ngcobo 1996: 87) argues that the androcentric conceptualization of leadership was found to be the main cause for the under-representation of women in leadership positions in schools. This conceptualization, she further points out, influenced male principals to engage in staff development programmes which exclude women teachers from management and leadership growth (*Ibid.*).

Another problem with the trait theory is that it is not clear whether these traits would 'work' in all settings, for example in the hospital theatre, the army or in the staff room. The notion of 'situation' (context) thus began to receive attention.

2.4.2 Situations and leadership

After finding that there was no trait or a combination of traits which fully explained leadership, researchers turned to the contexts or settings in which leadership was exercised. They sought to identify distinctive characteristics of the setting, to which the leaders' success could be attributed. According to this theory, the situation is the chief determining factor concerning who emerges as a leader, what the nature of leadership action will be and how the group will act (van der Westhuizen 1991: 189). In terms of this theory, a school principal may be an effective leader of a school but may not be successful in leading the army.

Situational determinants of leadership like the size, hierarchical structure of the organization, position power, subordinate characteristics like education, age, knowledge and experience and the climate, openness of the environment were postulated to influence behaviour and hence leadership (Hoy and Miskel 1996: 380).

Doyle and Smith (1999: 6) state that, in the situations approach, particular contexts would demand particular forms of leadership. In other words, people were expected to change their style to suit the situation, otherwise their style may have become irrelevant to a particular situation. According to this research focus, the same person could be a follower or a leader, depending upon circumstances (Southwestern Educational Development Laboratory undated: 1). For example, if a quick response is needed, one can become more directive or autocratic than participative. This approach boils down to the fact that there is not one best style of leadership for all situations. Thus van der Westhuizen (1991: 189) states that success in leadership depends upon the leadership actions being appropriate and suitable to the situation.

However, Bass (in Hoy and Miskel 1996: 382) maintains that this approach overemphasized the situational nature of leadership, while underemphasizing its personal nature. This theory also did not contribute much to the understanding of female leadership, because, as mentioned earlier, leadership was historically viewed as a male

prerogative. Its emphasis on situational characteristics drew attention away from the personal traits of leaders, and it is in the interrogation of these that female leadership is to be understood.

2.4.3 The contingency approach

Fiedler constructed the first major theory to propose specific contingency relationships in the study of leadership (Hoy and Miskel 1996: 387). The central idea in this approach was that effective leadership was dependent on a mix of factors. The model proposed that a combination of situational and individual characteristics partly explains the leadership phenomenon. Group performance was seen as a result of two factors, namely leadership style and situational favourableness (Antoine 1988:1; Southwestern Educational Development Laboratory undated). Situational favourableness included things like the structure of the task; if the task was clearly spelled out with regard to goals, methods and standards of performance then it was more likely that leaders would be able to exert influence (Doyle and Smith 1999: 6). In other words, a leader would have more influence if his or her followers had a clear idea of what they wanted to achieve, how to achieve it and why.

Fiedler (Hoy and Miskel 1996: 387) developed a scale called the 'least preferred co-worker' (LPC) scale. This scale asked the respondents to choose a person with whom they worked least well and describe that person on a semantic scale ranging from positive to negative attributes. Fiedler believed that what you said about others revealed more about you than about the person you were describing (Robbins and Decenzo 2001: 351). Therefore, if the respondent described the least preferred worker in positive terms, the respondent's leadership style was seen as relationship-oriented, but if the least preferred worker was described in negative terms, the respondent was seen as task-oriented. Fiedler saw an individual's leadership style as fixed; he believed that one's leadership style could not be changed but the situation should change if the style did not fit with the situation.

Even though Fiedler's theory made a major contribution to our understanding of leadership, it was not without its problems. It ignored other situational variables, like training and experience, that have an impact on a leader's effectiveness (Antoine 1988: 4). Antoine (1998: 4) states that there is doubt whether the LPC is a true measure of leadership style. The theory has also been criticized for its blindness to gender. Shakeshaft (in Bush and West-Burnham 1994: 188) criticized Fiedler's theory of leadership effectiveness on the grounds that his definition of leadership was based on the male-dominated corporate world of big business and that, whilst the theory was concerned with the interplay of situational variables and the relationship of the leader and led, no account was taken of the situational variable of gender.

2.4.4 Transformational leadership

Burns is credited as being the first to identify what has come to be the dominant leadership paradigm of the past few decades, namely transformational leadership (Bush and Coleman 2000:23). Burns (1987) argued that transformational leaders are individuals who appeal to higher ideals and moral values, such as justice and equality, and that transformational leadership can be found at various levels of an organization (Southwestern Educational Development Laboratory: 4).

Called by various names - transformational, charismatic, visionary, inspirational – this new genre of theory is evoking high levels of interest among scholars (Hoy and Miskel 1996: 393). This type of leadership is always contrasted with more traditional forms of leadership, which Burns describes as transactional, since leaders traditionally motivate followers by exchanging rewards for services rendered (Hoy and Miskel 1996: 393).

According to Bass and Avolio (in Bush and Coleman 2000: 23) transformational leadership is seen when leaders:

> Stimulate interest among colleagues and followers to view their work from new perspectives, generate awareness of their mission or vision of the team and

> organization, develop colleagues and followers to higher levels of ability and potential, and motivate colleagues and followers to look beyond their own interests toward those that will benefit the group.

In this way, transformational leadership adds a dimension of *values* to the notion of leadership, since leaders are seen to transcend personal interest for the greater good. Burke and Collins (2001: 245) see transformational leaders as leaders who develop positive relationships with subordinates in order to strengthen employee and organizational performance. These leaders encourage subordinates to focus on the interests of the whole group. In other words, transformational leaders increase productivity by increasing followers' level of commitment, instead of rewarding them materially to increase performance.

The data on transformational leaders and the emerging information on female leaders suggest that the characteristics of female leadership mirror those of transformational leaders. Rosener (in Vinnicombe and Singh 2002: 121) describes women's management style as transformational, since they are based on personal respect, mutual trust, regard for the contribution which each member can bring, and the development of individual and diverse talents, in contrast to the traditional transactional style preferred by men, which relies on power position and formal authority.

Similar findings have also been reported by other researchers such as Alimo-Metcalfe (1995), Mwingi (1999), Burke and Collins (2001) and Udjombala (2002). The 'nurturing' qualities identified in women leaders are being recognized as a strength in management, since they lead to the empowering of others through transformational leadership (Coleman, cited in Bush and West – Burnham 1994: 190).

Even though transformational leadership is on many accounts accepted as an effective way of leading, and its characteristics match most of those of the female leadership style, women are still less visible in leadership positions. This might be attributed to the fact that management and leadership have been historically defined and dominated by males. Firstly, it was primarily men who developed management theories; secondly, men have

traditionally held more leadership positions and thirdly, men were the chief incumbents of leadership positions (Enomoto 2000: 376). Therefore, research on organizations has largely examined the male experience and this could have resulted in researchers basing effective leadership qualities on those qualities found in male leaders. Leadership is thus essentially a gendered construct. Transformational leadership may be argued to be more feminine than other styles of leadership, because it might have been influenced by the approach women brought to organizations when they started gaining entry.

Although transformational leadership appears to be the model of choice for effective leadership, some researchers are still uncertain whether there is a sufficiently solid body of evidence to support its effectiveness (Doyle and Smith 1999). Wright (cited in Doyle and Smith 1999: 9) concluded that it is impossible to say how effective transformational leadership is with any degree of certainty. Therefore, the effectiveness of transformational leadership remains an open question. Similarly, Conoley (in Ngcobo 1996: 18) warned that no one style of leadership succeeds in resolving all types of conflict.

Many studies have reported gender differences in leadership styles. In the next section, I explore the ways men and women lead.

2.5 Men and women lead differently

In recent years, feminist researchers have begun to expose the differences between the way men and women lead. Rosener (1990) and Shakeshaft (1998), in their research carried out in the United States of America, point out that women's style of leadership is democratic, participatory and more inclined to encourage inclusiveness and motivation than the male counterpart, which emphasizes individualism, duty and rules (Oulu University library online 2002: 1).

Shakeshaft further points out that the characteristics of female leadership fit well with notions of how to run successful schools. Similarly, Ngcobo (1996), researching teachers' perceptions of female leaders, reports that teachers accepted female leaders as principals

because they had good relations with staff, were efficient organizers, were self-disciplined, had the ability to bring about positive change and were democratic leaders. These results are consistent with the studies carried out by Mwingi (1999), Chisholm (2001) and Udjombala (2002).

Rosener (1990) attributes women's success to certain characteristics which are generally considered to be 'feminine', developed from their shared experience as women. Although there has been a substantial body of opinion which holds that the leadership of modern organizations needs to be non-coercive, based on teamwork and adept at building relationships and that this is the very style of leadership naturally employed by women, a number of studies have noted generally-held negative perceptions of women as leaders, which could account for the lack of women in senior positions (Pounder and Coleman 2002: 122).

There is also a line of argument that, because of the socialization process, women have developed values and characteristics that result in leadership behaviours that are different from the traditional competitive, controlling, aggressive leadership behaviours of men (Pounder and Coleman 2002:124). Eagly (in Pounder and Coleman 2002: 125) argues that expectation is a central aspect of the socialization process. Thus people behave according to societal expectations about their gender roles and the expectation that women will be more caring and relationship-oriented than men largely accounts for different approaches to leadership based on gender. This goes together with the idea that cultural factors influence the way people carry out and respond to different leadership styles (Doyle and Smith 1999: 8). This shows that there are different cultural expectations about how people should behave in different societies and this may influence leadership behaviours as well.

Based on the above, I therefore feel that there is a need to disconnect gender from biological sex in order to 'allow' female leaders to exhibit so-called male gender qualities and vice versa. People tend to characterize themselves in ways the culture regards as appropriate and positive (Epstein 1991: 150). This implies that men can also be nurturing,

warm and caring if they are not made to feel embarrassed about showing these qualities. Women should also be prized for qualities commonly seen in men if expressed appropriately. Sherman (2000: 138) also reports that words like *mothering, comforting, compassionate* and *empathetic* were used by her respondents to describe community closeness, and *nurturing* was a recurrent theme. Therefore these words should not only be expected in women, but also in men who want to build close and caring relationships in their organizations.

The notion of going beyond the gender barrier has the potential of identifying the characteristics of a holistic conception of leadership as simply a 'human' phenomenon. This is the theme of the next section.

2.6 Gender not the determinant of leadership styles

An ongoing debate has appeared in the leadership and management literature over the past two decades as to whether female and male managers use different leadership styles (Burke and Collins 2001: 244).

Epstein (1991: 149) argues that women who see their leadership style as transformational do so because of their work environment; medium-sized, non-traditional organizations tend to permit and encourage more collegial and participatory management worker relations than is the case in larger organisations. Epstein further argues that most companies practising transformational management employ more men than women managers; the style cannot be attributed to women.

Some research suggests that neither gender nor a monopoly on a given leadership style can claim superiority in management effectiveness (Sonnenfield in Ways men and women lead 1991: 156). Meanwhile, past research has demonstrated that managers who emphasize transformational behaviour are seen as the most effective and satisfying managers by their subordinates (Bass and Avolio in Burke and Collins 2001: 246). This shows that the idea that gender determines leadership style is not universally held.

Powell (in Pounder and Coleman 2002: 126) analyzed a number of research studies and found that both female and male leaders in their studies exhibited similar amounts of task oriented and people oriented leadership behaviour. Similarly Kolb (in Pounder and Coleman 2002: 126) asserts that two decades of research indicate few, if any, differences in the leadership behaviours of male and females According to Korabik (cited in Vinnicombe and Singh 2002: 122), the realization that men and women can be equally proficient in task-oriented roles should result in more leadership positions being opened up to women.

The abovementioned studies reject the thesis of gender determining leadership style. This implies that there are other non-gender based factors that can account for actual leadership styles. For example, Korac-Kakabadse (in Pounder and Coleman 2002: 127) argue that leadership behaviour is largely determined by organisational demographics such as tenure in the organisation and in the job and experience of senior management responsibilities. Fagenson's studies also reveal that men and women in senior management positions, and those who were well educated, saw themselves as more masculine, while those in lower-level positions and the less educated reported themselves as more feminine (Vinnicombe and Singh 2002: 123). Therefore, Fagenson suggests that the masculinity profile label might be better termed 'upper level attributes'. But it may be argued that, since female leaders are rare in leadership positions, they may emulate leadership behaviour using males as their role models. This identifies a need for female role models, so that more feminine ways of leading and managing may become more acceptable.

Differences in leadership styles of men and women may also be attributed to other influences that coincide with the sex of the leader. For example, Kanter (in Pounder and Coleman 2002: 127) coined the term 'tokenism' to describe the situation that many female managers find themselves in, in a male dominated environment where they typically feel isolated. This situation could provide a set of performance pressures unique to female managers.

In view of the above, it cannot be concluded that women are better leaders than men or vice versa. It all depends on many factors influencing the leader behaviour, for example, stereotyping and organizational demographics, as mentioned earlier. Therefore, those qualities which women are made to feel comfortable with should be prized also in male leaders who express them and vice versa. There should be only one category: "people", not two labelled "men and women" (Epstein in Ways men and women lead 1991: 149). A gendered construction of management becomes particularly problematic when, according to Smith (in Enomoto 2000: 377), "the perspectives, concerns, interests of only one sex and one class are represented as general and a one-sided standpoint comes to be seen as natural and obvious". Any departure from those perspectives, concerns, and interests is viewed as deviant.

In the next section I explore gender stereotyping in leadership.

2.7 Gender stereotyping

Numerous reasons have been suggested in literature to explain the scarcity of women in leadership positions; these include cultural, social, legal, educational and organizational factors (Alimo-Metcalfe 1995: 3). These factors also reinforce sex or gender stereotyping, which leads to different perceptions of female and male leadership.

The category of stereotyping and sex bias encompasses issues of inferences made from physical appearance and prejudices relating to gender. Stereotypes are overly narrow ideas that are indiscriminately applied to all members of a group without allowing any variation (Gershaw 2002: 1). I feel there is a need to separate the terms "sex" and "gender", which are often used interchangeably. "Sex" is used to describe the biological division of individuals into male and female groups. "Gender" is used to describe the cultural, social and psychological traits of individuals as masculine or feminine, based on typicality for each sex, but which may be ascribed to traits of either biological sex (Claes in Vinnicombe and Singh 2002: 122). Sex differences are natural and cannot be changed, but gender differences are constructed and can therefore be learned, unlearned or even deconstructed.

The society we grow up in holds certain beliefs, norms, values and attitudes that are transmitted to the young. These influence the way we think about, perceive and behave towards the opposite sex (Kasanda 2003: 3). Our perceptions and actions may display biases and misconceptions that we may not be aware of, because we take them for granted. This may be a result of our socialization; as Gershaw (2002:2) argues; early gender-role typing is a natural process. This means from childhood we start searching for guidelines regarding appropriate behaviours for girls or boys. These, of course, differ from one culture to another, as we are not socialized the same way.

In my culture, people tend to stereotype men as being competent, skilful, aggressive and able to get things done. Women are stereotyped as warm and expressive, quiet, gentle and lacking in confidence and competence. Such stereotypes may have arisen from sex-role socialization during childhood. As was argued earlier, the traditional leadership theories viewed leadership as male. Similarly, Curry (2000: 10) points out that the obvious assumption is that good leadership is an essentially masculine thing.

Epstein (in Ways men and women lead 1991: 150) indicates that research shows that men and women tend to stereotype their own behaviour according to cultural views of gender-appropriate behaviour as much as they stereotype the behaviour of other groups. Thus it is not surprising to find that men are viewed as more transactional and women as transformational, since men will always describe themselves as competitive, aggressive and women as caring, nurturing and democratic. For example, in my culture, a woman who likes to command and control, or a man who does household chores like washing or cooking, is viewed as inappropriate and such behaviour is regarded as non-traditional. So the way we are socialized contributes to the way our behaviour is moulded. In the same vein, Eagly and Johnson (in Ways men and women lead 1991: 153) stated that women's greater social skills and society's expectations from women account for differences in style.

The power of stereotyping is evident everywhere, particularly in the media. In July 2003, as I was watching an episode of *Big Brother Africa* on DSTV, I saw on the screen an SMS that read 'Cherise stop saying idiot in the house because it is not ladylike in our culture'. This sentiment can be seen to reinforce gender biases that, as a woman, one cannot react aggressively to a situation, but only calmly, thus blindly reinforcing stereotyping. It is true however that political action seeks to challenge societal stereotyping through policies on men and women's equality, such as affirmative action. Such policies have the potential to bring about positive changes in compensating for discrimination against previously marginalized groups. This potential is seen, for example, in hiring practices where more women have been appointed in positions of influence.

The societal roles ascribed to women transfer to the workplace (Gaynor 1997: 38). Shakeshaft (in Bush and West-Burnham 1994: 187) states that men and women divide labour on the basis of sex, and male tasks are more valued than female tasks. This theory of male domination is applied to all areas of life, including the world of education. For example, course selection and career choice are also stereotyped in terms of gender. Subjects like Mathematics and Science are mostly encouraged in boys, whereas girls are encouraged to take what are normally referred to as 'soft options' like Home Economics. This gender stereotyping was also evident at the University of Namibia, where more women than men were enrolled for social work and nursing degrees, whereas more men were enrolled for commerce and science degrees (CEDAW 1995: 85).

In some Namibian cultures, male domination is reinforced by religious beliefs, cultural practices and remaining inequities. Namibian women are commonly thought of as 'mothers'. This strong stereotype makes it difficult for women to choose other paths, and can be best countered by the increased presence of women in political and public life to serve as alternative role models for young women (CEDAW 1995: 5). Certain cultures place restrictions on women travelling or living away from the family home (Gaynor 1997: 26). This can hamper the appointment of females in leadership positions that require them to travel or stay far from their families.

The film industry today is more sensitive to issues of culture and gender than it once was, but many movies still perpetuate common misconceptions about groups of people (Media awareness network 2003). Media may reinforce negative stereotypes in many ways, for example the way both women and men are portrayed in different programmes and the subordinate or otherwise roles they are given. In some books, overuse of one-sex nouns and pronouns like *he, his, she* and *hers* have been observed and this further promotes gender stereotyping. Biblical teachings are often cited in gender debates to justify female subordination, especially in Christian societies.

The fact that female teachers at the same hierarchical level as their male colleagues are assigned and accept pastoral, rather than managerial, extracurricular activities perpetuates the stereotype of women as nurturers and men as managers (Gaynor 1997: 38). Since these sexes are treated differently in terms of organizational socialization, job status and duties in the workplace, they tend to behave differently at work (Pounder and Coleman 2002: 127). Perceptions concerning styles of successful managers, held by men and women, tend to be stereotyped. For females, if the perceived criteria are based on male stereotypes, this may lead them to withdraw from the competition, even if they have genuine managerial leadership talent and qualifications (Vinnicombe and Singh 2002: 121).

Scrutinizing these established meanings is the key to the transformative process. Minnich (in Enomoto 2000: 378) posits that transforming knowledge about women involves changing our thinking, critiquing our actions and reforming our institutions. In other words, we have to recast what has been taken for granted or standardized as a good way of leading. This means that we have to change our organizational culture.

Schein (1992: 12) defines culture as:

> A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well

> enough to be considered valid, and therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.

Culture is learnt during the socialization process and is created when the assumptions, especially the deeper ones, become shared. These shared assumptions start to influence the way members perceive and think about things. Therefore cultural understanding is desirable for all of us, but it is essential to leaders (Schein 1992: 15).

One of the functions of leadership is the creation, the management and sometimes even the destruction of culture; organizational cultures are thus created in part by leaders (Schein 1992: 5). Nias (in Middlewood and Lumby 1998: 43) states that heads are 'founders' of their school's culture. A school can be seen as a culture dominated by masculine language, values, patterns of interacting, definitions of knowledge and standards of appropriate behaviour (Smulyan 2000: 26). Blackmore (in Smulyan 2000: 26) states that these cultural beliefs, behaviours and values contribute to the production and reproduction of gendered relations and actions at the institutional level. I believe such male-dominated institutional culture can influence females' experience and behaviour. Females working in such institutions may tend to act like men, a phenomenon Shakeshaft referred to as constituting "men in skirts" leadership styles (Sherman 2000: 133), or they may stick to the accepted traditional roles, depending on the signals they get from such institutions.

Taking this into consideration, I therefore feel that leaders can play a major role in subverting the culture that stereotypes leadership and creating one that is neutral with regard to gender.

2.9 Female leadership in Namibia

In Namibia, as is the case in many countries, women far outnumber men in professions like teaching and nursing, but they are the minority decision-makers.

However, since independence, the Namibian government and Namibian NGOs have embarked on several initiatives with the goal of incorporating gender sensitivity in the Namibian social, economic and political development goals, culminating in the adoption of the National Gender Policy in December of 1997 (University of Namibia 2000). However, information about female leadership in Namibia is still fairly scarce. This can be attributed to a lack of gender research in Namibia before independence, due to political barriers.

Although after independence the political barriers to research in Namibia were removed, there is still little information on women and leadership in education, especially in top structures. Speaking at the Namibia Economic Society breakfast meeting in Windhoek, the Minister of Women Affairs and Child Welfare, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, said the current situation showed that there were more female Government workers than males, but at the management level, female representation was a drop in the ocean (New Era Newspaper, Thursday 9 September 2004: 3). She further stated that Namibia today ranks 23rd in the world with regard to female representation in Parliament. According to the Minister, this was a considerable improvement, considering that the country attained independence only 14 years ago.

Currently, there are only seven women out of 102 Regional Councillors and only two out of 26 National Council members and five out of 27 Cabinet members are women. At the local authority level, there is a marked improvement, as there are 135 female councillors, compared to 169 males (New Era, Thursday 9 September 2004: 3). One can say the future is promising for women, as there seems to be more gender awareness among the community and government.

The fact that I could not find research reports on female leadership in education in Namibia after visiting the University of Namibia Research Centre and the Ministry of Basic Education Library serves to outline the existing gaps in research and publication in this important area of research.

2.10 Conclusion

In this chapter I began by defining leadership as it is understood by some researchers and also how leadership is related to management, since these two concepts overlap. Secondly, a brief review of leadership thinking pertinent to the discussion of female leadership was given. These included earlier approaches like Trait theory, Situation theory and Contingency theory and the more recent Transformational approach. Thirdly, men and women's ways of leading were explored through the examination of a number of studies. These studies argued that women lead differently from men, due to various reasons, such as the way women are socialized.

Fourthly, I explored why gender should not be the determinant of leadership styles, as many studies have found that both men and women in their exhibited similar amounts of task-oriented and people-oriented leadership behaviour. Finally, I looked at the factors that reinforce gender stereotypes that lead to different perceptions of male and female leadership, for example male cultural domination.

Since my research goal is to understand the inspectors' perceptions of female principals, in other words to understand the multiple constructions of meaning and knowledge inspectors make of female leadership, I felt working in the qualitative or interpretive paradigm will provide me with in-depth data of inspectors' views. Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Mertens 1998: 159).

In the next chapter I explore the methodology more comprehensively.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate inspectors' perceptions of female principalship. This chapter presents and defends the research approach used. I also explain my research method, sampling procedure, data gathering technique, data analysis procedure, ethical implications and the limitations of my research.

3.2 Research paradigm

Neuman defines a paradigm as:

> A whole system of thinking which includes basic assumptions, the important questions to be answered or puzzles to be solved, the research techniques to be used … (2000: 65)

This definition shows that a paradigm tells the researcher how to go about conducting research, based on the assumptions and questions to be answered. Three distinctly different paradigms that guide research are Positivism, Interpretivism and Critical Science (Cantrell 1993).

Positivists believe that reality exists apart from the researcher and is knowable, while interpretivists hold that reality is constructed (Cantrell 1993:84). Positivists, in other words, try to exclude people's subjective meanings, while interpretivists actively seek subjective perceptions of individuals (Cantrell 1993: 84). Gephart (1999: 4) stated that interpretive theory involves building a second-order theory or theory of members' theories, in contrast to Positivism, which is concerned with objective reality and meanings thought to be independent of people. Positivistic concerns to uncover truths and facts using experimental or survey methods have been challenged by interpretivists, who assert that these methods impose a view of the world on subjects, rather than capturing,

describing and understanding these world views (Gephart 1999: 1). One may say that Positivists take external reality (what they observe) to be more important than subjective reality (individual experiences and beliefs).

Critical science is interested in emancipating people through critique of ideologies that promote inequity and through change in personal understanding and action that lead to transformation of self-consciousness and social conditions (Cantrell 1993:83). This means that Critical Science wants to address imbalances, injustices and other forms of domination in society and to change or transform society into a more democratic society.

Since my interest was in understanding and interpreting inspectors' perceptions of female principals as leaders the interpretive paradigm seemed appropriate. My intention was to grasp the inspectors' subjective meanings and beliefs about female principals' leadership. Cohen and Manion point out that to retain integrity of the phenomena being investigated, efforts are made to get inside the person and to understand from within (1994: 36). In the sections that follow, I explain how I attempted to accomplish this.

In the next section I describe the research design of the study.

3.3 Research method – the case study

Unlike the experimenter who manipulates variables to determine their causal significance, or the surveyor who asks standardized questions of large, representative samples of individuals, the case study researcher typically observes the characteristics of an individual unit – a child, a clique, a class, a school or a community (Cohen and Manion 1994: 106). Since my investigation was driven by a 'how' question, the case study method suited my study: Yin (cited in Mwingi 1999: 45) argues that where the research requires an answer to a "how" and a "why" question and is focused on a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context, the case study becomes a suitable research strategy. Qualitative research typically uses a case study design, meaning that data analysis focuses on the one phenomenon, which the researcher selects to understand in depth, regardless of the number of sites, participants or documents for a study

(McMillan and Schumacher 1993: 375). It is in this sense that I refer to my study as a case study, focusing only on the inspectors' perceptions of female principals as one phenomenon I need to understand in depth. Soy (1996: 7) gives the following advantages of a case study method:

> Its applicability to real-life contemporary, human situations and its public accessibility through written reports.
> Case study results relate directly to the common reader's everyday experiences and facilitate an understanding of complex real-life situations

Although results of case study cannot be generalized, they lead the reader to apply the experience to his or her own real life situation or even determine whether similar findings are identifiable in his or her situation.

3.4 Research Participants

3.4.1 Sample size

My study involved three school inspectors; all three were male since there were no female inspectors in the region, which is one of the reasons that prompted my research. For interpretive research the sample size was appropriate, as Cantrell (1993: 90) points out that sample size for qualitative research is based upon the purpose of the study, not on specific rules. The researcher looks at what s/he wants to know, what will be useful and what will be credible and what can be done within the constraints of time and resources (*Ibid.:* 1993: 91). Similarly, Patton (in Anderson 1998:123) points out that there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry.

Three inspectors were purposefully selected from a total of 8 inspectors in the whole region. They were selected on the basis of their experience and the number of female principals available in their circuits, as explained below in 3.4.2. Since this is a small-scale study I believed three respondents would provide sufficient data to come to useful answers to my research questions.

3.4.2 Sampling

"Sampling" refers to the method used to select a given number of people or things from a population (Mertens 1998: 253). I purposefully selected three of the eight inspectors after consulting the education head office to get the names of three experienced inspectors who had more than one female principal in their circuits. It was important that the respondents had direct experience of the phenomenon of female leadership. Qualitative research typically uses small, information-rich samples selected purposefully to allow the researchers to focus in depth on issues important to the study (Cantrell 1993: 90; Mertens 1998: 261.) My sampling method was therefore in line with these expectations.

In the next section I discuss the data-gathering tool I used.

3.5 Data gathering technique – the interview

This research was conducted by means of interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three school inspectors, each lasting between 60 to 75 minutes. Prior to this, one interview was initially conducted with one education officer as a pilot study. This was done in order to help me identify problems in the design of questions, sequencing of questions or procedure for recording responses (Burns and Grove 1997). According to Bell (1993:94) semi-structured interviews allow the respondents a considerable degree of latitude. Although certain questions are asked, the respondents are given freedom to talk about the topic and give their views in their own time, unlike structured interviews where the respondent is limited to a range of responses previously developed by the researcher. Therefore the semi-structured interview serves as an effective technique in allowing the respondents to talk freely about their experiences and feelings without the researcher losing track.

As Gephart (1999: 4) puts it, interpretive researchers often prefer meaning to measurement-oriented methods in collecting data. Likewise my interest was not in testing or measuring a hypothesis or theory, but in understanding the respondents' beliefs, feelings and experience of female principals' way of leading.

The primary instrument for qualitative methods is the inquirer herself (Cantrell 1993:91). Therefore I conducted one-on-one interviews. The purpose of the interview, as stated by Cantrell, is to allow the researcher to gather descriptive data in the subjects' own words and to access the unobservable, "to walk in the head" (1993: 96). Therefore the interview technique was chosen to allow me to gain access to the inspectors' experiences, beliefs and feelings. The interviews were tape-recorded, with the permission of all interviewees, to ensure completeness of the interviews and to get information for reliability checks. However, the use of a tape-recorder does not eliminate the need for taking notes to help reformulate questions and probes and to record nonverbal communication (McMillan and Schumacher 1993: 432). Therefore notes were also taken and the interviews were later transcribed verbatim. Transcriptions were given to the respondents to check and verify the data.

All three interviews were conducted in the respondents' homes. This was what the respondents preferred, since it avoided disruption of their work.

3.6 Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis is primarily an inductive process of organizing the data into categories and identifying patterns (relationships) among the categories (McMillan and Schumacher 1993: 479). McMillan and Schumacher (1993: 479) further point out that most of these categories and patterns emerge from the data, rather than being imposed on the data prior to data collection. In order to identify patterns and organize my data into categories, I first read and reread my notes and transcriptions before listening to the tapes again, until I became immersed in the data. This helps one become familiar with the data by "dwelling with the data" (Burns and Grove 1997:173). This process of checking the transcripts against the audio-taped interviews helped me to get a sense of the interviews as a whole.

Since there are no absolute rules for qualitative data analysis, I analyzed my data by reading the transcripts as a whole, rather than question by question. Guided by my

research question (inspectors' perceptions of female principals' leadership) and the literature (Chapter Two), I was able to identify issues that were significant. These issues, drawn from all three transcripts, were then used as themes to structure the data presentation (Chapter Four). Direct quotations of respondents' views were used to enhance the credibility and authenticity of findings. Quotations from data also help to retain the "voice" of the respondents. The themes then identified provided the basis for the discussion of findings.

During analysis, I thought of the interaction between myself (what I knew) and the data occurring during analysis, in order to bracket my own experience of the researched topic. This, I thought, would avoid misinterpreting the interviewees' experiences. "Bracketing" is suspending or laying aside what is known about the experience being studied (Burns and Grove 1997: 532).

3.7 Ethical implications

3.7.1 Negotiating access

Bell (1993: 53) points out that no researcher can demand access to an institution, an organization or to materials. Thus, special permission to conduct this research was granted to me in writing by the director of the Rundu education region (Appendix A) after submitting to him an introductory letter from my supervisor accompanied by my own request. A letter explaining the purpose of the research was sent to each inspector to ensure that they knew what was expected of them, and what would happen to the information they gave. This information was necessary before they could decide whether to participate or not. All three inspectors gave their verbal informed consent to participate in the research. Informed consent implies that the subjects have a choice about whether or not to participate (McMillan and Schumacher 1993: 183; Cohen and Manion 1994: 350).

3.7.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

According to Neuman (2000) a researcher has a moral obligation to uphold confidentiality of data, which includes keeping information confidential from others in the field and disguising members' names in field notes. It is in this light that all respondents were assured the data collected would be kept confidential and would not be shared with anyone, apart from my research supervisor, without their authorization. Pseudonyms were also used to protect the anonymity of the respondents in all transcripts and reports.

3.7.3 Researcher interactions

Although I already knew the respondents personally, I was not much involved with them either socially or professionally, since I work for a different Ministry (Ministry of Health). This helped me to retain focus and prevented me from making assumptions. Burns and Grove (1997: 398) warn that if the researcher is collecting data while surrounded by familiar professionals with whom he or she interacts socially and professionally, it is sometimes difficult to completely focus on the study situation, which may lead to loss of data. I adopted what Cotterill (in Mertens 1998:138) refers to as a "friendly stranger" role with the participants. Cotterill adopted this role with respondents who were unfamiliar with her prior to her study and she found that they felt safe revealing things to her that they would not share with close friends or family, because she was a stranger (Mertens 1998).

3.7.4 Inconveniences to the participants

Inconveniences to the participants were also taken into consideration. For example, the issue of when and where the interviews were to be conducted was left in the hands of the participants, so as not to interfere with their work. As stated above, they all chose to be interviewed in their homes in their own time. I also tried to stick to the agreed duration of

interviewing, which was one to one-and-a-half hours. Johnson (in Bell 1993: 97) warns that:

> If an interview takes two or three times as long as the interviewer said it would, the respondent, whose other work or social activities have been accordingly delayed, will be irritated in retrospect, however enjoyable the experience may have been at the time. This sort of practice breaks one of the ethics of professional social research.

3.8 Limitations of my research

As the primary data collection instrument and as a female researching male inspectors, my thinking and experience might have biased my data-gathering and analysis. It is difficult to see how this bias can be avoided completely, but awareness of the problem plus constant self-control can help (Gravron, cited in Bell 1993: 95). For example, I tried to avoid asking leading questions, as these might suggest the responses desired by me as a researcher and not the respondents'. Selltiz (in Bell 1993: 95) also points out that "interviewers are human beings and not machines", and their manner might have an effect on the respondents. Additionally, Bell (1993:95) sees interviewing as a highly subjective technique that always has the danger of bias.

The sample that I used in my research was not a representative sample. Instead, I used a purposefully selected sample that could give in-depth information, which is the intention of interpretive study.

I was also aware that topics related to gender have been known to be sensitive, therefore it might be possible that the respondents might not have been willing to divulge some of their information to the researcher. The use of a tape-recorder might have also affected the way the respondents answered. Therefore the reason for tape-recording was explained to the respondents to avoid suspicion and their permission was sought prior to tape-recording.

Guba and Lincoln (in Mertens 1998: 297) identify credibility as the interpretivists'/ constructivists' parallel to validity. They further equate transferability with external validity. Credibility depends less on sample size than on the richness of the information gathered and on the analytical abilities of the researcher (Patton, in Hoepfl 1997: no page numbering). Credibility refers to the extent to which the results approximate reality and are judged to be trustworthy and reasonable (McMillan and Schumacher 1993: 157), whereas external validity refers to the ability to generalize findings across different settings (Hoepfl 1997; Mertens 1998: 183).

In interpretive research the burden of transferability is on the reader to determine the degree of similarity between the study site and the receiving context (Mertens 1998: 183). Stake (in Heopfl 1997) calls this process of transferability "naturalistic generalization". Patton (in Hoepfl 1997) also maintains that pragmatic validation of qualitative research means that the perspective presented is judged by its relevance to and use by those to whom it is presented. This means that the validation of findings is left in the hands of the reader or those who use the findings to judge or decide whether the findings can fit into another context. These readers are advised to play a different role than those reviewing quantitative research, since the criteria for assessing validity in qualitative research differ. Thus Cantrell (1993: 100) advises the consumers of research to wear appropriate goggles, interpretive goggles for interpretive studies, and positivist ones for positivist studies. Cantrell further states that wearing positivist goggles to assess the rigour of an interpretive study leads to inappropriate questions concerning, for example, sample size, generalisability and objectivity.

Therefore to strengthen the credibility of my research, I used the strategy of member checking. Mertens (1998: 182) stated that this is the most important criterion in establishing credibility. After transcribing the interviews, I gave the transcripts to the respondents to see if the notes reflected what they had told me. Also at the end of each interview, I gave a summary to the respondent to see if my data were accurate. As stated

above, I also took account of my own bias that may have distorted my findings to help enhance the credibility of my research.

The interviews produced rich data, which I present in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF DATA

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I give a brief background of the Rundu Education Region and professional profiles of the three inspectors. I then present the data collected from these inspectors. All inspectors and their circuits are referred to using pseudonyms and devices, in this case ‘inspector A’, ‘B’ and ‘C’.

A hallmark of most qualitative research is the narrative presentation of data (McMillan and Schumacher 1993:506). Data are usually presented as quotations from the participants’ own words, citing field notes and interview transcripts as sources (*Ibid* 1993:506). I therefore present data using the actual statements of respondents to show how they construct their world and the meanings they give to female principalship.

Words are powerful conveyors of meaning, perhaps more powerful than statistics (Collins cited in Neuman 2000:419) Using the actual statements or direct quotations from the data makes my research more meaningful and significant to the reader, since it reveals insights into the actual social setting to which the reader may relate his/her experience.

My task is thus to arrange the respondents’ views regarding female principalship in a logical manner, making their meaning unmistakable to the reader (McMillan and Schumacher 1993: 506).

Before presenting the data, I feel there is a need for me to comment on the questions that were used in my interview and why such questions were used. Initially, my questions were not directed at differences between female and male leadership behaviour, because I was interested in hearing the respondents’ own perceptions of female principalship; I wanted them to tell their stories, instead of telling me what is traditionally considered as

"masculine" or "feminine". In other words, I wanted to move from the generalized to the particular. Telling their own stories of what an effective principal is or does, without reference to gender, gave me a better understanding of how they perceive the phenomenon of leadership, whether they are inclined to one sex role or not.

I further asked them to tell me stories about both male and female principals who were doing well in their schools and what they thought they were doing that made them successful. I also asked about the qualities they thought a good leader should have. My purpose in this question was to find out whether they preferred qualities that are normally associated with femininity or masculinity or a mixture of both: in other words to find out whether they regarded leadership as a "male" thing or a human thing. I also wanted to know their views of female principalship and why they thought there were so few female principals and not a single female inspector in their region.

In brief, I wanted to minimize, or work against, recalling stereotyped attitudes in order to get to the inspectors' real experiences. Cook (cited in Ngcobo 1996: 3) states that perceptions are seldom accurate or stable and may be brought about by superficial characteristics or stereotypes, such as sex roles, age, race, occupation and appearance and that stereotyping often leads people to regard positively those that are similar to them and negatively those that are not. I thus tried – for as long as possible – to avoid questions that could lead my respondents to present superficial prejudices. An interview schedule is appended (Appendix A).

4.2 Context and participants' professional profiles

Presenting the context is essential for readers to understand the study and for extending the understanding acquired to future research or practices (McMillan and Schumacher 1993:506). All proper names are disguised and pseudonyms are used for confidentiality. Descriptions of the respondents' contexts are given to enable the reader to have a sense of who they are professionally.

The study was conducted in the Rundu Education Region of Namibia. This region is situated in the North-Eastern part of Namibia. It is led by one director, under whom is a deputy director, and has eight education circuits; each led by one school inspector. In total, there are eight circuit inspectors, all male. Three of these inspectors were my research participants.

4.2.1 Profile of inspector A

Inspector A was the inspector of Kasivi circuit. The circuit had a total number of 41 schools, 148 teachers and 4238 learners. There were 33 school principals, four of whom were female. Three of these female principals were acting principals. Inspector A had been a school leader for a long time. He had been head of the Science department for 10 years at different schools, an Education Officer (formerly known as Subject Advisor) for 7 years and an inspector for the past 5 years. It was apparent from his term of office that he was an experienced educator and leader. At the time of the interview, he was a married man with children.

4.2.2 Profile of inspector B

Inspector B was the inspector of Katere circuit. This circuit had a total of 20 schools, 360 teachers and 11 481 learners. There were 20 school principals, six of whom were female, three of them acting. Inspector B had been a head of department for two years, a school principal for two years, an Education Officer for three years and a Senior Inspector from 2002 to date. He was also married with children.

4.2.3 Profile of inspector C

Inspector C started his teaching career more than twenty-three years ago. He had been a head of department for one year, a school principal for 12 years and an inspector for the past ten years to date. He was an inspector in the Matumo circuit. The circuit had a total

of 41 schools, 219 teachers and 6109 learners. There were 32 school principals, five of which were female. He was also a married man with children.

Below I present the themes that emerged from the data.

4.3 Qualities of an effective principal

The following emerged as qualities respondents felt to be important for a principal.

4.3.1 Commitment and independence

The three inspectors believed that commitment to work is a desirable quality in a successful principal. According to these inspectors, a principal should be someone who shows interest in improvement. This is illustrated in what they mentioned when describing an effective leader.

Inspector A noted that:

> The moment you enter a school where there is an effective principal, you find silence at the school, teachers committed to their work, they are all in classes.

Inspector B said:

> I would prefer to look at someone who shows some kind of hard work, and this person should be able to show independence, who can do things on his own, without relying on the inspector. It should be someone who shows interest in his work.

The silence here was regarded as an indication that everyone was busy with his/her work; there being no time to make a noise. Inspector C referred to one of his principals as “a principal with a strong positive leadership” because he was committed to his work, and “he encourages his learners to work very hard and he is always doing the right thing”.

Commitment was also seen in one female principal who showed some charismatic commitment to or enthusiasm in getting everyone, the school and the community,

involved in attaining her vision of building a school hall. In other words, these inspectors expected a leader to translate their own commitment into one that can be shared by others

4.3.2 Communication

Two of the inspectors saw communication as an important characteristic of effective leadership. Inspector B indicated that one of his female principals managed to lead her school successfully because she communicated her vision very clearly to everybody. Inspector B further stated: "…this principal has the skill to communicate, to persuade and mobilize people, that is why she managed to motivate parents to build even a school hall and also to become an effective principal."

Inspector C also saw ensuring the flow of information at a school as a very important aspect of running an effective school. This was illustrated in the example of how one of his principals had managed to bring change to his school:

> You see the school had no procedures to follow, but now there is morning briefing where he passes information to the teachers. There is also assembly and devotion where he directs the learners and informs them on all happenings of the day.

Inspector C believed this helped to keep teachers informed with up-to-date information and upcoming changes. According to these inspectors, open communication contributes to the empowerment of others and the building of positive relationships, whereas poor communication can create mistrust amongst people in an institution. Listening was one of the communication skills identified by inspector C as a quality that contributed to female principals' success in leadership. He stated that female principals understood and showed empathy for others.

4.3.3 Good interpersonal working relationships

These inspectors believed that having good relationships with others would enable the principal to understand other people's roles in education and also to accommodate their views. They believed that other people's opinions and feelings should be considered.

According to inspector A, he would appoint a principal who showed good working relationships with others, such as members of the community. He said:

> Normally good managers or principals, we identify them from others because they have a very good programme which is followed and they command this programme with the help of teachers, not as an individual, not commanding in the sense of enforcing, but that the respect must come from the people because of the way he is presenting himself.

Inspector B noted that since there were many people involved in a school, like the community or parents, "one needs to understand their interests in order to work with them". The value of accommodating other people's views is highlighted in:

> I think that it is important, accommodating other people's views, because you are not going to work in isolation; there will be a school board, teachers, learners, learners' representative council (LRC); there will be inspectors, so everybody might want to contribute to the development of the school. So it is not the question of what I want as a principal but what the people want.

According to inspector C:

> a good principal should be a person who has good relationships with others, because if a principal does not have good relationships and a sense of caring he encounters problems with others.

Referring to one of his principals, inspector A said:

> He has a good relationship with his teachers, learners and the community; parents understand and appreciate what he requests them to do.

Inspector A saw this good working relationship as contributing to teacher and learner motivation. He said:

> A principal in my circuit managed to win an award from an NGO because he had a very good development plan, which he produced by working together with his teachers and the community. This principal has the ability to motivate and he produces good results.

These inspectors further considered community involvement in the school development plans as very important. They believed that a good principal should be able to mobilize

the community to get involved in school activities. Inspector B gave credit to a female school principal, who became the first principal in the region to actively involve the community in her school to such an extent that she managed to build a school hall, without government funding, but with the support of the community. These inspectors also believed that creating a good working atmosphere where people felt good about themselves and their work would enable the principal to command respect from others, promote a culture of trust at the school and enhance staff development.

Inspector A stated:

> Respect must come from the people because of the way the principal is presenting himself and if a person has respect coming from the people, people appreciate him and he has what we are looking for in running an institution.

Inspector A also noted that a principal needs the aid of parents, learners and teachers to improve learner performance and implement the school development plan: therefore he/she cannot work in isolation. Inspector C also attributed the success of one his principals to his good working relationship with his teachers, parents and learners. He gave his illustration of this relationship as follows:

> He encourages learners in the life of the school; he encourages and motivates his learners to succeed every year. He introduced prize-giving at his school which encourages learners to work very hard.

Inspector C was thus interested in a leader who involved others, such as learners, in decision-making, in order to improve the quality of the life of the school. He believed in a principal who gave attention to the level of motivation of his/her members in order to improve the work of his organization.

These inspectors also believed that a sense of caring was important for building good working relations and regarding caring, inspector C said:

> If a principal does not have good relationships and a sense of caring he encounters problems …schools led by female principals perform exceptionally well because they [female principals] are caring, they listen to advice …

Inspector A also stated that female principals perform better because they were more concerned than men; they cared. One could say that the two inspectors considered that a principal who valued human resource was effective in running a school. This also shows that they expected a school leader to have nurturing qualities of caring for his/her followers' concerns and needs.

4.3.4 Problem – solving skills

Problems arise in any institution, and thus two of the inspectors saw problem solving skills to be associated with high school effectiveness and positive student performance. They believed that the way in which a principal dealt with problems was one way of determining his/her success as an educational leader. As an example of the emphasis on problem solving, inspector B had this to say:

> The person should be able to show some kind of independence, who can do things on himself, without really running to the inspector to solve problems. And creativity is also important. … Now if this person is to depend on the inspector as the sole problem-solver, by the time the inspector comes it will be too late.

This also shows that these inspectors expected a school leader to be proactive in solving problems, to take the initiative and explore possible ways of solving problems. Inspector A also indicated that he would expect a person who is appointed as a principal to solve problems experienced in a school, be it management or general problems.

Again emphasizing problem-solving, when asked why he referred to two of his principals as "successful", inspector B said:

> Why I refer to them as successful principals is, it is rare that you are invited to their schools to solve simple problems. Honestly you do not need to worry too much about running to their schools … they know what to do, to be frank they know what to do.

This shows that these inspectors expected a principal to try to anticipate and identify possible problem areas before they became a reality. Inspector C also saw having

knowledge of the four management functions (planning, organizing, leading and controlling) as contributing to effective leadership.

Another quality that was woven within the respondents' responses to other questions was the importance of a vision. This will be presented next as a separate theme.

4.3.5 Vision

All inspectors strongly believed that leadership required vision. They believed that principals should have a picture of what they wanted their schools to be and their learners to achieve.

Inspector B had this to say:

> I have a very good principal, very good in terms of leadership, the person has a vision and mobilizes teachers and learners to pursue this vision, getting them involved in his vision and planning to realize the vision.

Also responding to why he thought his female principal succeeded in leading her school, inspector B stated:

> She had developed a school development plan, a mission statement for her school. One thing I would say: she has communicated her vision very clearly to everybody, the teachers, learners and parents. She has the skill to communicate, to persuade and to mobilize people to align to the vision. I think she is a "visionary", people might call it, and she is a focused and very much outstanding principal.

In the same vein inspector C described one of his best principals, who had managed to lead his school successfully, in this way:

> He is someone who has high expectations for his learners and looking at him, he leads his teachers with a clear vision and continues to focus on teaching and learning.

Inspector A described his principal as:

> …someone who has the ability to motivate his teachers and the community to come up with a very good school development plan, which is a long-term five-year plan aimed at improving learners' performance.

Having a good plan for the future and realizing it was seen as a very important way of achieving success. Inspector B also referred to this plan as a vision that the school community has to realize within three to four years, in order to improve the school in terms of results and growth. These inspectors believed in a shared vision with co-workers as a part of achieving success and also empowering others to contribute to the realization of the vision.

4.3.6 Other qualities of leadership

Other qualities that were viewed to be important for effective leadership in education included: creativity, organization, leading by example and a sense of accountability. Looking at the above example of the female principal who managed to build a school hall, it is clear that she possessed these qualities.

As an example of the emphasis on leading by example, inspector A noted, while referring to one of his best schools:

> A timetable is effectively followed and the principal monitors the programme and also participates in the teaching. In other words, he leads by example.

This principal was seen as setting a very good example by not just concentrating on management matters, but also on teaching, thereby encouraging his teachers to be serious about their teaching.

Inspector B said that a school was subject to change every day and thus one needed creativity to develop a school.

Inspector C also described his best principal as "someone who is always doing the right thing". He believed that this helped the principal control his school and get support from

others. Leading by example takes us to the next important theme to emerge from the date: of role modelling.

4.4 Other factors influencing appointment of female principals

4.4.1 Role models

According to one of the inspectors, an effective leader can be a role model to others. Inspector B believed that his principals were developing their teachers, helping them to become good resourceful teachers themselves. He said:

> One of my principals has always something to share with you, like one thing he shared with me was how he developed his teachers to become good teachers so that they don't need him always to come push them to do what they have to do. He motivates them so that they become resource teachers themselves. So that is something I personally admire and expect that other teachers could emulate what he is doing.

Inspector B also believed that if other principals could see these best principals as their role models and copy what they were doing, they too could become good principals. The issue of role modelling was also illustrated in inspector B's comments on why there were no female principals in senior secondary schools or in inspector posts:

> Today what I do not understand is why they (females) do not apply; maybe we need to take one on board and see if she will attract others to come on board. I'm not really sure whether it is the fear of the demand of the job or if it just that there is no role model for them to look at.

Inspector B believed that bringing more female principals and female inspectors would help prove to aspiring female leaders that the job was not as bad as they might have thought and would help open doors for many. He believes role modelling encouraged and motivated others to take up the challenge.

Another factor mentioned by the three inspectors, which they thought influenced the type of leader a principal needed to be, was the nature of work. I present this in the next section.

4.4.2 Nature of work

The three inspectors believed that the nature of work influenced the appointment of women in principal posts. They mentioned that they would prefer someone who was hard working and focused to take up the position of principal. They further believed that the nature of the work contributed to the low number of women in principal positions. Inspector B stated that competition for senior positions was high among women and men and that men stood a better chance of getting these posts, for the following reason:

> Most men have been in management positions and thus when these positions are advertised, only those who have been in privileged positions (men) qualify in terms of experience and qualifications.

These inspectors also believed that the nature of the job was not attractive to women because they did not choose to work in rural areas and this type of work needed someone who was "tough". This is evident in inspector B's comment that "culturally, women were seen as not emotionally strong, like a man, to run or take the pressure of a bigger school".

Inspector A believed that women tended to withdraw when confronted with difficult situations, while men would always persist. He further stated:

> If a female principal is less qualified than others, she tends to withdraw; women do not have that motivation to say even if I'm less qualified I can still do it. They lack this, but men will always be forceful: even if they are less qualified, they would like to go forward. When you compare the number of men who have failed to succeed because they are less qualified with that of females you find that most men still try to work hard. But if it is a female she will tell you "Can you please transfer me to another school because I'm not able to run this school…"

These inspectors believed that, to be an effective principal, one needed to produce good results. This is evident in their statements. Inspector A proclaimed:

> I have one female principal who is doing well and she has managed to improve the results by at least three per cent this year, which is an achievement.

Inspector B noted: “I used to call my principal good in my view, if they meet some basic criteria, for example they should be able to produce results”. Again putting emphasis on the results, inspector B stated:

> A female principal has been appointed at one school just to surprise the whole region by competing with giant schools producing very, very high academic results.

Inspector C also described one of his best principals as one who encouraged and motivated his learners to succeed every year, and one who introduced prize-giving at his school in order to encourage learners to work harder.

4.4.3 Cultural stereotyping

According to these inspectors, there was no reason to discriminate against women but they admitted that, in the past, stereotyping and other factors like work environment contributed to the minority of women in leadership positions. They indicated that women tended not to apply for posts, especially in remote areas, because it was rough work and they preferred to be with their families.

Asked if that was the reason why he had only two female principals in his circuit, inspector A had this to say:

> First of all my circuit is a remote circuit … to be frank most ladies do not prefer to apply for posts which are in remote areas, that is one issue, but of course we know that in the past there have been overlooking of females in management positions.

Inspector B commented as follows:

> In the past, the appointment of principals rested in the hands of inspectors. It could be that the previous inspectors might have been all male and might have preferred to go for males as principals. Secondly, not long ago, it was the world of men; only recently after independence are we talking about equality. Leadership was regarded as something for men and it is only now that we are having equal competition among women and men. Thirdly, the high

> competition in principal positions puts men at an advantage, since they have been in management and thus qualify in terms of experience and qualifications. Fourthly, women in the past might not have the guts to fight for senior positions.

Inspector B further pointed out that the cultural background of many men in their communities created the perception that women were not able to run bigger schools, but only lower primary schools where they could play with young children. He said, “We have looked at or appointed females as second-class citizens”.

Another reason that was mentioned by two of the inspectors was that female leaders were less competitive and that they tended to give up easily when seeking senior positions like principal ship or “they do not have the guts to fight for senior positions”, as inspector B put it, and that they lacked the motivation and confidence to face the challenges.

On the other hand, despite these stereotypes, these inspectors saw no reason to discriminate against women and viewed female principalship positively. Inspector A felt that female principals were more organized than men in terms of managing resources. He also said:

> If a female principal is qualified, from my own experience, the female principal will do a much better job than a male principal. They are more concerned and there is less absenteeism in female principals.

Inspector C also stated: “I do not see the reason for discriminating [against] them (females), they just lead like any other person”. In a similar vein, inspector B stated:

> To me, leaders are not necessarily to be discovered within the sex of a person, be it male or female … to me they all possess the qualities or the potential to become good leaders. All that you need is to show the will and have a vision. I believe it is within everybody, whether male or female.

4.4.4 Opportunities available for aspiring female leaders

All three inspectors felt that there were opportunities available to assist female teachers to take up leadership positions. Inspector B felt that putting female teachers in middle management positions had created opportunities for them to get appointed as principals. He described what he did in his own circuit as follows:

> In my circuit, what I normally do is in each and every school where there is a head of department position, there is a female head of department. Because currently for you to be appointed as a principal, you should have been head of department before. So if females are already in middle management, the chances are there for them to become principals.

These inspectors also emphasized the importance of the continuous professional development programme, which was in place to prepare new principals for their principalship. In this programme principals, were given modules on administration and management to enable them to know what was expected of them. Inspector B also believed that affirmative action, which was already in place to help create equal employment opportunities, would help women, as one of the previously disadvantaged groups, to gain access to leadership positions. The issue of role-modelling, which has been mentioned in 4.5., was thought to be important in motivating female teachers to apply for positions as principals.

Inspector C felt that the orientation which new principals received played a role in helping them lead effectively. He stated:

> We always orientate them as soon as they are taken into the job market. There is a mentor in each circuit who shows them how to go about carrying out administrative matters and managing the school.

This shows that these inspectors believed in leading by example; they believed that bringing more women on board would motivate female teachers to apply for senior positions.

4.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the views of the three inspectors, which were shared during the interviews. In the next chapter, I attempt to make sense of my data in terms of my research goal and question, and the literature I have consulted.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented data describing the inspectors' perceptions of female principalship. In this chapter, I discuss emerging issues in terms of the research question. Since descriptive data do not make sense without being interpreted, I interpret the results of my research drawing on appropriate literature and taking into account previous findings, cited in my literature review.

As this study was of a relatively small scale, my findings must be taken as suggestive rather than conclusive: nonetheless some interesting issues have emerged.

My research goal was to understand the school inspectors' perceptions of female principalship, and the themes are reconstructed from the data reported in chapter 4.

5.2 Qualities of an effective principal

5.2.1 Commitment

The respondents felt that commitment to work was important in a leader, and expressed this idea in a variety of ways using words such as 'hardworking', 'interest in improving work', and 'showing independence.'

Commitment features strongly in leadership literature. Horgan (in Pahal 1999: 3) defines commitment as passion seen through caring, concern, and building "perpetuation". I found that my research participants saw commitment as being related to leadership success in a school. They saw principals with a high concern for their work as playing a major role in boosting students' achievement, because they instilled this commitment in their teachers and learners. They helped teachers to channel their energies toward

achieving the goals of the school. Commitment to work cannot be taken for granted in leaders. Sterling and Davidoff (2000: 27) maintain that:

> One may have the status, authority and responsibility of a leader, but this does not automatically make one an effective leader. The first step in turning around a negative situation is the commitment to lead. Commitment frees one from making excuses as to why a negative situation cannot change, and allows one to make a real difference to practically any situation.

Commitment is thus fundamental to good leadership and is a quality that needs to be cultivated with dedication, because working with people can sometimes be disheartening. Commitment carries one through difficult times and helps the leader to overcome obstacles and difficulties. In other words, when the going gets tough one needs to be committed in order to overcome.

5.2.3 Task- and person-orientation

The tension between task-orientation and the building and maintenance of good human relations has dominated leadership research for the past century. I believe that both dimensions have their roots in early leadership and management thinking: task-orientation in the scientific management paradigm associated with Frederick Taylor, and person-orientation in the human relations movement, of which Mary Parker Follett is the spiritual leader. It is generally regarded as desirable that leaders achieve a balance between these orientations, as is recommended in Blake and Mouton's Managerial Grid, where an ideal style is projected as high in both dimensions: concern for task and concern for people (Reece and Brandt 1996: 317). Variations on this notion do occur, for example in Hersey and Blanchard's Situational Leadership model (Reece and Brandt 1996: 328), where the task-person tension shifts to accommodate different levels of follower maturity or readiness. These dimensions were first clearly identified in studies conducted at the Ohio State University. These studies resulted in the Leadership Behaviour Description Questionnaire (LBDQ). In the LBDQ, 'initiating structure' (the task dimension) includes any leader behaviour that delineates the relationship between the leader and subordinates and at the same time, establishes defined patterns of organization, channels of communication, and methods of procedure; 'consideration' includes leader behaviour that

indicates friendship, trust, warmth, interest and respect in the relationship between the leader members of the work group (Hoy and Miskel 1996: 382). Contemporary leadership thinking sees this classical tension differently, probably in response to the realization that people are the most valuable asset of any organization, and that leading people is more complex than managing processes. Robbins and Decenzo (2001: 349) argue that employee-oriented leaders were associated with higher group productivity and higher job satisfaction, whereas production-oriented leaders were associated with lower group productivity and lower worker satisfaction. These findings are supported by Burke and Collins (2001:253) who argue that today's organizations need managers who can develop positive relationships with subordinates, serve as role models and persuade employees to look beyond their own needs and focus on the interests of the group. What is constant, though, is the idea that effective leaders should be able to address both the task and human requirements of their educational institutions, and the view that the achievement of a balance is desirable, is still prevalent. Reece and Brandt (1996: 4), for example, write that most organizations that survive and prosper over a long period of time maintain a balance between concern for production and concern for people, which means both tasks and relationships should be seen as equally important. My research has produced interesting findings that feed into this debate.

My research participants perceived having good human relationships as one of the essential qualities in a leader. In my opinion, the three inspectors would hire a school principal who is able to promote a collegial working environment characterized by mutual trust and respect for others' ideas and feelings. They saw a strong connection between workplace satisfaction and school success; that is, if teachers, parents and learners are satisfied, there would be better results. The kinds of leaders my respondents had in mind would be principals with a collaborative leadership style, wiling to work with people in a positive way.

The link between success in organizations and positive relationships among workers is a recurring theme in leadership literature. Bush and Middlewood (1997:10), for example, pointed out that:

> Where governors and staff work together constructively and harmoniously, it provides a powerful basis for success but conflict, or separation between professionals and lay governors, may serve to inhibit development.

My findings confirm that people are the most important resource in a school and that working in isolation is not conducive to the effective running of the school. The qualities that were highlighted are skills such as communication, role modelling and being a visionary leader. The quality of 'caring' was highlighted as a female attribute. The caring attitude of the female principals showed their concern for people, which was thought to be beneficial to the atmosphere in a school and conducive to good performance.

This finding is consistent with the results of an earlier study by Comer (in Pounder and Coleman 2002: 125) who note that female business managers tend to be rated higher than male managers on the "individual consideration" dimension of transformational leadership. These dimensions of caring and nurturing have been identified by Gray (in Bush and West Burnham 1994: 189) as some of the characteristics of the feminine or nurturing paradigm. Interestingly, these inspectors accepted and perceived women as good performers *because of* those feminine qualities. Increasingly, these nurturing qualities identified with women are being recognized as strengths in management (Bush & West-Burnham 1994: 190).

Results such as these presented here give rise to arguments that strongly favour women over men as leaders. As discussed in chapter two, Burke and Collins (2001: 245) see transformational leaders as leaders who develop positive relationships with subordinates in order to strengthen employee and organizational performance. My respondents saw the importance of transformational leadership and favoured a school principal who displayed a transformational leadership style.

The moral dimension of leadership is also stressed. Good interpersonal relationships need to be accompanied by honesty, being straightforward with people so that they know where they stand. Honesty breeds an atmosphere of trust. This is why these inspectors

believed that a principal who does not have good interpersonal working relationships with others would always encounter problems with others.

I also believe that it is important for leaders to understand the people they work with so that they can make profitable use of their strengths and encourage and assist them to grow in their work so that they can contribute to the effective functioning of the school or any organization. Through teamwork, a leader can get things done.

It is thus clear that my respondents favoured a school leader who was people-oriented. People-oriented leaders are concerned with establishing and maintaining relationships and will emphasize things like expressing feelings, teamwork, harmonizing and compromising (Love 1994: 38). Concern for people manifests itself as personal involvement with goal achievement, maintaining subordinates' self-confidence, responsibility based on trust rather than submissiveness, maintaining pleasant working conditions and satisfactory interpersonal relationships (Gerber, Nel and Van Dyk 1999: 298). Literature has referred to such leadership as participative, since it is group-centred, enhancing teamwork and decentralized decision-making.

However, task-orientation was also identified as a significant characteristic of leadership. In my research, task-orientation was seen chiefly as the ability to solve problems. From my discussion with the three inspectors, it was evident that they would favour a leader who could solve problems without too much reliance on others or on them as inspectors. They saw the solving of problems as being related to school effectiveness. Van der Westhuizen (1991: 158) also feels strongly about problem solving as a management task. He states that a characteristic of management is that it also makes provision for the solution of problems, and that the educational leader would always have to determine which problems should receive priority and which could be dealt with later. This means that a school principal should be someone who has considerable insight when solving problems. Thus van der Westhuizen (1991:158) also states that the way in which a principal deals with problems is one way of determining his/her success as an educational leader. I also believe that if problems in a school are not properly handled and solved,

there will be conflict in a school and the principal will be chronically burdened with additional problems, which will lead to an unhealthy working climate. That is why the inspectors demanded the special abilities of problem solving in an ideal educational leader. These abilities are also important because schools are characterized by conflict, and conflict management presents more problems for the education leader.

5.2.4 Vision

As has been found in other studies cited in literature (Martin and Henderson 2001; French and Bell 1995) it was evident to me that the inspectors recognized the importance of vision in leadership. Leadership requires vision: without vision to challenge followers with, there is no possibility of a principal being a leader (Pejza 1985 in Southwestern Educational Development Laboratory: undated). As Martin and Henderson point out, a vision describes a desirable future in a way that conveys meaning and inspiration to others (cited in Manasse 1986 in Southwestern Educational Development Laboratory: undated).

I found that my respondents expected a principal to be able to identify a vision and convey this vision to others. This is confirmed by inspector B's remarks about his female principal who succeeded in communicating her vision to others, as presented in chapter four under 4.3.5. Principals should know where their schools ought to be headed and what their students should achieve.

According to Senge (1990: 9) one idea about leadership that has inspired organizations for decades is the capacity to hold a shared picture of the future members seek to create. This is consistent with what was mentioned by my participants regarding visionary principals. The quality in question is also referred to as "charisma", a word used by one of my respondents. Burke and Collins (2001: 248) see charismatic leaders as those who are admired and trusted by their followers; they serve as role models and their subordinates aspire to be like them.

What my respondents particularly stressed is the notion of communicating, or sharing the vision. When a personal vision becomes translated into a shared vision, people become empowered, so that "… people excel and learn, not because they are told to, but because they want to" (Senge 1991:9). These inspectors expected a principal to involve others in the enactment of the vision. Bennis and Nanus put it as follows:

> It is, however of no use having a dream if that dream is not shared by everyone else. It is best if everyone else has a part in the shaping of the dream, leaving it to the leader to articulate it and to capture it in some way so that it steals into the imaginations of the people. Some of the leaders did it with words, some with visual models, some just by living and breathing their vision in contact with their people (Bennis and Nanus in Handy 1999: 116).

Martin and Henderson (2001: 73) stress the same idea:

> One of the most prized aspects of leadership at all levels of an organization is the ability to develop with others a vision that enables everyone to make a commitment to achieving it. This has been recognized as a feature of successful leadership for a long time.

Sterling and Davidoff (2000: 90) give the following reasons why vision building should be a participatory process:

> If followers are not part of the development process, they will be poor supporters at the implementation level. If all stakeholders are involved from the outset they will own the vision and feel a part thereof.

If the school community is not a part of the process it may not abandon negative ideas and attitudes about the school, which may weaken the momentum towards a positive future.

If the whole school community is not involved, one will not get the benefit of everyone's creative input in the process. Since there are many aspects of school life that need to be accommodated into the vision, one must be sure that all these concerns are involved in the vision-building process.

It seems evident that without the contributions from the entire school community, the vision cannot become a reality, because many will not be motivated and willing to strive towards achieving the vision they are not a part of. This is a particular challenge in Namibia, as it is in South Africa, where parents have for so long been alienated from schools and often lack basic competences (such as literacy) required to participate meaningfully.

Literature suggests a direct association between visionary leadership and transformational leadership. Burke and Collins (2001: 245) argue that transformational leaders achieve results by persuading employees to believe in the mission and its attainability. Similarly, Leithwood and Aitken (1995: 28) see the development of an organizational vision and a mission as:

> a critical transformational leadership function, and those assuming leadership roles feel responsible for helping to move the organization in the direction of its goals.

It was interesting to note that my respondents realized that both men and women could be visionary leaders. This finding is important to note, as this attitude can be motivating to those women who aspire to take up leadership positions.

Thus one can say that these inspectors regarded some of the principals in their circuit as successful because they empowered their teachers and learners and the community as a whole. The entire school community felt ownership of the outcomes of their goals and understood how their actions helped to shape this future. The example given earlier, of a female principal who involved the entire school community in building a school hall without funding from government is a good instance of a visionary leader. Her achievement is consistent with what Shakeshaft (cited in Sherman 2000: 139) notes, namely that women make better use of language, which encourages community building, are polite and cheerful and use shared decision-making styles.

In my opinion, these inspectors would hire a principal with a transformational leadership style. According to Peters (cited in French and Bell 1995: 96), one of the eight attributes that characterises excellent innovative companies is "productivity through people". I agree with Peters that one has to value and respect people, because they are the most important assets in any organization: without their involvement, failure is likely to ensue.

Naturally, good interpersonal relationships depend on communication, to which I now turn.

5.2.5 Communication

Communication has been described as the mutual exchange of ideas and interpretation of messages (cited in Van der Westhuizen 1991: 204). My participants - like those in other studies - believed that open communication contributes to the empowerment of others and the building of positive relationships, whereas poor communication can create mistrust amongst people in an institution. Bennis and Nanus (in Handy 1999: 116) identify communication as one of the four strategies regarded as a necessary condition for any freedom of action. They believe that without good communication, or some approximation of it, no aspiring leader would stand much of a chance (Handy 1999: 116). Similarly, my participants believed that without communication it would be difficult to realize one's vision: effective principals succeed because they communicate their vision very clearly to everybody.

According to Reece and Brandt (1996: 22), it is not an exaggeration to describe communication as "the heart and soul" of human relations. They further state that communication is the means by which we come to an understanding of others and ourselves. To grow and develop as persons, we must communicate (*Ibid*. 1996: 22).

Similarly, the importance of communication in a successful school was also confirmed by women respondents in Sherman's (2000) studies. These women principals felt responsible for ensuring communications at all levels. For example, one woman said the following about the importance of communication:

> If I don't keep everybody informed, I'm simply not doing my job. It keeps everybody happy and it prevents unnecessary grumbling and questions about what we are doing here. I want everyone to think that they can come into the school at any time and that they will know what is happening.

Mazzarella and Grundy in (Southwestern Educational Development Laboratory: undated) also note that "effective school leaders in particular, are good at communicating" and have the "aptitude and skills they need to interact well with others; they know how to communicate".

Smit and Cronje (cited in Kauaria 2002: 77) view communication as an integral part of all leadership or management functions, claiming that in order to plan, lead, organize or control, leaders have to communicate with their followers. Thus one can say communication is central to democratic school leadership. Schmuck and Runkel (1994: 119) also point out:

> For educators to be clear about instructional goals, solve important problems, make effective decisions, and put plans into action, many acts of communication are required. If the educational organization is to remain responsive to demands of all sorts, an open flow of information from and to the various groups must be maintained.

My respondents saw good communication as important in making an institution like a school a happier place to work than one with constrained communication. They would favour a principal with what Shum and Cheng (1997: 165) called 'human' leadership, principals with 'human' leadership skills who emphasize relationships and feelings and seek to lead through facilitation and empowerment: clearly good communication skills lie at the heart of such leadership.

Besides the skill of good communication of vision and empowerment, I found that my participants considered female principals as effective because they are "good listeners". Superintendents in Mahoney's (1990) studies (cited in Southwestern Educational Development Laboratory: undated) also advised: "Often people aren't looking for instant

comments or solutions; all they want is for someone to hear them out". Listening skills are also an important characteristic of leaders who facilitate change.

The ability to communicate well, reported in women (as in Sherman's study cited above), ensures a better sense of networking with the entire school community. In a democratic society, involvement of others like teachers and parents in decisions is important and this can only be possible if there is good communication. I believe good communication ensures transparency in an organization like a school.

Although these inspectors did not regard the skill of communication as peculiar to any gender, they identified listening as an important skill in women, which made female principals more likely to succeed. One can thus say that they support the notion that women bring to administrative practice qualities necessary for democratic school reform. Interestingly, although caring and listening have been among the characteristics which were culturally considered in our societies as "feminine" or inappropriate in leaders, they feature strongly in my findings as qualities which contribute to women's success as leaders.

5.3 Factors influencing the nomination of female principals

5.3.1 Role models

My participants saw the absence of female role models in principalship as contributing to the absence of female principals. They noted that since there were very few female principals, it was necessary to bring female principals on board to see if they would attract other female teachers to apply for these posts, even in rural areas. They believed this would prove to the aspiring female leaders that 'it can be done.' The lack of role models is also seen by Sherman (2000: 141) as a contributing factor in the low number of female leaders. She states that women have had fewer women as role models and have been mentored less than men for certain leadership positions.

Garland (cited in Sherman 2000: 141) also argues that women have had difficulty developing needed mentorship relationships, because older male administrators typically

prefer protégés who are junior versions of themselves. This sort of attitude constrains women's professional ambitions and career development. These inspectors understood the importance of positive reinforcement and the need for positive role models in order for more women aspirants to be able to take up senior positions. In other words, the more women are visible in leadership positions, the more contagious this will be to other women who would wish to apply for these positions.

Reece and Brandt (1996: 430) also note the importance of role models for women, as it would help women break away from traditional expectations. They further see such role models as women who have the ability to:

- Plan a career and prepare for continued advancement.
- Know what they want and ask for it.
- Make decisions, live with the consequences, and learn from the process.
- Realize that with equal rights come equal responsibilities.
- Seek out opportunities that increase their abilities and status.
- Develop qualities of cooperation, dependability, self-control and expertise in some areas.

Such women are referred to by Hall (in Udjombala 2002: 84) as "prototypes of success".

These inspectors also believed that an effective leader could be a role model to others in terms of leadership practice. For example, a principal who models the way is the one who 'walks the talk' or 'practice(s) what they preach'. One can say these inspectors believed what Albert Schweitzer believed: "example is not the main thing in influencing others, it is the only thing" (cited in Reece and Brandt 1996: 73).

A role model is that person you most admire or are likely to emulate (Reece and Brandt 1996: 72). Burke and Collins (2001: 248) also note that transformational leaders serve as role models and their subordinates aspire to be like them. I can thus say that these inspectors regarded the presence of female role models as an important element in the

professional development of women, due to the fact that they constituted an example of women in management and thus provided more support and psychological security to those new and uncertain female recruits. I found that role modelling was seen as an important aspect in helping those women with a limited vision of their own potential to become aware of the opportunities open to them in the world of employment.

5.3.2 Nature of work

The inspectors I interviewed saw the nature of work as a contributing factor to the invisibility of women in leadership positions. According to them, principalship is a competitive type of work and men stand a better chance of climbing the ladder due to their long years of experience in management positions. In the eyes of those who hire principals, women are often seen as lacking the preparation required for the job. These inspectors saw this role as requiring someone who was tough, and emotionally strong. These characteristics have been traditionally considered as masculine (this is discussed in 5.3.3 under 'stereotyping'). The question of how women will gain the necessary experience in the first place obviously points to the real issue.

King (cited in Van der Westhuizen 1991: 534) reports that promotion opportunities for women in education were affected because of restrictions placed on their appointments in the past. They were not considered, for instance, for promotion to posts like Circuit Inspector, since one of the unwritten requirements was that promotion would take place from the position of school principal and few women occupied those positions.

These differential levels of opportunities are also identified by Weightman (in Bush and West-Burnham 1994: 185) who said:

> Men tend to do the high profile, straightforward jobs that are part of the natural progression up the hierarchy. The job of head of department of faculty has a clear role that everyone understands and accepts. This enables the post holder to be seen as being a manager and doing management work.

I also found that the inspectors perceived the issue of women not wanting to work in remote areas as a contributing factor influencing their professional progress. I think this

is one of the "hidden" professional barriers mentioned by my respondents, because not all women who aspire to principalship are married or have families in town. Van der Westhuizen also sees geographic mobility, in the case of women, as a limiting factor, since the women cannot easily accept a management post in a neighbouring town, while a man could do this and then plan for his family to move (1991:558). In my opinion, this leads to women tending to suppress their earlier aspirations. Once they are given reduced opportunities to rise in promotion positions, they develop an attitude of reduced dedication. I thus tend to agree with Greyvenstein (cited in Van der Westhuizen 1991: 549) who states that many women have career ambitions and aspirations which do not differ in any way from those of their male counterparts who are in line for promotion posts in educational management, but that they simply do not have the same "opportunities" at present. This belief that men should be high school principals suggests a certain kind of control and authority, based on 'power over' and 'fear of' (Sherman 2000: 134). According to my respondents, the few females who were principals were at primary schools. The respondents felt that women were regarded as "second-class citizens" and would not be able to run larger institutions or high schools. I therefore think that, in order to bring fundamental changes in women's status, the justifications for women's exclusion, especially from high schools, needs to be questioned. Otherwise this will continue to reinforce the myth of separate worlds for women and men.

5.3.3 Cultural Stereotyping

My participants admitted that stereotyping had contributed to the low number of women principals and women in other senior positions. They also believed that women were not motivated to apply for principalship, especially in rural areas. As stated under 5.3.2, they indicated that women preferred to be with their families. The weakness of this kind of stereotyping is that it does not account for the significant number of women who do not have families in urban areas or those who are unmarried. There must be other reasons why they do not aspire to senior positions in rural areas. Moreover, if family commitments constitute the limiting factor for women to take up senior positions in rural schools, why are women in other professions, such as nursing, willing to take up senior posts in remote clinics and hospitals?

My participants further pointed out that promotion opportunities for women in schools were negatively affected because of restrictions that were placed on their appointment in the past. Women were not considered because of the lack of experience in management posts. They believed that this problem was brought about by the previous, predominantly masculine, norms in the selection of leaders in the teaching profession. Women who are in line for promotion posts in educational management often do not have the same opportunities.

Thus one tends to agree that individuals who are given few opportunities to rise in the promotion structure are likely to distance themselves from anything which smacks of promotion. Additionally Shakeshaft (in Bush and West-Burnham 1994: 181) states that people who have very little opportunity to move up the hierarchy (woman teachers) disengage in the form of depressed aspirations. This is referred to by Greyvenstein as the "role conflict dilemma" (cited in Van der Westhuizen 1991: 550). According to Greyvenstein, contemporary society has not yet reached the point of accepting that it is a natural phenomenon for a woman to be both (if she prefers) a homemaker and an effective career woman. Therefore she says (in Van der Westhuizen 1991: 550).

> The woman aspiring to an educational management position has to contend not only with the conflict between her traditional role of wife and mother and her career role, but she also has to develop a new definition of self to succeed in her role as manager. Sex-role stereotyping compounds this inter role conflict in women. Where teaching has been traditionally viewed as being complementary to the woman's role of wife and mother, management is contradictory to this role, thereby causing further conflict.

Another stereotyped attitude that my participants mentioned, which was practiced in the past and may still be, was the preference given to men by those who appointed candidates into educational management posts. They stated that most selection panels consisted of men and thus preferred to appoint men rather than women. This corresponds well with the literature. Schmuck (in Bush and West- Burnham 1994: 181) argues:

> Through all stages of preparation from encouraging teachers to seek administrative positions to final selection of administrative candidates – the chances are that a man will be preferred to a woman.

My research participants also recognized some of their experiences of female principalship. They felt that, not long ago, management was a world of men, so it was only after independence that equal competition between men and women became possible. They reflected the commonly held view that women might not have the "guts" to fight for senior posts like principalship, and suggested that the cultural background of most men in Namibian communities viewed women as incapable of running secondary schools. The inspectors also felt that women were less persistent than men in applying for promotion. As reported earlier, Shakeshaft (cited in Bush and West-Burnham 1994: 181) comments on the same phenomenon.

Although these participants noted that they themselves did not see the reasons for discriminating against women, they seemed to share the same stereotyped belief, reported in literature, that a manager had to be emotionally strong and tough. The fact that the respondents consistently used the past tense – for example when they said that, in traditional cultures, women "were" seen as not emotionally strong – suggests that they themselves had moved beyond these stereotyped views, or perhaps that the country as a whole was trying to move ahead in its thinking. Certainly the fact that they were able to identify cultural and societal barriers to women's advancement so clearly indicates a degree of awareness which in itself is progress, particularly since they claimed not to be victims of this constrained view of human potential. In fact, one of the respondents was adamant in claiming that good leadership qualities were not gender-specific, and may be found in men and/or women, as reported earlier.

There is, in fact, evidence to suggest that men may have become the victims of stereotyped thinking. Reece and Brandt (1996:435), in their studies, point out that many men are tired of being in control, of not expressing their emotions freely, and of feeling they must constantly strive for achievement. Apparently, men have discovered that the strong, unemotional, 'in-control' image supported by previous generations is not realistic

for men of the 1990s and beyond. Men want freedom to lead the way they want to, instead of being restricted by traditional sex-role stereotypes. The masculine sex-role orientation represents dominant, unfriendly, instrumental and control behaviour and female sex-role orientation represents submissive, friendly, and emotionally expressive behaviour (Shum and Cheng 1996).

It is nevertheless difficult to escape subtle discrimination against women that exists in society's celebration of 'masculine' characteristics as positively correlated with professional success. In addition, this subtle tendency to allow stereotyping to continue can lead to predominant masculine norms in the selection of principals. In this regard, Greyvenstein (cited in Van der Westhuizen 1991: 547) has advice for women aspiring to leadership positions:

> Women aspiring to leadership positions must, however, seriously consider the consequences of adopting masculine behaviour and traits, and it has been stated that women should not take on a male image. Reasons for this advice to women may be found in research results on the effectiveness of women principals compared to male principals, which reveal that many traits inherent in women underscore high levels of competence and excellence as school leaders . . .

This advice is in line with Shakeshaft's warning (cited earlier) that women should not adopt what she calls a 'men in skirts' leadership style. Similarly, Schmuck (in Pounder and Coleman 2002:127) identifies potential tensions experienced by women in senior management positions, who must, according to Schmuck "become abnormal women; they must transcend the social expectations of femaleness in order to aspire to the socially prescribed role of a leader".

Other attitudes that were made clear by my participants, which I considered stereotypical, included Inspector B's comment that one female principal 'surprised' the whole region by producing good results after a former principal (male) at the same school had disappointed the community by producing poor results. Inspector A also claimed that if a female principal is less qualified, she tends to withdraw: he believed women lack the

motivation to ‘go forward’. The message is clear: men are expected to produce good results and to have self-confidence: for women to succeed is an unusual thing.

Cubillo (cited in Cubillo and Brown 2003) argues that women’s so-called lack of confidence was more to do with unfamiliarity with the territory than a lack of faith in their abilities. The fear of failure also tended to be much reduced once women were aware of the rules of the game. Additionally, Blackmore (in Cubillo and Brown 2003: 281) described women as “outsiders inside”. That is, they (women) were inside the institution but outside the “boys club”: women were “working inside a system not of their own making”.

5.4 Opportunities available for women to reach principalship

5.4.1 Putting women in middle management positions to prepare them for principalship

Among the external barriers, reported in literature (Smulyan 2000), which limit women’s access to educational administration, include a lack of available information about positions and few structural opportunities to gain the skills and visibility needed to advance in the system. My participants felt it important to address this barrier, by taking the steps needed to prepare new principals, including women, for the new job.

I found that my participants were conscious of trying to create opportunities to make it possible for women to take up leadership positions. They reported the need to enable women to climb the principalship career ladder, through such steps as appointing female teachers to be heads of departments in their schools and also involving women in continuous professional development programmes where they would be exposed to modules on school administration and management.

These inspectors believed that putting women in middle management positions (like head of department) would pave the way for them to attain principalship, since only people with management experience stand a chance of being considered for principalship. Historically, women have been the minority in all management positions, making their

chances for further promotion slim. Similarly, Weightman (cited in Bush and West-Burnham 1994) also saw the head of department job as part of a natural progression up the hierarchy. Weightman noted that the job of head of department has a clear role that everyone understands and this enables the post holder to be seen as being a manager and doing management work (Bush and West-Burnham 1994: 185).

One of the dangers of this strategy would, of course, be that the middle management position simply replaces the position of teacher as the new glass ceiling: the emphasis has to be on moving women *through* these positions.

5.4.2 Professional Development Programmes

Gone are the days when principals were expected to perform their duties in a hit-or-miss fashion due to lack of professional training in management. Nowadays, principalship is a task which not only requires academic certification, but also professional expertise in carrying out management duties. The ability to be an effective leader and to achieve success is aided, at least in part, by developmental opportunities received. To learn to be effective principals, women also need access to training and education programs.

My participants emphasized that new principals - including female principals - were involved in a continuous professional development programme, which was aimed at equipping new principals with knowledge and skills on school administration and management. They believed that this helped new principals in leading their schools successfully.

One of the inspectors also felt that it was important for a new principal to have a mentor. He stated “there is a mentor in each circuit who always shows them (new principals) how to manage their schools”. Burke and Collins (2001: 246) also note that individuals striving to become successful within an organization need coaching and guidance from their supervisors, mentors and peers. Smulyan (2000: 20) argues that women sometimes lack the information and experience that would provide stepping stones into the bureaucracy, because they do not have the networks and mentors, frequently available to

male teachers who aspire, to or are encouraged to consider, administrative careers. Given this situation one may ask whether one mentor per circuit system employed by my participants would be enough to cater for both men and women who need support and encouragement. More importantly, would the mentors all be male? This lack of mentorship may possibly have had a contributing effect to women's later entry into the principalship and to the feelings of isolation women who aspire to and assume positions of leaderships experience Smulyan 2000: 20).

According to Shakeshaft (in van der Westhuizen 1991:559), this approach, where the male educational leader is held up as a model for female aspirants, leads women to emulate these models without question as though this were the only way of working which ensures success and efficacy. Shakeshaft (in Van der Westhuizen 1991: 559) further argues that this imitated behaviour (with male models as the only norm) is also possibly not the best or most sensible way of working for educational managers. It is therefore interesting to note that women's ways of working should not be seen as inferior or ineffective but equally important.

5.4.3 Affirmative Action

Affirmative action was perceived by one of my participants as a strategy to help women achieve senior positions. He stated: "affirmative action is already there, making it a bit easier for women to get into management positions". The Namibian constitution calls for affirmative action to make sure that women participate fully in all spheres of life, especially in decision-making positions. Article 23 of the Namibian Constitution states:

> It shall be permissible to have regard to the fact that women in Namibia have traditionally suffered special discrimination and that they need to be encouraged and enabled to play a full, equal and effective role in the political, social, economic and cultural life of the nation (The Constitution of Namibia not dated: 16).

Affirmative action has been defined by Greyvenstein (in van der Westhuizen 1991:558) as

> ... a positive action taken to remove artificial, arbitrary, and unnecessary barriers to employment when these barriers operate insidiously to discriminate on the basis of racial or other impermissible classifications.

The BMF Blueprint (in Gerber, Nel and Van Dyk 1999:155) defines affirmative action as:

> a planned positive process and strategy aimed at transforming socio-economic environments which have excluded individuals from disadvantaged groups, in order for such disadvantaged individuals to gain access to opportunities, including developmental opportunities, based on their suitability.

It is very clear from the definitions above why government has adopted the affirmative action policy: it is interested in national reconstruction and elimination of all the inequalities of past discrimination.

I found that my research participants had reached that point of understanding the democratic practices of the Namibian education system, which requires everybody to be treated equally. These participants therefore acknowledged that much still needed to be done to get more women on board. I found inspectors' attitudes positive: they were ready and willing to implement the affirmative action practices in their circuits to enable women to take up leadership positions. This is evident in what inspector B was doing in his circuit, where he was putting women in head of department positions in order to pave their way to principalship. This seems an important practice in helping to eliminate discrimination against women. I also believe that actions speak louder than words, because it is common knowledge that Policies and Acts (like the Affirmative Action Act) can be enforced by law, but their success depends on changing attitudes. Policy only becomes real when the mindset of those implementing them is ready to receive their intentions. I thus believe the positive attitude shown by these participants is important in transforming the education system, through encouraging more equitable participation in leadership: inspectors are able to effect transformation, since they are directly involved in appointing principals.

However, though these inspectors showed that they were working towards changing the school environment, the picture is still pitiful: the number of female school principals was still very low after 14 years of independence; for example, there was still not a single female principal in senior secondary schools. It seems that the top leadership (inspectors included) is still holding onto the old system of appointing principals and thus not fully implementing affirmative action and other strategies for gender equity. It is also important to note here that the successful implementation of affirmative action programmes in organizations is dependent on the organization's ability to adapt to change. They say, "old habits die slow", and perhaps the 'old guard' finds it difficult to get rid of the traditional and comfortable practices. In other words, the pervasive organizational culture has not changed to the extent that these inspectors' views suggest, and may be retarding the organization's ability to adapt to change and challenge (Gerber, Nel and Van Dyk 1999: 164).

Affirmative action should not merely be seen as the replacement of male principals with female principals to redress inequality: this will not improve the education quality in our education institutions. If affirmative action includes assessing the skills profile of both men and women, so as to determine what must be done to improve their skills, this would be a step closer to redressing inequalities, facilitating the advancement of those socially, economically or educationally disadvantaged.

It is thus important for my participants, as implementers of affirmative action, to understand this legislation in its entirety. This will enable them not to just appoint people simply because they have been disadvantaged and regardless of whether they can handle the situations. Steven Carter, an African-American law school graduate, felt unhappy and insulted when he was given a post because he was viewed as "the best black": he wanted to be judged on his merits, not on being black (Reece and Brandt 1996: 420). On the basis of this, Reece and Brandt (1996: 420) warn that when affirmative action employees find they are different from the majority of their co-workers and supervisors, they may experience loneliness and isolation. They may not be able to gain the sense of "belonging" that is essential to self-motivation and eventually may leave their jobs. One

could say that preferential treatment should be justified on an individual's merits (skills) not only on his/her historical status, since such preferential treatment subjects the person to self-doubt. Thus, affirmative action policy should not simply overlook more qualified people and fill positions with incompetent people. This is in line with one of the basic principles of affirmative action in Namibia, which states that preferential treatment under carefully planned affirmative action programmes should only be given to suitably qualified persons (Gerber, Nel and Van Dyk 1999: 162).

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter looked at how inspectors viewed and perceived females as school principals. It emerged from the interviews that these inspectors, though to some extent still trapped in stereotyped visions of the principalship, were aware of the limitations inherent in past discriminatory thinking and practice. They perceived 'feminine' qualities like caring, good listening and empathy as important ingredients of effective leadership. They perceived and accepted female principals as being as good as, or sometimes even better, than their male counterparts at leadership.

They did, however, acknowledge that the colonial past and cultural stereotypes have played a major role in discrimination against women. One of the inspectors felt that all one needs to be an effective leader is emotional strength: the sex of the individual is irrelevant, although this same quality was seen by another inspector as lacking in women: he saw women as not having the courage to take up challenges but rather as giving up easily in difficult situations.

This research also established that, although these male inspectors accepted that women are as capable as men, there was still no single female principal running a senior secondary school 14 years after independence. It was also found that these inspectors could not refer to a female principal as a 'best principal' when they were asked to mention and talk about best principals in their circuits, they only did so after being asked follow-up questions prompting them to think about female principals too. This, which

they attributed to the low number of female principals in their circuits, they could easily refer to.

But the question that can be asked is: why are they still no senior secondary female principal after 14 years? One of the possible answers could be that those responsible for the selection of principals do not look at potential and qualifications women have, but are primarily interested in previous leadership record (experience) when selecting, which is unlikely to be found in female teachers. This later leads to absence of role models for women, which was seen as a contributing factor to the low number of women principals.

In the next chapter, I present a summary of my main findings, conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present a summary of my main findings, discuss the potential value, as well as the limitations, of the study and make recommendations arising from my findings. Finally I present possible areas for further research.

6.2 Summary of main findings

My findings present a mixed picture of female leadership in the context of principalship in Namibia. My respondents identified, and to some extent also portrayed, traces of stereotyped thinking as regards the suitability of women to the nature of principals' work. These are factors, which contribute to the low number of females in principalship, and include the following:

- The post of principalship was seen as competitive, requiring someone with many years of experience in management to qualify. It required emotional toughness and self-confidence. These qualities of emotional toughness and competitiveness were traditionally presented in literature as male characteristics.
- Management and leadership posts were still perceived to be male territory
- The low numbers of women in top positions creates a vicious cycle, whereby there are not enough role models to motivate aspiring women leaders
- Women teachers were still thought of in terms of their roles in their families; the argument being that they did not apply for promotion posts because they did not want to leave their families to work in rural areas

- Male domination in management positions had an influence on the selection process. In this case, these inspectors referred to their own situation, where they were all male and played a major role in appointment of principals.

It was also found that these inspectors perceived the following qualities as essential and desirable in an effective principal, irrespective of sex. These inspectors favoured principals who:

- Were committed to their work
- Had good interpersonal working relationships: they were caring
- Were problem solvers: they paid attention to task and structure
- Were good communicators and good listeners
- Were visionary and able to convey this vision to others
- Were knowledgeable of their school development plan and produced good results

The above findings are in keeping with the findings of other researchers, such as Burke and Collins (2001), and Hudson and Rea (1998). Although this study was not concerned with finding out the inspectors' perceptions of the differences between the way men and women lead, it emerged that female principals were perceived as good leaders because they were seen as good listeners, they were caring and they were more self-disciplined than men. Some studies have strengthened the contention that these characteristics have traditionally been attributed to women's way of leading and are desirable in today's male leaders too (Hudson and Rea 1998: 3, Shakeshaft in Smulyan 2000: 24). Van der Westhuizen (1991: 527) also states that these outstanding qualities should not be regarded as being counter-productive or professionally negative, but rather as assets. These qualities have also been described in much of the literature as parallel to transformational leadership.

The respondents also felt the following opportunities to help advance women teachers were available:

- They (the inspectors) were putting women in middle management positions to prepare them for principalship.
- Professional development programmes aimed at equipping new principals (male and female) with knowledge and skills on school management and administration
- The implementation of affirmative action strategies in educational institutions and other government institutions.

This study seems to confirm that, although the three inspectors who were interviewed were male and had been influenced by past stereotypical and cultural factors in their leadership, they perceived and acknowledged female principalship as of equal worth with male principalship. They attributed more importance to female principals who had been successful in leading their schools than men. They attributed the success of women principals to qualities mentioned above, such as caring, being good listeners and being visionary. These inspectors also acknowledged that inequality still existed between men and women due to past historical and social influences. Since the picture of female principals that emerged closely matches the picture these inspectors held of their preferred school principal, one may ask why the disparities are still so pronounced: to whom, then, should these women prove themselves?

6.3 Implications of this study

This study demonstrates that superiors, in this case male inspectors, often recognise the strength that lies in the so-called 'feminine' qualities. Therefore, this should be seen to motivate, not discourage, female principals and aspiring female leaders to apply for leadership positions.

These positive perceptions shown by male inspectors toward female principalship and inspector's awareness of stereotyped attitudes of men towards women in societies are an indication that there is awareness that leadership is from within and not linked to the sex of a person.

Findings such as these can play a role in changing the negative expectations which society holds towards women, since generally-held negative perceptions of women as leaders have been identified in literature as accounting for the lack of women in senior positions.

It is my hope also that these results will benefit and help both men and women to learn to understand and appreciate their differences and see themselves as equals. This may also ease women's entry into the male-dominated arena of management and leadership and will influence societal expectations and help to create a more favourable environment. Since no similar study has been conducted so far in this region, I hope this study will contribute to enhancing our understanding of principalship in general, and female principalship in particular.

6.4 Recommendations

This study, though only a small-scale study, has shown that women school principals can be perceived as effective leaders. Linking this study to the current situation in schools, I would like to make the following recommendations:

Since inspectors play a major role in recommending teachers for principal positions, they should be at the fore in promoting active participation of women in school management and leadership by encouraging them to apply for senior positions and giving them equal opportunities with men.

They should also positively influence other stakeholders in education, like parents and school boards, to accept and value female leadership as a valuable resource. During meetings, stakeholders should be encouraged to talk about their stereotyped attitudes and identify how to address these attitudes so that they do not affect the work environment.

While these male inspectors felt that affirmative action policies would help bring more women on board, or help women overcome the hurdles along their career paths in

educational leadership, and were showing commitment to affirmative action (which is a most important step), it is important to note that persons, including women without required training or experience, should not be placed in management positions over trained and experienced males just because of affirmative action. Rather, training programs that will help to develop the full potential of both men and women should be developed and implemented. Applicants should be identified based on their strengths and skills that are not necessarily gender-specific. It is my belief that we all have a sense of pride in what we achieve because of our abilities, not because of favours given to us.

Both men and women should participate in the design and implementation of these programmes so that they will not be bemoaned by others as being male-oriented, like other previous programmes. This will also help men and women accept and value their similarities and differences in leadership. This exposure will allow women interested in leadership positions to have confidence in applying for and taking up leadership positions.

Women leaders should not view themselves as weaker and lose their self-confidence when faced with challenges, but rather see challenges as given and learn to deal with them. Women leaders should also be role models to their aspirants and should be encouraged to have meetings, especially in rural areas, and to have career sessions with female teachers in schools. This will help as a reinforcing factor. Therefore, if more women leaders set an example of leading effectively, even in senior secondary schools which are still regarded as male arenas, their actions will be contagious to other women watching them and these women will want to emulate them.

Since the research participants were all male, women should also celebrate the applause they received from their perceived leadership by males and not deny themselves the opportunities to advance to top-level positions, they should let go of their stereotypes. I think that my research has added something to the overall debate on women leaders.

6.5. Possible areas for further research

My attempt in this study was to understand how male inspectors perceived female principalship. Therefore, other aspects of female principalship were not dealt with in this study. In order to advance our understanding about female principalship, this study raises some questions that could be answered by further researchers.

First, as stated earlier, the data for this study was gathered by interviewing three male inspectors to describe their perceptions. An alternative approach could have been to ask female principals themselves to describe the behaviour of their superiors i.e. inspectors, towards them. This could help to understand whether female principals think they are perceived positively or negatively.

Second, it would be of interest to assess whether these female principals' qualities of caring, nurturing and being good listeners, perceived by inspectors, are perceived as strong or weak qualities by other stakeholders, like parents and students. Third, it would be of value to find out whether the continuous professional development programme mentioned by the participants is gender-neutral. For example, who develops and gives this programme, and are all men and women given the same and equal opportunities to participate and does the content of this programme meet both men's and women's needs?

6.6. Limitations of the study

As mentioned earlier, the data were gathered through interviews with inspectors. There is a possibility of perception errors and bias on the part of my respondents. They may have been inclined to share those positive aspects or experiences concerning women that they thought I was interested in hearing about, rather than giving me their unbiased view. Their perceptions may also differ from the actual behaviour of female principals.

Secondly, the study was a small-scale study, where only three inspectors were interviewed, and therefore the findings may not be generalisable to all female principals.

Thirdly, since all inspectors interviewed were male, there could have been some bias regarding female principalship.

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APPENDIX A: Interview schedule

The following are guidelines rather than questions. All three interviews were conducted along the following lines of enquiry, though they differed slightly from each other depending on how each inspector responded:

Question 1 focused on the **qualities** inspectors were looking for in the selection and appointment of school principals.

Question 2 followed up on question 1, probing for reasons why respondents regarded the qualities they mentioned as important.

Question 3 asked the respondents to identify (without naming) a principal in their region who was doing well, and invited them to explain why this person was making a success of the task of leading a school. Here I was aiming at going to respondents' real experience of leadership in their schools, rather than tapping into their generalised theoretical knowledge.

Question 4 typically became a follow up question, asking for more concrete examples of what successful principals were doing that made them successful.

Questions 5 began to focus on female leadership. Respondents typically did not mention women as examples of successful principals – here I asked if there were any women principals who were successful.

The example of women leaders mentioned in question 5 was then probed in Question 6, in terms of what it was that contributed to their success. An example of probing was asking more about the female principal who managed to get a school hall built with the help of the community.

Question 7 probed the reasons why there were so few women principals in the region. Question 8 focused on the respondents' reasons for their answers to Question 7, for example one respondent said it used to be believed that women did not have the "guts" for the job – this was then probed.

Question 9 asked for plans and programmes that might be in place to encourage and empower women to become principals.

The last question was an open-ended one, asking for the respondents' views on female leadership.