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**GENDERED EXPERIENCES: A STUDY OF FOUR WOMEN  
HEADS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

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**MASTER OF EDUCATION**

**2002**

**This study was funded by a grant from the CSD**

**GENDERED EXPERIENCES: A STUDY OF FOUR WOMEN HEADS IN THE  
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**RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTER OF EDUCATION DEGREE**

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**JUNE 2002**

## **ABSTRACT**

Social discourses and gender equality policies in South Africa has enabled the entry of significant numbers of women into predominantly male domains of educational leadership. In this study, the lived experiences, of four women heads of department in four historically race classified schools in the Durban Metropolitan area, are explored. This study probes the gendered experiences, in which, race and class are inextricably interwoven, as heads of department in commerce and questions the extent to which their leadership positions are a reflection of gender equality. Based on semi-structured interviews with the research participants (black, coloured, Indian and white), this study argues that despite occupying the status of head of department the research participants still assume gender subjective roles. Although, some evidence exists of changing patterns of these women's lives at different stages, the study reveals that the public and private spheres of work and family are not separate entities; they intersect and impinge, with particular implications for the position of women within the sphere of education leadership. The study reveals that despite an overarching discourse of gender equality, discourses of leadership are primarily about gender, race and class structure in the lived experiences of the participants. The gendered experiences overall was such that they inhibited these women from applying for further promotion. In effect, the study shows that these women, irrespective of being educated and occupying positions of leadership, are still in a state of subjugation and male domination.

# **APPRECIATION**

## **TO MY PARENTS**

For your silence on me deviating from your norms of what being woman means, so I may  
fulfill my life

## **TO MY SISTERS**

For the acknowledgement you accord me that feeds me the courage to reach higher

## **TO MY CHILDREN**

**(Michelle Naidoo & Donelle Fisher)**

For your attitude to challenge boundaries that helped me find my spirit

## **TO THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

For sharing your personal experiences and making this study possible

## **TO DEAREST NYNA AMIN**

For your selflessness

## **TO JAY & VIDYA AMIN**

For gracefully accepting my intrusions into your warm family life

## **TO MY SUPERVISOR, DEEVIA BHANA**

For sharing your knowledge, sensitivity and understanding

## **TO PRAVITHA NAIDOO, VIJAY NAIR, DAISY PILLAY AND DR MICHAEL SAMUEL**

For your counsel

## **TO MY FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES AT WORK**

For your patience and understanding

**DECLARATION...**

I, Dayanathie Naidoo, declare that this dissertation is my own work and has not been submitted previously for any degree in any university.

.....

RESEARCHER

.....

SUPERVISOR

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

*Women's values are stacked against the traditions of their professions*

(Swiss & Walker 1993:1)

### 1.1 THE STUDY IN CONTEXT

This study explores the gendered experiences of four heads of department in commerce, in secondary schools in the Durban Metropolitan area in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The main argument of the study is that positions of leadership are not guarantees of gender equality, as asymmetrical and unequal power relations still exist. The participants in this study define their positions by their historical, social and cultural discourses, which tend to reproduce stereotypical images of themselves.

Data for this study, conducted in 2000, was obtained through semi-structured interviews. This research tool allowed for in-depth exploration of the gendered career experiences of the research participants. Each participant selected, represents a microscopic view of her gendered experiences as a black, or a coloured, or an Indian or a white woman as head in the department of commerce. Although the racial classifications of the research participants no longer carry legal force, they still carry social and political weight in terms of their lived experiences as black, or coloured or Indian or white women and therefore these race classifications are used in the study.

This study was conceptualized against the landscape of gender and race sensitive policies (HRM circular No. 35 of 1999, HRM Circular No. 37 of 1999 and Procedure Manual for Processing School-Based Promotions of 1999) that were being implemented by the Department of Education (DOE) in KwaZulu-Natal in 1999 with specific reference to the

appointment of school managers. These managerial positions were widely advertised and there was a mandate to appoint previously disadvantaged sectors (which included black women). The experiences of the research participants, analyzed from an eclectic feminist perspective, borrowed ideologies from radical, socialist and poststructural feminist theories. The following questions formed the foci of the analyses:

- What are the lived experiences of women in positions of leadership, as heads of department in commerce in secondary schools?
- How do these women construct themselves in these positions of leadership?
- How do these constructions help to cast light on the challenges that these women experience?

## **1.2 PERSONAL MOTIVATION AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY**

The motivation for this study is driven by personal experiences and the context I find myself in at present.

When I began teaching commerce, I experienced how being a woman led to my being treated differently compared to the male members on staff who were in the same field as myself: Commerce. I began teaching at a school where the managers (principal, deputy principal and heads of department) were all male. They made the decisions of who taught what.

I was given the task of teaching Typing, Accounting and Business Economics. There seemed to be no question about the allocation of Typing, from grade ten to grade twelve, to me. For Business Economics and Accounting, I was allocated grades eight and nine because the upper grades were the preserve of the males. I was led to believe that as a woman, it was in my own interest to gain experience in the lower grades before I could

teach these subjects in the higher classes. I noticed that male commerce teachers were not expected to 'gain experience' before being allowed to teach the higher classes. Typing has been constructed as 'woman's subject' and Accounting and Business Economics as 'male subjects'. It occurred to me that this was the chief reason why I was given Typing to teach.

This experience was not an isolated one. In 1997, when the DOE offered early retirement packages, the position of Typing teacher became available at the school where I taught. I was the first one approached by the principal with regard to filling this vacancy. Traditionally at this school, too, Typing was regarded as a low-status subject when compared to the status accorded to Accounting and Business Economics. It was therefore appropriate for me, a woman, to teach Typing as I was considered to have less status than my male colleagues.

During my more recent years as a teacher, in a secondary school, I have seen women commerce teachers take secondary roles to their male colleagues. I have seen women being overlooked for promotion, or when promoted they seem to exercise little authority in making decisions as heads of departments. The position of head of department seems to be a mere title. Should this be the case?

In my experience as an educator, I have observed two situations involving female colleagues:

In situation one, which includes myself, I have seen many women who are capable, hardworking, dedicated, effective and successful teachers, with many years of experience who appear to be happy with their teaching positions. They seem content in their current positions; do not apply for promotion (which would catapult them into managerial positions) and are in subordinate positions to the authority of upper management (generally male) who are in certain cases much younger and with less experience than them. What I cannot fathom is why we women lack ambition and how we can subject ourselves to subordination - to younger, less experienced males.

Situation two, describes the experience of being under the supervision of a woman principal. The impression I gained was that the principal did not exert her power as the head of the educational institution. The power and authority of the principal appeared to be that of a mere figurehead. The 'real' authority was invested by the principal in the deputy principal, a 'male', occupying a position of upper management and next in charge at this school. 'He' seemed to wield more power and authority with staff and learners alike compared to the principal. 'His' voice was heard at staff meetings when a debate arose. 'He' was elected to address certain issues at staff meetings. 'He' was ever visible around the school campus. This visibility itself presented him as a person with power. 'He' formulated and implemented school policies. 'He' seemed to be the head of the institution. The more the figurehead (principal) receded into the background because of 'his' projected competencies as manager, the more opportunities he gained to foreground himself as the head of the institution. Why did she (the principal) allow this to happen?

Perhaps the answer lies in the way women construct their identities and themselves; which will be interrogated in this study.

Against the above scenarios, this study was undertaken with the following rationale:

1. Too often, research neglects the issue of social and power relations in the formation of women's experience thus neglecting the questions: 'Who is being empowered?' and 'In whose interests is empowerment being enacted?' The study aims to foreground women as subjects and give them 'ear' as they express their **own** interpretations of their **own** experiences.
2. In response to gender equity policies and GETT (Gender Equity Task Team – an initiative taken by the National Department of Education in accordance with South Africa's vision of gender equality), DOE has begun implementing promotion procedures to balance the inequalities and to promote women to management positions. Now, more women occupy head of department, principal and deputy principal positions, but: Are women seen as being equal to their male colleagues?

My study intends to investigate how four women heads of department in commerce experience these challenges and whether GETT has any influence on the research participants being able to exercise their power and authority, inherent in these leadership positions.

3. Teaching is perceived as an extension of mother's work (Shakeshaft 1987, Wolpe et al 1997). Just as a mother cares, nurtures and loves her child, a teacher is expected to create this 'natural', maternal environment for the child in school. However, as women move into promotion positions, administrative duties take precedence over pastoral roles. My study intends to explore how this influences the experiences of the research participants. How deeply are those 'maternal' traits innate in these commerce heads of department?
4. Our gendered histories, the different roles and positions we take on in our lives as women and our race play a significant role in defining who we are and the way we experience our lives. This study about women heads of department in commerce who were schooled and socialized in apartheid South Africa, intends an exploration to foreground the experiences that shaped and impacted on these women's lives.

### **1.3 POLICIES INFORMING THIS STUDY**

The South African education system, before 1994, was shaped by the philosophy of apartheid. This was characterized by racial inequality in terms of government spending, access to education and the design of the school curriculum. Apartheid curriculum was a tool to promote values, cultural beliefs and norms, thus legitimizing unequal social and political power relations. The separate and unequal education system of 1948 was a system based on 'Christian' and 'National' policies.

Apartheid presented women in the teaching sector with yet another discrimination hurdle. Wolpe et al (1997) asserts that the discrimination that kept black women out of certain positions was instituted through apartheid. Hendrik Verwoerd's introduction to the Bantu

Education Act in 1954 (Wolpe et al 1997) demonstrates the sexist and racist ideology behind the historical positioning of women in the education sector:

*As a woman is by nature so much fitted for handling young children, and as the great majority of Bantu children are to be found in the lower classes of primary school, it follows that there should be far more female than male teachers. The department will therefore ... declare the assistant posts in ... primary schools to be female teachers' posts ... Quotas will be laid down at training schools as regards numbers of male and female candidates respectively who may be allowed to enter for the courses ... this measure will, in the course of time, bring about a considerable saving of funds ... (Wolpe et al 1997:197)*

The Government of National unity, which came into being in South Africa in 1994, not only inherited a racially and socially divided education, but also an imbalance in the promotion of women into management positions in the education system. Although gender was not a key element in the government's vision for transformation, the government, educationalists and trade unions alike recognized the importance of addressing gender inequalities. A series of discussion documents, debates and proposed policies with a view of creating a non-racial and non-sexist education system ensued.

In acknowledgement of the serious disparities between men and women in the education sector, the education White Paper (1995) called for the establishment of gender equity. It reported that women suffer discrimination and ill treatment, male domination and sexual harassment, amongst other forms of abuse. The White Paper (1995) also asserted that the values and gender role patterns of South African women had much to do with South Africa's values for patriarchy.

In keeping with its commitment as a signatory to the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), South Africa now has gender equity firmly enshrined in the Constitution of South Africa. The constitution refers to the following gender values:

*(a) Human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms*

*(b) Non-racialism and non-sexism (Wolpe et al 1997:3)*

The Employment Equity Bill also proposes to achieve workplace equality by

*(a) Promoting equal opportunity and fair treatment in employment through the elimination of unfair discrimination; and*

*(b) Implementing positive measures to redress the disadvantages in employment experienced by black people, women... to ensure their equitable representation in all occupational categories and level in the workforce. (Department of Labour 1997:6)*

In accordance with South Africa's vision of the principle of gender equality, the National Department of Education took the lead to appoint a Gender Equity Task Team (GETT). The GETT Report identified numerous concerns with regard to sexism in schools among which was:

*establishing schools as sites where there is critical and active promotion of all forms, including rights based on sex, gender and sexual orientation.*

and

*investigate and advise on the establishment of a permanent Gender Equity Unit (White Paper 1995:27)*

Based on the attention the National Department of Education at ministerial level paid to the education department's commitment to equity, the establishment of the GETT was to focus on formulating guidelines to establish a Gender Equity Unit (GEU) in the National Department of Educational. The proposed structures for gender equity in education drew on international experience of institutionalizing gender policy, planning and implementation (Wolpe et al 1997).

Subsequently, in 1996, Parliament passed a legislation that made provision for the Commission for Gender Equity (CGE), an independent body, to act as a watchdog for gender equality. The object of the CGE was:

*To promote gender and to advise and to make recommendations to Parliament or any other legislature with regard to any laws or proposed legislation which affects gender equality and the status of women. (Basson 1995:183)*

In honouring its commitment to gender equality policies, the year 1999 heralded a period when more women were promoted to management positions than at any other time in South African history. A manual, prescribed by the Department of Education in KwaZulu-Natal, with regard to promotion procedures for educators to management positions specified:

- *Affirmative action, measures for designated groups, namely Blacks [which include Indians, Coloureds and Africans], women ...*
- *Representativity (Procedure Manual for Processing School Based Promotions 1999:11)*

Despite official policy and genuine efforts to implement recommendations regarding the advancement of females in the teaching sector, large numbers of males, in dominant positions, continue to prevail. Women can only assume such positions when they become vacant as the men move up or move out.

This raises the following question:

- What happens when women move into spaces (positions of leadership) previously occupied by males?

The four participants in this study have taken this bold step. This study explores their experiences in these 'power spaces'.

## **1.4 LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section explores the literature available on gender studies with regard to women in the education sector. The literature review is organized around three headings:

- Teaching as a career
- Women teach, men manage
- A woman's place

The rationale for these categories is based on the dominant discourses that prevail in literature with regard to gender studies on women in the education sector, regarding career choices, upward mobility and the way women construct themselves.

### **1.4.1 Teaching as a career**

There is a widely held belief that the role of women is that of wives and mothers and that their participation in the labour market is marginal. Wolpe et al (1997) asserts that women are clustered around the lowest levels in terms of their status and pay in the work arena. To date, women have dominated the education profession in South Africa as anywhere else in the world, but not in positions of leadership and management. (Chisholm & Napo 1999; De la Rey 1998; Wolpe et al 1997; Truscott 1994). Kotecha (1994) attributes the South African situation to the following:

- Society encourages girls to pursue traditionally female occupations, to continue the female domestic role

- Due to the limited range of occupations for women, teaching ranks as a high status profession for women

Butlender (1996) and Truscott (1994) suggest that the high number of women teachers in South Africa is steeped in its history. Hendrik Verwoerd (a South African prime minister) implemented the Bantu Education Act of 1954 to increase the quota of women teachers in 'Bantu' (black) education by manipulating gender representation at schools. Men were actively discouraged from teaching, particularly in the primary school. They 'phased out' as training facilities available for male teachers were closed. The few men who continued to teach did so on condition that they accepted low the salaries paid to the women.

According to Kotecha (1994), married women in the South African teaching fraternity had no chance of promotion. A married woman was not considered for the position of principal, deputy principal or vice-principal regardless of her ability and/or experience. However, all men and single women were preferred. Although this overt discrimination was removed, its legacy has undoubtedly shaped the power relations in the education sector. According to Wolpe et al (1997), in 1994, only four percent of women held the position of principal compared to eleven percent of men.

Wolpe et al (1997) asserts that women were faced with two kinds of discrimination. First, direct discrimination, which kept black people out of certain positions and was institutionalized through apartheid. Second, indirect discrimination, the result of women being more likely to leave work to rear children, thus decreasing their seniority which resulted in elimination from promotion. Seniority, therefore indirectly discriminated against women, when used as a criterion for upward mobility.

The South African school organization in structure and curriculum tends, also, to reflect the sexual division of labour (Truscott 1994). Chisholm (2001) asserts that recent research on school administration and policy has seemingly linked leadership to the male species. She elaborates that South Africa is a case in recent years where a powerful

agenda for social justice has shaped the bureaucracy in the education sector. Policies (HRM Circular No. 35 of 1999, HRM Circular No. 37 of 1999, Procedure Manual for Processing School Base Promotions 1999) for promotion into leadership positions, as stated previously, were implemented. While the intention of the policy was to be socially just, what actually happened during implementation was that it did not consider whether the women were actually 'ready' for the leadership positions. This led to a new set of problems, which, women, due to their experiences as subordinates, have not had opportunities to develop.

Archer and Lloyd (1992) assert that stereotypes reinforce the idea of 'men's work' and 'women's work', thereby influencing gender differences in occupational pursuits, training, opportunities and aspiration levels. They suggest that gender stereotypes affect people's expectations about their own performance. The very descriptions of men being *forceful, enterprising, assertive, confident, rational and tough* (Archer & Lloyd 1992:235) typify success in high profile jobs. Feminine adjectives such as *soft-hearted, sentimental, talkative, gentle, emotional* (Archer & Lloyd 1992:235) make women unsuitable for high occupational achievement.

Witz (1993) asserts that women engage in a complex web of work activities, which span both public and private spheres. The tasks that women perform in each of these spheres are often similar and may be defined as 'servicing tasks' (e.g. cleaning, cooking, feeding and tidying up).

Anderson and Collins (1992) assert that men are twice as likely to specialize in business and the sciences and are seven times more likely to concentrate on the engineering field. They elaborate that while men pursue fields aligned with better paying jobs in more powerful positions of business, science and technology, women tend to study in fields that align themselves with poorer pay and less status in health, education and the social services sector.

McMullan (1993) states that teaching is not like the traditional career (which involves a deliberate effort to plan and strategize ones upward mobility).

*Traditional concepts of a 'career' often present it as a conscious and deliberate attempt to progress through the hierarchy. In this sense the concept of career is often an 'objective' notion which relates to the rational structures of an organization. Career is often defined in rational terms, e.g. that hierarchy, prestige, continuity and upward mobility are prime motivators ... (McMullan 1993:123)*

Ouston (1993) agrees that teaching is 'subjective'

*There are deeply personal aspects of teachers' work, which make it very distinctive from other types of work. (Ouston 1993:69)*

Shakeshaft (1987) and McMullan (1993) are in agreement that there are widely held beliefs that women do not necessarily perceive careers in the traditional way as they place importance on relationships in order to achieve their objectives.

Bassow (1992) is of the opinion that men are more achievement motivated than women. Women define success or failure more in terms of intrinsic criteria (how they feel about it).

*Part of the confusion about gender differences in achievement, motivation and behaviour have been due to using men as a norm, and then trying to understand why women don't act like men. (Bassow 1992:74).*

Swiss and Walker (1993) concur that today's women have to find a fierce determination to discover new options for being both parent and professional without sacrificing too much to either role; thus *burning themselves beyond redemption* (Swiss & Walker

1993:1). They elaborate that many women grapple with the choice between family and profession. They do this in one of three ways:

- Developing plans for a rewarding career and time to enjoy family
- Stay at home for a period before returning to work
- Change jobs to a more 'parent friendly' work culture

In addition, they assert that careers are not tailor made for professional women who also choose motherhood. These women, in merging their dual roles, risk losing confidence and optimism as their older male colleagues favour traditional family values, namely, a women's place should be at home.

Measor and Sikes (1992) state that the most commonly given reasons for women in lower teaching positions is attributed to the leave taken for motherhood and raising children. Research with secondary school teachers in Warwickshire (in Measor & Sikes 1992) reveal that while sixty percent of their research participants did not have children, nationally thirty percent of women teachers, over fifty years of age, were childless.

Powney and Weiner (1991) identify a woman teacher as a 'drifter'. This woman works hard and loyally and 'drifts' into promotion as a reward. She does not strategize career changes but may respond when one becomes available.

Ainsberg and Harrington (1989) agree that women are less likely to have a career map for upward mobility. They assert that media attention on parenting magnifies the guilt that women feel for their choices. Mothers who continue working may question their decision about not being a 'traditional' mum. Their ambivalence may grow as they hear stories about female college dropouts rediscovering the joys of motherhood and serving in community projects or finding employment in the service sector.

Thus literature on 'teaching as a career' for women reveals that:

- Women, due to society's view of them as wives and mothers, are marginalized in the labour market (Wolpe et al 1997)
- Women cluster in the lowest levels of skill, pay and status (Chisholm & Napo 1998; Wolpe et al 1997; Kotecha 1994; Truscott 1994)
- Women form the majority in the teaching sector in South Africa and this is attributed to its history of sexism and apartheid (Butlender 1996; Kotecha 1994; Truscott 1994)
- South African women teachers, like their colleagues world wide, do not aspire towards promotion as they perceive that managerial positions suit male characteristics (Chisholm 2001; Truscott 1994)
- Women are vastly influenced by the stereotyped reinforcement of 'man's work and 'women's work' (Archer & Lloyd 1992)
- Women align themselves to servicing tasks (Witz 1993) in occupations such as the health, education and social sectors (Anderson & Collins 1992)
- Women do not necessarily perceive careers in the traditional way and thus do not plan strategically for upward mobility (McMullan 1993; Bassow 1992; Powney & Weiner 1991; Shakeshaft 1987)
- Women seem to attach more importance on relationships than on careers (McMullan 1993)
- Teaching allows women to be both parent and career professional (Swiss & Walker 1993)

- A career in teaching seems to satisfy society's expectations of the role of women as well as resolves conflicts within women (Kotecha 1994)
- Media's portrayal of women drives them towards careers in the education sector (Ainsberg & Harrington 1989).

#### **1.4.2 Women teach, men manage**

Christie (1996) asserts that the overall organization in the South African school context is, essentially, authoritarian in nature. When one enters the school (black or white) context one immediately notices who is in charge. There is a ladder of seniority – the principal at the top, then the deputy principal, then the senior teachers, followed by the level one (classroom) educators.

Recent literature in education and gender (Blackmore 1999; Sachs & Blackmore 1998) has linked leadership in education administration as male dominated in two ways:

- Gendered character of organizational culture
- The way in which women negotiate these conditions

Blackmore (1999) warns that when social justice shapes the recomposition of bureaucracies of the state, it simultaneously restricts the educational organization, in which asymmetrical and unequal social relations of gender exist. This sets the stage for conflict and contradiction between policy goals and outcomes.

According to Walker (1998), women do not fare as well as men in their academic careers. Acker (1994) characterizes women as the 'other' academics. Acker (1994), Luke and Gore (1992) and Thomas (1990) concur that while women in higher education do not face overt discrimination, the everyday practices of exclusion which are more subtle,

more deeply embedded, and more difficult to contest and resist, despite claims to egalitarianism, are evident.

Ouston's (1993) stance is that women in education seek cross-curricular, pastoral and support activities rather than seek management positions in education. She documents research to illustrate that women prefer to define their teaching careers as good classroom teaching rather than upward mobility.

Acker (1989) attributes the rejection of hierarchical ambition as forming the biology of women. She asserts that women are programmed genetically to reject ambitious intentions. She adds, that it is women's biology that directs them to socialization and satisfying experiences of alternative values as these constitute how women construct themselves. As a result, women do not lose a competition; rather, they choose not to participate in the hierarchical system.

However, she recognizes that women and men interpret their experiences differently and hence, construct themselves differently, due to socialization (the process that forms part of the structure of society like the social institution of the family, schools, church amongst others). In constructing themselves, women and men are influenced by those dominant groups that usually define one or more roles for them. Furthermore, once biology is appealed to as an essential basis for the understanding of women's differences, then the differences between women and men become fixed, and the only hope is for cultural re-evaluation of female qualities.

Acker (1994) asserts that the social lives of women committed to the work of the intellect, is contradictory. They faced a dilemma of balancing 'feminine' attributes (seen as appropriate for the job) and 'masculine' attributes (seen as unacceptable in women). This seems to reinforce the 'male as norm' syndrome for women.

*Those who do take a stance are regarded as eccentric, not actually strident and uncongenial. Whatever it does it seems only to reinforce the male-as-norm deficiencies.* (Acker 1994:140)

Travers and Cooper's (1991) study reports that women tend to be modest about their achievements and knowledge. Travers and Cooper's study (in Ouston 1993), confirmed by Shakeshaft (1993), illustrates that women teachers are stressed by performance appraisal as they lack self-confidence and self-esteem. This results in women rarely applying for jobs for which they are not highly qualified. While women internalize the belief that their self-esteem is lacking, men externalize this experience by blaming other factors.

Studies (Ouston 1993) reveal that it takes four times as many interviews for women to be appointed to higher positions as compared to men. Women look at this as a personal failure and rationalize that this was not the job for them in the first place.

Gill (1994) concurs that males have a smoother path in attaining administrative positions. Shakeshaft (1989) is of a firm belief that male dominance (exercising positions of power due to occupation of higher posts) leads to conditions that keep women from advancing into positions of power and prestige. According to Lousber (1996), women have to work twice as hard than men to prove themselves in the workplace.

Davidson and Cooper (1992), Swiss and Walker (1993), Burke (1993) and Heward (1994) contend that a 'glass ceiling' (concept that assumes that women have the motivation and ambition and capacity for positions of power, but invisible barriers prevent them from reaching the top), through which women need to break to liberate their career paths, exists. Loubser (1994) is of the opinion that many factors combine to create the 'glass ceiling' thus making it difficult for women to penetrate it.

Hill and Ragland (1995) assert that women are faced with internal barriers (ranging from lack of personal confidence to a fear of challenging the cultural expectations of their role)

prevent women from advancing in their educational careers. Shakeshaft and Cohen (1990) provide a reason for Hill and Ragland's (1995) argument. They base this erosion of self-esteem with life long effects on harassment and abuse levelled at female students by their male peers.

Shakeshaft (1993) asserts that practices of discrimination at the workplace, based on gender, are subtle and un-coded by the sender or the receiver. Interviews with women in school administration reveal that majority of the participants respond in the negative to the question of personal discrimination. However, Shakeshaft (1993) asserts that if the participants were given a list of discriminatory actions their responses would prove to be the opposite. She concludes that women, themselves, do not recognize sex discrimination.

Shakeshaft (1993) asserts that women do not become school administrators because they lack support in the form of formal and informal networks, that exist for men, to help them get interviews. Further, women are still primarily in charge of child-care and housekeeping. Russell's (1995) study reveals that women lack support from other women in the same field. This support seems to have its basis on nurturing support, rather than professional experience and information sharing.

Measor and Sikes (1992) concur that women in senior positions at schools do not provide examples of 'success' as they do not challenge traditional stereotypes. The message conveyed is that it is normal for male authority to be enforced.

Benn (1989) accords two reasons for male domination in upper management, which results in a dearth of female role models:

- Women service careers that accentuate their maternal roles
- Men 'protect' management positions for their own species

*The first is an extension of motherhood; the second an extension of power and authority, reserved for men, who have guarded it well. (Benn 1989:xix)*

Russell's (1995) studies reveal that women also have difficulty in finding mentors, partly because men occupy higher work positions. She alludes to the term 'conditional' mentoring where men mentor women who do not challenge them. They see such women as controllable, their 'loyal lieutenant' (in Russell 1995:134).

Hall (1993) and Shakeshaft (1987) report that differences exist in the management style of women as educational managers. Ouston (1993) agrees that men and women communicate differently. They assert that while women listen for feeling, men listen for facts. In addition, Ouston (1993) reports that women have a more participatory and democratic style of management compared to that of men. Once they become administrators, they are more likely to motivate and encourage empowerment than men. While men are more likely to emphasize organizational structure and to avoid conflict, women are more likely to:

- Establish instructional priorities
- Be attentive to social and emotional development of their students
- Be sensitive to the feelings of their teachers
- Include more 'facts' in evaluation, look for the effects of teachers' personality on the lives of the students
- Place emphasis on the technical skills of their teachers
- Make inputs on content from other sources
- Emphasize curricular improvement
- Provide immediate feedback to teachers and involve teachers in decision-making

Wolpe et al's (1997) study reveal that many women survive in male dominated environments of teaching as they adopt a hegemonic modus operandi. While various

leadership and management styles exist, there is no distinction between male and female styles. Women can be as autocratic as their male counterparts.

Literature reveals that the overall organization of the school context in South Africa is a male dominated context (Blackmore 1999; Sach & Blackmore 1998; Christie 1996; Blackmore 1993). This seems to prevent women in the education sector from aspiring towards positions of leadership (Walker 1998). Women are also subject to covert discrimination (Acker 1994; Luke & Gore 1992; Thomas 1990) which cannot be contested or resisted. Hence, women choose pastoral and support positions in schools rather than administrative positions. Literature provides the following reasons why 'men manage and women teach':

- The biological make-up of women (Acker 1989)
- The dilemma of balancing male perceived authority positions with feminine attributes (Acker 1994)
- The glass ceiling ( Shakeshaft 1993; Davidson & Cooper 1992)
- Lack of personal self-confidence coupled with the cultural expectations of the role of women (Hill & Ragland 1995; Shakeshaft & Cohen 1990)
- Women need to work twice as hard to prove themselves (Lousber 1996)
- Women communicate differently with their subordinates compared to men, when in leadership positions (Ouston 1993)
- Women lack the formal and informal structures that advance men in their careers (Shakeshaft 1993; Russell 1993, Measor & Sikes 1992)

### 1.4.3 A woman's role

Many South African women are still trapped in traditional roles because men do not take equal responsibility for family care and will not do what they regard as woman's work (Wolpe et al 1997).

*These domestic activities reflect women's very practical interests. These practical interests mirror the conditions in which women are dominated by men.*  
(Wolpe et al 1997:23)

Wolpe et al (1997) clarify 'practical interests' as that which enable women to fulfil aspects of their lives that are seen as integral to the roles ascribed to them as wives, companions, mothers, workers and community managers, such as house keeping, health care for children, access to water and firewood, access to education and security for women and children.

When Wolfe (1990) and Coward (1992) examined the compatibility of marriage and career on career-orientated women in the education sector, they found little research as to what extent this influenced women in schools. However, when women in senior posts in schools were surveyed they found this to be a factor.

Hileman (1990:123) states that a woman loses her independence "*when she adds the role of wife*". Studies have shown that women who share living spaces with men are more likely to assume the domestic role.

Hensel (1990) in her study with women in higher education, reveals that women experience feelings of guilt when they do not spend enough time on work as well as when they feel they are not fulfilling their maternal role adequately. She adds that the work force does not make sufficient provision to accommodate the special needs of women.

Coward (1992) suggests that becoming a parent is a critical stage for a woman in the course of her professional development. Parenthood creates conflict within working women. The compromise of part-time employment does not help. As a solution, women leave the employment sector. Ozga (1993) states that some women resolve this situation by remaining childless.

Measor and Sikes (1992) concur that careers are secondary to the needs of women as they place their families first. They leave work to have and care for children, look after sick relatives, or relocate with their partners due to his job commitment.

Literature on the role of women, is defined by society's perception of women primarily as mothers and wives. South African women still seem to be trapped in these traditional roles (Wolpe et al 1997). Some evidence exists that career and marriage are not compatible (Coward 1992; Wolpe 1990; Hileman 1990). Hence, women with careers experience two kinds of 'guilt feelings':

- That they do not devote enough attention to their careers
- That they do not devote enough time to their roles as mothers and wives (Hensel 1990).

A reasonable assumption is that women view their primary roles as that of mothers, wives, caregivers and housekeepers (Measor & Sikes 1992).

This leaves women with one of two choices:

- Leave the employment sector (Coward 1992)
- Not have children (Ozga 1993)

#### **1.4.4 Conclusion**

This section provided a literature review of women in the education sector from both a South African and an international perspective. A great deal of literature exists to explain why women in the education sector choose to conduct themselves in certain ways. While literature concentrates on women's leadership in academia, a paucity of information exists on the experiences of women teachers in positions of leadership in schools. Research on heads of department in secondary schools is non-existent. By foregrounding the gendered experiences of commerce heads of department in secondary schools, it is hoped that more research would be undertaken with other women heads of department on a wider scale.

#### **1.5 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The hierarchical structure of a typical South African secondary school comprises principal (head of the institution), deputy principal (second in charge and delegated to by the principal), heads of departments (support managers of specific groups of subjects depending on the complexity of the courses offered at the secondary school) and level one, classroom teachers. While the general administration of the school rests with the principal and deputy principal specific subject needs are attended to by the department heads. The job description for heads of department demands high competencies, skills, attitudes, values and knowledge in a particular learning area, for example commerce, which comprises Accounting, Business Economics, Economics and Typing amongst others. This pre-requisite (specialization) is also a criterion for the appointment of the head of department in commerce. Despite having this specialization women as heads of department in commerce in secondary schools do not seem to have enough power and authority vested in them to lead their department. Why do women in head of department positions allow upper management to interfere in their specialized tasks?

Women in leadership positions seem to be prevented from upward mobility by a glass ceiling in their career paths. When will this glass ceiling be penetrated and thus liberate women?

Historically, women have taken the stance of 'living' up to the roles society expects of them – as mothers, wives, caregivers, housekeepers. They perceive these roles as being primarily womanly (feminine) roles. They perceive positions of leadership as being 'masculine'- forceful, assertive authoritarian. Commerce women heads of department in secondary schools are inextricably interlinked with the history of the treatment of women in the larger society. How do commerce women in positions of leadership (heads of department) experience these roles?

Literature reveals that there is a paucity of women giving voice to their experiences. The incidence of commerce heads of department telling of their experiences that shaped and affected their lives is particularly remote. The intention in this research study is to foreground the gendered experiences of commerce heads of department ('ordinary women) in secondary schools?

## **1.6 THE AIMS OF THE STUDY**

The aims of the study are to explore:

- The lived experiences of women heads of department in commerce to gain an insight into the conflicts between their leadership positions and practices
- The impact of gendered experiences on the lives of women commerce heads of department

- How women in leadership positions construct themselves in their positions as head in the department of commerce

## 1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this explorative study lies in its response to the growing demand for gender studies, especially with regard to experiences of women.

*One of the major contributions of feminist scholarship has been the reclaiming of women's experience. Recovering, naming, and theorizing women's experience has been central to developing new knowledge, ... and re-visioning research. The emphasis has been central to the political practice of the women's movement, heralded by the slogan "the personal is political" ...*

(Briskin & Coulter 1992:254.)

This study, therefore intends to add to current knowledge on the lived experiences of South African women in leadership positions in secondary schools and how they come to terms with the new gender equity procedures in the teaching profession.

The focus of this study, as a whole, has been a belief that women teachers belong to a system which refuses to recognize that women are victims of a powerful system. This study encourages feminist emancipatory approaches to women in positions of power. The rationale on how these women 'conspire' to execute their tasks professionally will contribute to the growth of the 'woman' and hence result in their empowerment.

## **1.8 CRITICAL QUESTIONS**

The study explores the following critical questions:

- What gendered experiences shape the lives of women in positions of leadership (head of department) in the department of commerce in secondary schools?
- How do these experiences impact on their professional lives?

## **1.9 SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

This study was undertaken with women commerce heads of departments from four different contexts in the Durban Metropolitan area. The participants in the study lived, schooled and trained in apartheid designated areas and institutions. Their teaching experience was also limited to historically race segregated schools. Despite the fact that the education sector was well into the transition period, the research participants were exposed in a very limited way to an integrated teaching staff and learner population. The four participants chosen were heads of the department in commerce. Their ages ranged from thirty-two to fifty years of age and their teaching experience spanned between twelve and twenty years of experience. Each participant was of a different dominant, historically classified, South African race group, namely, black, coloured, Indian and white.

Data for the study was collected through semi-structured interviews. Interviews were chosen over questionnaires, as questionnaires were considered an inadequate tool to validate the participants' experiences. The interviews delved briefly into the participants' childhood backgrounds, schooling, qualifications and gendered experiences at tertiary institutions. More in-depth questions were asked about their gendered experiences as teachers and heads of department and their aspirations.

The contexts that prevailed in the apartheid era were very prevalent in the schools the participants taught. The schools' resources reflected the historical bias, based on the system of apartheid when white education funding was the highest, followed by Indian, then coloured and then black. Although the study was undertaken in 2000, six years after South Africa's democratisation, it was evident that the transformation at schools was very slow.

## **1.10 LAYOUT OF THE CHAPTERS**

Chapter 1 provides a preamble of the study. It describes the personal motivation and rationale for undertaking the study, examines the policies informing the study, provides a literary review on gender and education and states the aims, significance, critical questions and scope of the study.

Chapter 2 explains the theoretical framework of feminist theories and shows how it can apply to the position of women as heads of department in commerce in secondary schools. I borrow feminist ideologies from radical, socialist and poststructural feminist theories.

Chapter 3 analyses the methodical approach used in the study. Here, I describe and expound the methodology chosen and its implications for a feminist study. The sample selection and the research tool to interrogate the sample are elaborated on. I also describe the way data was analyzed. The chapter concludes with limitations of the study.

Chapter 4 follows with a discussion of the research study through the medium of the analyses and findings. Here, I take the position of an eclectic feminist (drawing from radical, socialist and poststructural feminist theories) to present my analysis and findings.

Chapter 5 provides a summary and conclusions for the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

*Women don't lead their lives like, "Well, this part is race, and this is class, and this part had to do with women's identities,..."*

Beverly Smith

*Theories belong to the world of soft, indistinct mental images, values and ideas.*

(Neuman, 1997:45)

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I interrogate the ways in which issues of identities and role construction are addressed as informed by feminist theories, namely radical, socialist and poststructural feminist theories. These three feminist theories are described and expounded on, to illustrate the relevant features that enabled me to analyze the data collected from the four research participants. I explore how different feminist theories can help to understand those historical, social and cultural practices which constitute and contest gender relations in my study - which explores how four commerce heads of department in secondary schools experience their professional lives.

In the exploration of the study I intend to understand the following:

- How do women in positions of power and authority (heads of department) construct themselves?
- Why do women heads of department in commerce tolerate social relations that subordinate their interests to those of men?

## 2.2 RADICAL FEMINIST THEORY

The thrust of radical feminism has been captured in the 'slogan'

*The personal is political* (Hartmann 1997:65)

For radical feminists the slogan 'personal is political' (Hartmann 1997:95) points directly to the roots that divide the sexes in a way that subordinates women and gives impetus to the male's drive for power and domination over women.

The following radical feminists see patriarchy as the political imperatives for structural domination over women:

1. Pervasiveness of male domination: (in the labour force and career market). Men maintain their control over women by excluding them from some labour and career markets. They do this by occupying positions of power in the labour force. This enables them to dominate in decision-making processes. Controlling the labour force gives them power over women.

*(O)ur society ...is patriarch. The fact is evident at once if one recalls that the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political offices, finances – in short, every avenue of power within the society, including the coercive force of the police, is entirely in male hands.* (Kate Millett 1971:25)

2. Financial control and male networks (monetary control and social bonding): Although patriarchy is hierarchical (in terms of race and class), men are, nonetheless, united in their dominance over women by ensuring that women are economically dependent on them. The men depend on each other to maintain this domination through their majority.

*(A) set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women. (Hartmann 1997:101)*

3. Women's biology (physical weakness): In comparison to men women are seen as physically weak. The nature and social role of women is defined in relation to the norm – 'white heterosexual male'. Women are accorded secondary status as rooted in man's conception of woman, similar to Simone de Beauvoir's understanding of the 'other'.

*Patriarchal power rests on the social meanings given to biological sexual difference. In patriarchal discourse, the nature and social role of the women are defined in relation to a norm which is male. This finds its clearest expression in the genetic use of the terms 'man' and 'he' to encompass all of humankind. (Weedon 1997:2)*

Radical feminists argue that patriarchy, a social structure, creates the conditions for women to be systemically dominated, exploited and oppressed (Hartmann 1997; Walby 1995). The biological, social, historical and cultural differences that prevail between men and women allow men to exploit and subjugate women are the differences that concern radical feminists on a political level. Different but equal became the new 'mantra'.

On a political level, radical feminists argue for the conditions that recognize both the uniqueness and separateness of women and the recognition of their worth as being equal to that of men. Theoretical arguments highlight female/male differences and the specificity of the sexes with regard to strength, interest and roles amongst others. The outcome is a paradigm of female uniqueness, acknowledging female as the ideal (Soerensen 1992).

Radical feminism gives positive value to womanhood rather than support the notion of assimilating women into areas of activities associated with men. It pays attention to

women's oppression in a social order dominated by men. Hence, they regard women's oppression as sexual oppression.

The notion of shared oppression in radical feminism is intimately connected with a strong emphasis on sisterhood. One of the basic tenets of radical feminism is that any woman has more in common with any other woman – regardless of race, class or ethnic group – than any woman has with any man.

Radical feminism stresses that, in a social order dominated by men, the processes of changing sexual oppression must, as a political necessity, involve a focus on women. This approach does not deny that some men may struggle to overcome this system of domination.

Thus, radical feminism proclaims the following about women:

- Women are subject to patriarchal societies
- Women are subordinate to men
- Women are economically dependant on men
- Women are biologically weaker than men
- Women are sexually oppressed by men
- Women share a sisterhood due to their common experiences
- Women are of equal worth to men, but, are unique and separate to men
- Asymmetrical relations of power exist between men and women

For the purposes of this study I appropriate the idea of patriarchy as a form of covert, systematic domination over women. Patriarchy is viewed as a set of social relations between men and women with a material base (men's control over women's labour, power and economic dependence) in the hierarchical relations between men, and solidarity among them, which enable them to dominate women.

Unlike the positioning of women as victims of male oppression in radical feminism, in this study, data from the research participants will be analyzed in terms of the choices they make based on how they construct their identities.

The study also recognizes that the experiences of the research participants may show that a radical feminist perception of sisterhood exists – that all women share the same experiences.

### **2.3 SOCIALIST FEMINIST THEORY**

Writers of social feminism such as Luke (1992), Walby (1992) and Hartmann (1997) address the issue of social class and gender. They use reproduction theory, which focuses on providing cheap labour for a capitalist social structure, to explain gender inequalities that exist in the education sector.

Socialist feminists find significance in class relations (one class is more advantaged than the other) and the exploitive economic relations (the worker is exploited by providing cheap labour) between classes for the understanding of gender relations. These are perceived to oppress women so pervasively that women's liberation from the family cannot be achieved outside society.

Several conflicting accounts of the division of labour, which inform different common-sense assumptions about women's subjectivity and social role, exist. These include versions (seen as natural) based on biological assumptions of our capabilities as women, mothers and wives, and from theories, which see it as a socially produced structure.

The socialist feminist analysis of women's positions takes three forms: (Hartmann 1997; Walby 1992).

- The first questions the relationship of women in the economic system. Women are defined as part of the working class, thus subsuming women's relations to men as workers and producing workers.
- The second sees all aspects of women's lives as that which reproduces the capitalistic system (women endure their low working class status within the family just like working class men in the labour force)
- The third position focuses on women as house workers and its relation to capital (earnings/maintenance). Some argue that housework produces surplus value and that house workers work directly for capitalists (the powerful, rich upper class). Women provide cheap labour by accepting responsibility for housekeeping and child rearing duties. In reality this is reimbursed by the provision of food and shelter.

The latter two more recent approaches in socialist feminist thoughts emphasize housework and ignores women's current role in the labour market. However, all three approaches include women in the category of working class and understand women's oppression as another aspect of class oppression.

Many positions are taken with regard to class and position. Socialist feminism argues that all class societies produce a range of competing and conflicting forms of consciousness, which result in class differences determined by the conflicts of interest between labour and capitalist demands.

Luke (1992) asserts:

*It is through (public) wage labour that the subject becomes alienated from 'his' essence, his labour, the product of that labour, and finally from his species being. Alienation thus posited as a male condition and a cultural (public) condition.*

*Domestic labour, by contrast, which does not generate direct market surplus value is implicitly rendered as natural labour. (Luke 1993:31)*

Engels (in Firestone 1997) observed that the original division of labour was between man and woman for the purposes of child breeding. Within the family the husband was the owner, the wife was the means of production and the children were the labour. The reproduction of the human species was an important economic function, distinct from the means of production.

Hence, to date socialist theory has sought to harness what is perceived as two strands of women's oppression:

- Class oppression, and
- Capitalistic oppression

Amos and Parmar (2001) assert that patriarchy is not only about gender oppression, but, about power. They elaborate that the family has been the object of much debate in the feminist movement and has been cited as one of the principal sites of women's oppression – women's role in reproducing the labour force, their supposed dependency on men and their constitution and construction of their identity formed by their notions of domesticity and motherhood.

Thus socialist feminism proclaims the following about women:

- Women are providers of 'cheap' labour
- Women are the working class
- Women are subject to capitalistic (patriarchal) oppression
- Women are economically dependant on men
- Division of labour exists between men and women in their roles as male and female

- Women are ‘prisoners’ in their roles within the family structure
- Women are biologically suited to motherhood and housekeeping duties
- Women construct their identities on their notions of domesticity and motherhood

For the purposes of the study I appropriate the idea that a division of labour exists between women and men. Women construct their identities on their notions of domesticity and motherhood. The importance women attribute to their feminine roles questions their perceptions of being in positions of leadership, which they perceive as male orientated roles.

## 2.4 POSTSTRUCTURAL FEMINIST THEORY

Weedon (1997) asserts that there is no fixed meaning to the term ‘poststructural’. This is a term generally applied to a range of theoretical positions developed by Derrida (1973; 1976), Lacan (1977), Althusser (1971) and Foucault (1978; 1986). The work, which these theories inform

*includes, for example, the apparently ‘apolitical’ destructive criticism practiced by many American literary critics in which they are concerned with a free play of meanings of gender (Weedon 1997:19).*

Luke and Gore (1992) are more specific in their description of poststructuralism. They assert that poststructuralism is an epistemology that rejects foundational truths located in disciplinary knowledge and unitary rationalist subject. What is foundational to all knowledge is central to poststructuralism.

In poststructural analysis, discourse is understood as being constitutive (meanings do not exist prior to their articulation, but are always socially and historically located in discourse). In every discourse, subject positions are made available to us. The subject positions we assume ultimately effect and determine our identity. Positions are

discursively and interactively constituted as the discourse shifts. In speaking and acting from a certain position, people bring their history as a subject to a particular situation. We adopt the discursive practices and storylines as if they were our own, individual experiences.

For poststructuralists, identities are derived from a wide set of factors, often involving attempts to understand the contradictions between those factors. Gender, race, class, sexuality, history, language, culture and individual experience, amongst others, contributes to how and what we understand to be our identities (Orner 1992).

Delamont (1989) asserts that women are a 'muted' group (they learn to express their ideas in terms of the dominant group thus suppressing their own voices and regressing in the choice of alternatives). She uses the concept of the 'habitus' to explain the difficulty women have in being perceived as 'lacking'. This leads to them limiting themselves and their identities. She adds that surrounding social, political and historical forces simultaneously shape and influence identity formation. The identities of women are shaped by the 'romantic storyline' (Davies 1992) and marriage (Aisenberg & Harrington 1988); whether they marry or not or have children or not.

According to Nicholson and Fraser (1990), the notion of gender identity presupposes three major premises:

- Everyone has a deep sense of self which starts in early childhood, with the primary parent, and remains relatively constant thereafter
- This deep self differs in men and women, but, is relatively similar for women across their race, class and ethnic backgrounds
- This deep self bears traces of one's gender identity

Weedon (1997) asserts that feminist poststructuralism is a useful theory to address the issue of how social power is exercised and how social relations of gender, race and class might be transformed.

*For a theoretical perspective to be politically useful to feminists it should be able to recognize the subjective in constituting the meaning of women's lived reality.* (Weedon 1997:9).

Bell (1995) explains that the idea of hegemony is the way in which power is maintained, not only through coercion, but also, with the voluntary consent of those dominated. She asserts that hegemony describes how a dominant group can project its particular way of social reality so successfully that *its* view is accepted as common sense truth, even by those disempowered by it. Fraser (1997) expounds on the definition of 'hegemony' as the inclusion of power to

*establish authoritative definitions of social situations and social needs, the power to define the universe of legitimate disagreement, and the power to shape the political agenda.* (Fraser 1997:381)

Hegemony expresses the advantaged position of dominant social groups (men) with respect to discourse. Foucault (1977) asserts that hegemony helps us to understand power as relational and dynamic. It circulates within a web of relationships in which we all participate. Hegemony is also maintained through discourse (ideas, texts, theories, language). These are embedded in networks of social and political control that Foucault (1977) called 'regimes of truth'.

We should therefore not ask: Why certain people dominate? Instead we should ask: How do things work at the level of ongoing subjugation, at the level of those processes which subject our bodies, our thoughts, our behaviours? Foucault (1977) warns that power is not to be taken as a phenomenon of one's domination over another.

*Power must be analyzed as something that circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads, they are always in a position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only inert or consenting target; they are always also the element of its articulation. In other words individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application.* (Foucault 1977:234)

The normalization of oppression in everyday life is achieved when we internalize the attitudes and roles that support and reinforce systems of domination without question or challenge. Essentially then, both the agents of privilege and the victims of oppression play a role in maintaining oppression, for example, the belief that men are more capable in positions of management and authority and women are more suitable to housekeeping and child rearing. They unquestioningly adopt assumptions about female limitations. This presents women as negative stereotypes - weak, emotional and irrational. They may also support male dominance as a means of survival because to challenge it means risking jobs, relationships and physical security. The danger is that males in positions of power and authority, in the school site (privileged group), internalize their status quo of oppression and, through their collusion with the system operate as agents in perpetuating it among the subordinate groups (women teachers).

The terms 'subject' and 'subjectivity' are also central to poststructuralist theory. They form a crucial part in the humanist conception of the individual which is central to Western philosophy and political and social organization. While humanist discourses presuppose that what is central to woman, is, in essence, her heart, which is unique and makes her what she really is; poststructuralist theory proposes a subjectivity which is *precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak.* (Weedon 1997:32)

Roman (1992:556) defines subjectivity as the stance taken by researchers in their attempts to valorize the subjectivities, experiences and knowledge of research participants and, conceivably, themselves, while relying on notions of subjective experience that are not mediated by the historically specific analysis of the underlying structures, material conditions, and conflicting sets of unequal power relations. Because both stances are premised on the subject/object dualism, neither subjectivism nor objectivism can provide adequate causal analyses of the connections between the structures and processes that give rise to both these unequal power relations and to people's experience and knowledge.

Subjectivity can be defined as the combination of

*the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world.* (Weedon 1997:32)

Unlike the individualist notion of people as rational, self-motivated individuals in pursuit of their own, clear self-interest, the concept 'subjectivity' can capture both the notion of people as intentional subjects – actors in the world – and also subject to forces beyond their conscious control (Crowley & Himmelweit 1992).

This seems to explain the reasons for the way research participants behave which are not always in our own best interests as women in positions of leadership. Hence, such behaviour may be termed 'irrational', in terms of the rational male. This behaviour may contribute to our 'failure' to make personal and emotional changes that are politically and intellectually desirable in the eyes of male colleagues in the school site.

However, even though our subjectivities are, by definition, personal and individual, our desires and expectations are acquired in a social context. Unlike the term 'individual', the term 'subject' encourages us to think of ourselves and our realities as constructions (products of meaningful activities which are both culturally specific and generally

conscious). The term 'subject' calls into question the notion of totally conscious self. The subject is, therefore, always both conscious and unconscious.

In their discussion of the self, Usher and Edwards (1994), deconstruct the feminist self and locate it and its experiences in concrete social relations. They assert that a woman's understanding of her social self emerges as she explores her relations with others, her feelings and fantasies of them alongside experiences of embodiment that make up her inner/core self that is not natural.

*(S)uch a self is simultaneously embodied, gendered, social and unique. (in Usher & Edwards 1994:232).*

The poststructural viewpoint is that subjectivity is produced historically and is the product of society and culture. The feminist poststructuralist takes this further and insists that the individual is always the site of the conflicting forms of subjectivity. With the development of language, women are able to give meaning to experience and understand it according to particular ways of thinking and particular discourses which pre-date their language development. Our ways of thinking constitute our consciousness and the positions within which we identify ourselves and structure our sense of ourselves.

The meanings and values that women carry with them make them resistant to alternatives. However, as they move out of their familiar circles through education and politics, they may become exposed to other ways of interpreting their experiences. For many women, this is the meaning of the practice of consciousness-raising, developed by the Women's Liberation Movement (Weedon 1997).

Living in a capitalist economy, beckoned by consumerism and individualism, we are required to assert ourselves and stake our identity (singular, fixed and true at all times). We are constantly called upon to locate those aspects of ourselves that are unique and define whom we are. But, as conscious and unconscious subjects we can never be sure of

others or ourselves in a definite way. The possibility of misinterpretation and misrepresentation always exists.

In poststructural feminist theory, experience has no inherent essential meaning. It gets meaning through language interpretation, which may result in conflicting and distorting versions of social reality, resulting in conflicting interests. This range of discourses and their material support in social institutions (schools) and practices are vital to the maintenance and contestation of forms of social power, since in social reality there is no meaning; except in language.

Yet, the only effect that language has, in the social and historical sense, is its interpretations by the individuals who become the bearers by taking up the forms of subjectivity and the meanings and values, which it proposes and acts upon it. Giving meaning to the world offer the individual a range of modes of subjectivity. Values and interests of women have to be understood in the context of female sexuality and women's proper place and lifestyle which cross a whole range of discursive fields (the concept 'discursive field' was produced by the French theorist Michel Foucault, as part of an attempt to understand the relationship between language, social institutions and power), (Weedon 1997) from family, religion, education, employment and media. In addition, the media and entertainment seem to promote power relationships between women and men.

*These are beliefs in which individuals have a vested interest. Dominant discourses of female sexuality, which define it as naturally passive, together with dominant social definitions of women's place is first and foremost in the home, can be found in social policy, medicine, education, the media, the church and elsewhere. (Weedon 1997:36)*

In theory every walk of life is available to women, but for women teachers the possibility to share a job sector with a man involves acceptance, negotiation or rejection of what men seem to offer to them. The definition of 'woman' as wife and mother is always

immanent. The message that woman should be attractive, desirable and direct all their energies to one man (the husband and father), is vastly influenced by fairy tales heard as children, in religion, in women's magazines and in audio and visual media.

In essence, poststructural feminist theory suggests, that the subjective experiences of the women can only be interpreted and understood by their own subjective selves. In the interests of feminism, experience needs to be deconstructed and reconstructed.

Nicholson and Fraser (1990) seem to agree that:

*If masculinity and femininity constitute our basic and ever present sense of self, then it is not surprising that the manifestations of sexism are systemic.* (Fraser 1990:30)

The high prevalence of 'gender' social justice and equity programmes and policies, and the status given to women in the education sector, easily obscures the iniquitous and precarious nature of representation of women in these sectors.

Thus, feminist poststructuralism proclaims that:

- In every discourse, subject positions are available to us
- Positions are discursively and interactively constituted as the discourse shifts
- Women adopt the discursive storylines as if they were their own
- We derive our identities from factors such as gender, race, class, history, sexuality, language and individual experiences, amongst others
- Identities are shaped by romantic storylines
- Women learn to express their ideas in terms of the dominant group (male)
- Women experience hegemony (the way power is maintained by a dominant group) and this can be accepted as a natural process
- Power is relational and dynamic and, therefore, circulated by the oppressor and oppressed

- Subjectivity is the combination of conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions, produced historically and is the product of society. Hence, we can never be sure of ourselves in a definitive way

For the purposes of this study I appropriate the following from poststructural feminist perspective:

- That knowledge is always provisional, open ended and relational
- Our treks through our female lives are located in our historical and cultural contexts
- Our conscious and unconscious thoughts dictate our actions
- As women we are shaped by romantic storylines and identities ('head of department' is still deeply and exclusively masculine)

## 2.5 CONCLUSION

This study identifies women from three feminist perspectives:

- Radical feminism: As understanding the experiences of research participants in their constitution and its strategic position within the broader field of patriarchal power relations
- Socialist feminism: As that which is seen as a form of labour-class control in which women class themselves in a lower capital market by providing cheap labour (in terms of their own beliefs of what feminine is) in the form of free housekeeping and child rearing work, while their careers take a secondary status
- Poststructuralist feminism: Whose concern is with the discursive construction of subjectivity, with the role of social institutions and the heterogeneous forms of power which govern social relations, motivated by the understanding of the

position of individual women in society and the ways in which they are governed by and may resist specific forms of power

What it means to be an individual person in this 'modern' world involves interrogating our constitution in terms of our personal experiences, shaped by our selves and our subjectivities (Wilkinson & Kitzinger 1995).

*The meaning of experience is perhaps the most crucial site of political struggle over meaning, since it involves personal, psychological and emotional investments on the part of the individual. It plays an important role in determining the individual's role as social agent. It effects both where and how the individual acts and whether her actions are based on consensual acceptance of the meaning and effects of an action, on conscious resistance to them, or on the demands of other external necessities. The power of experience in the constitution of the individual as social agent comes from the dominant assumption in our society that experience gives access to truth. It is assumed that we come to know the world through experience. (Weedon 1997:76)*

In this chapter I try to respond to questions about the capacity of individual women in positions of leadership, to locate and offer an explanation of where our experiences come from, why it is contradictory or incoherent and why and how it can change. This chapter offers a way of understanding the importance of subjectivity, identity, patriarchy and class oppression in the lives of women. How the research participants interpret these states is largely dependent on their own discursive discourses.

This chapter also accounts for the political limitations of change at the level of subjective consciousness, stressing the importance of the material relations and practices which constitute the research participants, as embodied subjects with particular, but not, inevitable forms of conscious and unconscious motivations and desires which structure society.

# **CHAPTER 3**

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This study explores the gendered experiences of four women heads of department in four school contexts in the Durban Metropolitan area. The purpose of this study is to explore how a sample of four women commerce heads of department in secondary schools, experience their lives. The study has been conceptualized on the basis of semi-structured interviews. This occurred in two stages, viz. 'preliminary interview' stage (to make the final selection of four research participants) and 'in-depth' interviews (to explore the gendered experiences of the selected research participants in terms of their positions as heads of department in commerce).

This chapter explains the research methodology adopted, sample selection, instrument used to collect data and the procedures followed to analyze the data. The research methodology reported in this chapter consists of a qualitative analysis of semi-structured, tape-recorded interviews with the four research participants of the four dominant race groups in South Africa (black, coloured, Indian and white) who teach at secondary schools in the Durban Metropolitan area. Through the interviews the research study interrogates:

- The experiences of four women commerce teachers in leadership positions in secondary schools
- The impact of their experiences on their lives as women and heads in the of department of commerce

The intention of the qualitative approach of this research is aimed at highlighting gendered experiences, inextricably interlinked with race and class, of the research participants in terms of their identity constructions based on their historical, cultural and

social influences. Thus, the study explores the experiences of the four research participants against an eclectic feminist theoretical framework, drawing on ideologies from radical, socialist and poststructural feminist theories.

### **3.2 THE APPROACH**

A study, which addresses the lives and experiences of women, lends itself to a feminist perspective (Hall 1993). This perspective is perceived as suitable due to its methodological underpinnings, which see reality as differently constructed and experienced (Kittay 1997). This perspective enabled me to explore the gendered experiences of the participants as heads of department in commerce.

A central feature of feminist study is the social construction and intertwined nature of gender, race and class. As the study explores how women construct themselves in terms of their own gender, race and class experiences and form their identities, the preference for qualitative research methods, as featured in much of feminist studies (Jayaratne & Steward 1991; Fonow & Cook 1991) was considered an appropriate choice.

According to Jayaratne and Steward (1991), two different viewpoints about women's experiences are captured when quantitative or qualitative methodology is used. While qualitative research methodology can capture women's understandings, emotions and actions (which must be explored in their own terms), quantitative methodology often includes researcher bias and the abandonment of all aspects of traditional methods at the expense of scholarly quality.

The debate between qualitative and quantitative research methodology features prominently in feminist studies. Jayaratne and Steward (1991) argue that quantitative research methodologies involve research techniques that translate the individual experiences of women into predetermined, predefined categories thus resulting in unarticulated experiences and the concealment of their voices of their lived experiences.

*Running through much of this enthusiasm for qualitative methods has been an understanding that many aspects of women's experience have not been articulated or conceptualized within social science. A deep suspicion of quantitative methods as having concealed women's real experience has motivated much preoccupation with, and the advocacy of, qualitative methods as methods which permit women to express their experience fully and in their own terms. (Jayaratne & Steward 1991:89).*

Walby (1992) levels the following support for qualitative techniques in feminist research:

*Qualitative techniques which allow women to speak for themselves are considered to be more in keeping with feminist methodology by reducing the amount of distortion that a patriarchally based science would introduce. In practice this means a methodological imperative to use qualitative rather than quantitative methods to interview women and to report frankly on their views. (Walby 1992:17)*

My decision to choose the qualitative research approach was based on the following premises.

- The study involves gendered experiences of women, operating within the feminist perspective. Only qualitative methodology allowed me access to data about the lived gendered experiences of the participants as heads of department. This data, would best be captured in narratives in a qualitative methodological sense. Statistical data would not only impede the theoretical understandings of gender, but would also lead to the creation and the implementation of development plans that ignore, and even harm, the interests of women (Fonow & Cook 1991).
- Quantitative research methodology espouses the ideology that science is value neutral and that the scientific method “*protects against contamination of findings*

by 'subjectivity'" (Jayaratne & Steward 1991:89). My criticism against quantifying methods is not against every form of statistic, but at its claim to have "monopoly on accurately describing the world" (Fonow & Cook 1991:67). Feminist methodologies deny the possibility of neutral and value free science and knowledge. They assert that the feminist researcher is part of the study (in Fonow & Cook 1991).

My personal interest in the study included me as part of the process through which the data would be interpreted and conclusions would be drawn.

*(T)he best feminist analysis ... insists that the inquirer her/himself be placed in the same critical place as the overt subject matter, thereby recovering the entire research process for scrutiny in the results of the research. (in Jayaratne & Steward 1991:98).*

- Operating within a feminist theoretical framework, the mere conception of the problem statements, the methodology and research tools and the interpretation of the data, were inextricably connected to my identity construction as a black, woman commerce teacher and a feminist. Can statistics best describe the experiences of women commerce teachers?
- The qualitative research approach equipped me, the researcher, with the research tool - interviews, to explore as fully as possible, the gendered experiences of the research participants in their capacities as heads of department in commerce. I strongly believed, like, Jayaratne and Steward (1991), that the qualitative research approach would best capture my objectives and analyze data from an eclectic feminist theoretical framework.
- My study also involved race and class bias. These 'categories' were likely to manifest themselves more fully in qualitative research strategies.

- The qualitative approach possessed the elements for this study, as it aimed at unpacking the individual experiences of women commerce heads of department and not form generalizations. It was only through interviews that I could explore individual experiences and their impact on the lives of the research participants. This meant that the participants and I had to engage in a dialogue. This dialogue meant a personal interview. I could only elicit trust, empathize and sympathize with these women through this personal contact. Personal interaction was also a criterion for the questioning routine to have a natural flow in accordance with the responses of the correspondents.

Hence, my choice of human interaction, not ‘scientific’, impersonal investigation led me to conclude that the best way to collect data would be through a qualitative approach.

### **3.3 THE SAMPLE**

The sample selection comprised twelve research participants, for the ‘preliminary’ sample. This was reduced to four for the ‘in-depth’ interview. All research participants in this study were women commerce teachers from co-educational secondary schools in and around the Durban Metropolitan area in Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa. These were teachers selected from the four historically race designated schools during the apartheid era in South Africa.

My sample choice for this ‘all women’ and ‘multi-racial’ group was based on the following:

- Women were to be the subjects of study. The theoretical framework of this feminist study was not to compare women with men. It was to foreground the gendered experiences of the research participants.

- Although gender, race and class are inextricably interwoven in the experiences of women, I wanted to explore the degree of gendered experiences of women of different races. As a commerce teacher of Indian decent, I knew that my gendered experiences were not the same as my black, coloured or white colleagues.

The initial and purposeful sample were as follows:

### **3.3.1 The initial sample**

Twelve women commerce teachers, three from each of the four historically classified races groups, from twelve secondary co-educational schools in the Durban Metropolitan area were selected for the initial sample. All research participants were qualified commerce teachers occupying either level one (teacher) or head of department positions at their schools. They were employed either on a temporary basis, by the school's governing body, or in permanent state employment tenure. Their teaching experience ranged between five and twenty five years in the department of commerce in secondary schools. Their ages ranged between of twenty and fifty-five years. Some were married and parents and grandparents, some were married without children and some were single. All participants were reared in middle-class homes (their parents were either labourers employed by the corporate sector or in government service departments).

This sample choice was based on my view that certain commonalities of gendered experiences are shared by both non-white (black, coloured and Indian) and white women in South Africa, but, the diversity of race, class and age, also, produced different experiences. My position is that: as women, we define ourselves in terms of black/white, male/female, reason/emotion, subject/object to make meaning of our lived experiences.

Initial contact with the black, coloured and white research participants was not an easy task. This was due to the lack of or non-contact with schools of other races, due to the

history of the apartheid education system in South Africa (there was a separate education department for each of the four dominant race groups and each department was controlled as a separate entity in terms of its funding and policies). Fortunately, I had just joined a teacher body comprising majority coloured and white members. At a membership meeting, I made contact with a coloured deputy principal and a white principal who provided me with the names of the first prospective coloured and white research participants. Referrals from the first coloured and white participants enabled me to contact the second and third coloured and white research participants.

To contact the first black research participant I enlisted the help of the university student-teaching liaison officer who provided me with telephone numbers (it was rare to find black schools listed in the telephone directory). Equipped with the list of schools and their location I set about telephoning for prospective research participants.

Contact with Indian research participants was easy. My first telephone call led me to a willing research participant. Again, my first research participant led me to the second and third research participants.

As stated above, initial contact with the twelve prospective participants was through telephoning them at their schools. During these telephonic conversations, the participants were informed about the direction of the study and their contributions to the study. Private telephone numbers (home and cell numbers) were obtained at this point.

The second telephone conversation was utilized to inform and assure the research participants of their right to privacy, their right to remain anonymous and their right to confidentiality. Once the women agreed to participate in the study, meeting places and times for the preliminary interviews were arranged. These interviews were conducted either at the employment sites or in the homes of the research participants, depending on their preferences.

### 3.3.2 The purposive sample

The aim at this stage was to collect data to answer the critical questions. Of the twelve commerce teachers interviewed in the initial sample, four heads of department in commerce were selected for the 'in-depth' interviews. These research participants ranged between the ages of thirty-two and fifty years. Their teaching experience spanned between twelve and twenty years. One research participant from each of the four races was selected. I chose this sample because:

- This was an explorative study not intent on measuring white and black experience against each other. This study was intended to recognize the women of South Africa across the colour line as individuals whose experiences were borne by social, historical and cultural influences.
- Black women have either remained invisible within the feminist scholarship or have been treated purely as women without any significance attached to colour or race (Amos & Parmar 2001).
- Too often, black women appear in cross-cultural studies under the guise of feminist and progressive anthropology as subjects for interesting and exotic comparison (Amos & Parmar 2001).
- When the question of race is raised, this usually focuses on black women as victims. This study allowed the processes of racial oppression to be better understood by concentrating, as well, on the exercise and mechanisms of white privilege and power. This did not necessarily mean that one should focus where black and white people interact.
- There is a need to end the continual splitting of racial and gender identities and positions as if they can be dichotomized. Instead, it is necessary to focus on the ways in which each is implied and experienced through the other and not as

separate entities. It does not make sense to analyze race and gender as if they constitute separate, discreet systems of power.

- Finally, although diversity is clearly one important element, to focus on race alone is to marginalize other issues. It is not the case that women are constructed differently in any absolute way. Although, it is evident that women share experiences across cultures, is it not necessary to abandon categories like race in order to realize that experiences can be internally differentiated.

All four research participants in this sample:

- Attended racially segregated institutions during their own school and tertiary education years
- Were qualified and permanent commerce teachers employed by the KwaZulu department of education
- Held position of head of department in commerce
- Taught at co-educational schools
- Taught at racially segregated schools before South Africa's democracy
- Taught commerce subjects in secondary schools during the course of their teaching career
- Taught more than one commercial subject and in different grades and standards
- Taught in schools with a majority staff and learner population of their particular race group
- Were wives and mothers

These 'homogeneous' characteristics did not mean that the experiences of the women would be constant and common. I knew, from my own gender and race constructed experiences that commonalities as well as differences existed in our experiences, regardless of how 'homogenous' we were. Neither were the four participants to be representative of the experiences of a particular race or class. As this was an explorative

study, the experiences of the research participants were placed under the microscope to add to the knowledge of gendered experiences.

Each research participant in the purposive study was given a pseudonym in accordance with the race she represented in response to the promise of confidentiality. The name was not intended to label any of the women or fix their identities. While acknowledging the labeling, it was considered just as problematic to deny the participants of their racial positions. Instead of seeing white women as without race and black women as similar to white women, except for having race, the idea was to see races as that which constructs the lives of black and white women in relation to each other. The fact that group identity is for many people self-consciously chosen and affirmed as a fundamental aspect of their self-definition (Amos and Parmar 2001) also helped me in terms of the choice of names. Hence, the research participants were named Bongwiwe Khumalo (black), Gail Federicks (coloured), Saira Khan (Indian) and Elizabeth Johnson (white).

### **3.4.1 THE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT – THE INTERVIEW**

The choice of the interview as the research instrument was based on the premise that gendered life experiences of women need to be explored through a tool that:

- Explains the purpose of the study in an explicit way
- Clarifies information immediately and later on with the research participants
- Stimulates the research participants to provide insights into their gendered experiences, by means of a dialogue (researcher sharing her own personal experiences)
- Explores an area considered to be significant but not covered in the interview schedule

While Bogdan and Biklen (1992:96) define interviews as a “*purposeful conversation*”, Cohen and Manion (1995) elaborate that interviews are a

*two person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research- relevant information.* (Cohen & Manion 1995:96)

As my study was to elicit narratives from women about their gendered professional experiences, I chose interviews (Borg and Gall 1989; Denzin 1989; Gay, 1992; Best & Khan 1993) as *the* research instrument to gather the data for the study.

While Denzin (1989:29), rates interviews as “*good to high on every dimension*”, Best and Khan (1993) assert that the main purpose of interviews is to obtain a special kind of information. If we are to explore the actual and perceived experiences it may be better to

*... interview people to find out from them those things that we cannot directly observe... We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviours that took place at some previous point in time.*

*We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world – we have to ask people questions about things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective ...* (in Best & Khan 1993:72)

Gay (1992: 231) concurs:

*The interview is most appropriate for asking questions which cannot effectively be structured into multi-choice format, such as questions of a personal nature. In contrast to the questionnaire, the interview is flexible...*

The next step was to decide on the structure of the interview schedule. The semi-structured interview research tool seemed particularly useful to me as a researcher as it espoused the following principles:

- Flexibility: As the questions were open-ended it allowed me to probe for specific details in answers. It also created opportunities to rephrase and clarify misunderstood responses.
- Response rate: During the initial part of the interview, I sensed that the participants were distracted by the presence of the tape-recorder, despite it being placed away from them. As time passed and the participants became engaged in the interview, they became less and less aware of the tape recorder and more open to me, the researcher. Listening and not writing also led to the interview taking a dialogical dimension.
- Non-verbal behaviour: As the words and tones of the participants were recorded, I was able to take note of gestures and facial expressions. This helped to assess the validity of the responses.
- Control over the environment: As the interviews were conducted in the 'space' selected by the participants, they seemed comfortable and settled, thus enabling engagement in the dialogue in answering the interview questions.
- Spontaneity: As the participants had not previewed the interview schedule, their spontaneity was an assurance of more informative and less normative data. This was enhanced by their gestures and tones.
- Question order: The open-ended questions placed under categories resulted in a sequential flow of data.

- Respondent alone answers: As I was the only person present with the participant she was assured of privacy, anonymity and confidentiality. This trust seemed to invite individualist responses.
- Completeness: Questions not particularly understood by the participants were clarified on the spot and this led to all questions being answered adequately.

(Best and Khan 1989; Gay 1992; Bailey 1994)

As a novice researcher I found the semi-structured interview schedule particularly useful in two ways:

- As a 'prompt'
- To keep me on track with the critical questions, the aim of the study

The guidelines to formulate the open-ended questions were informed by the following critical questions:

- What gendered experiences shape the lives of women heads of department in commerce (positions of leadership) in secondary schools?
- How do these experiences impact on their roles as heads of department in commerce?

### **3.4.1 'Preliminary' interviews**

The 'preliminary' interviews (see Schedule – Appendix A) were conducted with the twelve selected participants. This semi-structured interview schedule comprised the following categories:

- Brief biographical background in terms of childhood upbringing and school

- Reasons for choosing teaching as a career
- Professional and academic qualifications
- Teaching experience
- Marital status and dependents

Participants were interviewed at schools or in their homes as arranged by initial telephonic conversations. The interviews were taped recorded and transcribed in preparation for the 'purposeful' sample selection. Each preliminary interview lasted approximately thirty minutes.

### **3.4.2 'In-depth' interviews**

This interview schedule delved in detail into the professional experiences of the research participants. My reasoning for this was to strengthen the rigor of analysis to yield the best possible picture of what experiences shaped and impacted on the lives of the participants as in leadership positions in secondary schools. The 'in-depth' interview focused on:

- Gendered experiences at secondary school, as a learner
- Career choices
- Gendered experiences at tertiary institutions, while a student
- Job opportunities in terms of gender and race
- Gendered experiences as a secondary school commerce teacher
- Gendered experiences as head of department in commerce
- Role models in career
- Family influence and support in careers
- Marital status and spouse support of careers
- Career aspirations

The duration of these interviews lasted approximately ninety minutes. Each interview was tape recorded and transcribed, soon after the interview. Follow up interviews, via the telephone, were undertaken to clarify and elaborate on certain issues. This was resorted to as participants were hesitant/unwilling to schedule appointments in the near future, as they were now involved in setting end of year papers, engaged in academic and staff activities, catching up with their learner assessments, teaching extra hours in preparation for the grade twelve examination.

Once the transcripts were completed, participants were approached to verify their data. While one participant insisted that her transcript be faxed to her for verification, others trusted me to transcribe their data accurately. When I indicated to the participant that faxing the data would violate my promise of confidentiality and anonymity, she did not find this to be problematic as we had arranged to dispatch and receive the transcripts when we were the only ones present both ends.

### **3.5 DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES**

In keeping with the qualitative methodology used to produce data for this study (described in chapter 4), I followed certain procedures to perform the data analysis. The format included reading the transcripts a few times, making comments and memos on the transcriptions, developing a list of categories, experiencing moments of in-decision in demarcating the data in categories, and re-categorizing.

After completing the transcriptions, I read and re-read them in order to extract an initial content analysis, as well as, to familiarize myself thoroughly with the text. Having become familiar with the content of the transcripts, I sorted the text into broad categories using the aims of the study as well as the feminist ideologies I had selected to analyze the data.

The first step in analyzing the data was to uncover broad themes that prevailed in the study in terms of the lived gendered experiences of the four research participants. The themes were then ‘matched’ in terms of the feminist ideologies chosen. Fore grounded in the themes were the gender, race and class experiences.

Data relevant to each theme was codified by means of coloured highlighters under broad themes. This resulted in sub-categories under three primary themes. Dominant discourses as well as topics covered in the interview were sought during the subcategorizing stage. Words and phrases were jotted down to represent topics and patterns. These words and phrases formed the coded categories/themes.

Thereafter, the coded data was organized, by grouping the individual respondents’ answers together in accordance with the categories/themes developed. The relationships among the various themes and categories were described in accordance with the patterns or structure that emerged from the data.

Thereafter, the data was interpreted from an eclectic feminist perspective based on the radical socialist and poststructural ideologies selected. The interpretation involved explaining the findings in terms of the gendered experiences of the four research participants.

### **3.6 LIMITATIONS**

My sample, although representative of the dominant races in South Africa, does not represent a broad spectrum of commerce educators across the levels of experience and rank. Only heads of department in commerce were chosen for the study.

As my study was limited to women in and around the Durban Metropolitan area, I cannot generalize my findings. The choice of purposeful sampling rather than the use of questionnaires has much to do with this limitation.

The study is also limited by the omission of the male voice of experience, which would have provided for the dominant attitudes and experiences to be interrogated against the female stances, thus enabling me to observe the differences and balances.

### **3.7 CONCLUSION**

This chapter analyzed the methodological approach used in the study. The qualitative approach and its implications for a feminist study were explained. The size, characteristics and reasons for the sample collection were justified. A rationale was given for the research tool (interview) and the purpose and content of the interviews were described. The procedure followed to analyze the data was also expounded.

In the next chapter, I present the data in terms of the gendered experiences of the research participants and analyze the findings. The chapter begins with a brief background of each participant. Thereafter, the data is analyzed in themes and sub-categories and the findings are explained.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY

*Teaching is a good job for a woman but a career with a lot of prospects for men.*

(Burgess 1989:90)

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the experiences of the four research participants by providing an analysis of the interviews conducted with them. The discussion that ensues from this chapter is based on the data, gathered in 2000, from four women heads in the department of commerce, in four secondary schools, in the Durban Metropolitan area. The approach is a qualitative one based on data collected through semi-structured interviews.

I begin this chapter by introducing the four research participants: Bongiwe Khumalo (black), Gail Fredericks (coloured), Saira Khan (Indian) and Elizabeth Johnson (white). Each research participant is given a pseudonym in response to my promise of confidentiality. The name chosen for each research participant resembles her racialized identity. While acknowledging the trap of labelling, to deny them their race would be just as problematic as each woman's experience is inextricably interwoven in her being classified as a black, a coloured, an Indian or a white during the period of apartheid – a period during which the research participants lived the crucial part of their lives.

The chapter commences with a brief background of each research participant. My reason is that each participant's experiences are influenced by her history, culture, race, class, ethnic and political beliefs.

The background, presented to provide a brief profile of each research participant, is in terms of her:

- Childhood rearing
- Schooling
- Ambitions
- Tertiary qualifications
- Teaching qualifications
- School employment context

Thereafter, the experiences of the research participants are presented in the form of broad themes. Their narratives about their experiences as women and in positions of leadership form a vital feature of the presentation. The narratives used are explorative, rather than a descriptive device for understanding their experiences. The broad themes are

- Teaching as a career
- Women teach, men manage
- A woman's place

These broad themes are sub-divided. The data is analysed from an eclectic feminist perspective, with selected ideologies from radical, socialist and poststructural feminist theories. The analysis foregrounds the gendered experiences of the research participants, taking into consideration that each participant forms her identity in terms of her race, class, social, political, cultural and historical relations with the world.

The data gleaned from the interviews, conducted with the research participants, is intended to answer the critical questions:

- What gendered experiences shape the lives of women heads of department in commerce (positions of leadership) in secondary schools?
- How do these experiences impact on their lives as heads of department in commerce?

## 4.2 BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

### 4.2.1 Bongiwe Khumalo

Bongiwe, thirty-two years old, married and a mother of three, was born and reared in a black residential area (historically designated for the black population during the apartheid era in South Africa) south of the Durban Metropolitan area. Her mum, a nurse, and breadwinner of the family, reared Bongiwe and her two brothers. Bongiwe cannot remember her father.

*We had no contact with him. My father divorced her so she was just there for us.*

She attended the local primary and secondary co-educational schools in her residential area. During her senior secondary schooling years, she studied English, Afrikaans, Accounting, Biology, Mathematics and History. Her admiration for the English and Accounting teachers was not the only reason for these being her favourite subjects at secondary school. These teachers also influenced her career choice - to be a teacher.

*In standard six I was taught by a very good teacher. I enjoyed Accounting and he especially encouraged us...In standard seven when he left the teacher who replaced him - he too was very good.*

*I used to like the way she (the English teacher) taught us. I wanted to be a teacher....*

On matriculating, she enrolled at a Teacher Training College as a full-time student to study for a Teacher's Diploma to teach commercial subjects in secondary schools.

*I decided that since I did well in commerce I should persist in teaching commerce.*

To fulfil her dream (become a teacher) she had to travel to Pietermaritzburg (about a hundred kilometres away from her home) to study. There were no teacher training colleges for black students in the Durban Metropolitan area. This resulted in her boarding in the institution's hostel and returning home for holidays.

*At the college of education, I did my STD (Secondary Teaching Diploma) in Accounting and Business Economics. After that I studied for my H.D.E. (Higher Diploma in Education).*

Bongiwe was employed at a school situated in the area of her birth, by the DOE. Her teaching experience at this school spanned over twelve years. It was here that she received her promotion, after a period of eleven years, as head of department in commerce. She shared this position with two other male colleagues. She was the second female promoted to the position of head of department in this school. The other female, occupied the position of head of department in English.

Bongiwe taught in a co-educational, commercial secondary school. The school was in the heart of this densely populated, historically designated black area. It was a brick structure, consisting of an administration block, classrooms and caretakers' quarters. Like all other schools, its maintenance was reliant on school fees collected from learners. The school enlisted the help of private businesses to supplement its funds for its upkeep.

Majority of the learners who attended this school were local residents, others who attended this school came from the nearby black areas in Durban. All learners came from '*financially struggling backgrounds*'. This was the explanation given for the school's resources, namely an overhead projector, chalkboards, a photocopier and a computer for

official administration purposes. As head of a department Bongiwe shared an 'office' in the administration block with the other heads of department.

At the time of the interview, Bongiwe lived in a historically designated white, residential area about thirty kilometres away from her employment site. She was engaged in studies for the Bachelor of Commerce degree through a correspondence university. She planned to use this degree to secure a position as a lecturer at a tertiary institution.

#### **4.2.2 Gail Fredericks**

Gail, forty-four years old, married, and mother of two was born and raised in a historically designated, coloured township in Cape Town, South Africa. Her childhood was spent with both parents and five siblings.

She completed her primary and secondary education at co-educational coloured schools in her residential area. She chose to study English, Afrikaans, Mathematics, Accounting, Typing and Biology in her senior secondary years at school. Her favourite subjects were Accounting and Biology. She admired her Accounting teacher's attitude towards the subject.

*I loved accounting. I had a very good teacher who I loved to bits. He sort of created a love for the subject and I found I was good at what I was doing.*

On matriculating, she enrolled for a Bachelor of Commerce degree as a full time student at a coloured university. Her interest to work in the private sector, in the human resources department, arose from the accounting teacher's information about the careers available to her if she possessed a Bachelor of Commerce degree.

*Somehow, I found that, at that time, to be glamorous, ... and I always wanted to dress up and look good and go out to work.*

Her degree

*... took a bit long. Four years. I studied two years full time and I failed my second year and this forced me to go out and earn something and study part-time.*

She completed her degree, as a full time student, by accepting a government bursary on condition that she taught in the department of coloured education. While employed as a teacher, she completed her Higher Diploma in Education, a requirement stipulated by the coloured education department (each of the four races was governed by its own education department during this apartheid regime). This qualification enabled her to acquire permanent tenure in the department of coloured education.

Gail taught at coloured schools while in Cape Town and Durban (the area she moved into when her husband was promoted). At the time of the interview, she taught at a historically labelled coloured school, in a low to middle socio-economical coloured area. The learner population in this school consisted of the local coloureds and blacks from nearby townships.

The school, a brick structure, comprised classrooms, an administration block and caretakers quarters. Its maintenance and service was dependant on the school fees charged to the learner population.

*We don't have as many facilities as in the white schools. Over the years stock has depleted. Funds have also decreased as our learners do not pay school fees. Many come from disadvantaged homes.*

Gail taught Accounting, Business Economics and Economics from grades eight to twelve. At the time of the interview, she taught grades eleven and twelve. She felt compelled to teach in the higher classes.

*Right now there is only me that is the qualified teacher. We have an unqualified lady that taught grades eight and nines and she's now one of the unprotected temps. She's to leave.*

Gail's teaching experience spanned over twenty years, seven spent as head of department in commerce. The school's staff comprised coloured teachers only. She was one of the two females promoted to position of head of department.

Gail lives in the neighbouring area, from her school (a growing multiracial middle-to-upper class area). High on her career agenda is retirement, which she intends to take when her youngest son completes grade twelve (in two years).

#### **4.2.3 Saira Khan**

Saira, fifty years old, married and mother of two hails from a Muslim (one of the many Indian cultural groups) family. She was born and reared in Durban. Her childhood was spent with both parents and two sisters. Her primary education was at a co-education school. She completed her secondary education at an Indian girls' school.

She studied English, Afrikaans, Biology, History, Geography and Mathematics during her senior secondary years in high school.

*I remember that I wanted to do Latin and because there were very few people - and in most cases there was very limited choice.*

On matriculating, in 1967, Saira felt marginalized by the choice of careers available to her.

*Generally, career choices were few. It was teaching, law and medicine. ...*

She chose to study for the Bachelor of Commerce degree.

*... because I wanted to go into the industry...*

*...(If I did commerce I could either work, I could teach, I could write books from home. ...if I did the B.A. (Bachelor of Arts Degree) then the only thing I could do was teach. ...*

Her tertiary education was completed at an academic institution, historically designated for Indians during the apartheid era.

*... we had to take a ferry everyday across to the island...Although we got our qualification from UNISA we had to study at Salisbury Island.*

Saira was the only female student enrolled at the university for a Bachelor of Commerce degree

*Being the only female there, made everybody protective over me...*

*. they (male students) always had respect. They wouldn't just say anything in my presence...*

Saira blames her gender and race for not being able to pursue her dream career in the private sector.

*... I actually wanted to be a chartered accountant ... it was so difficult because when I went for interviews ... they could not give me a job because with apartheid they didn't have a separate toilet for an Indian female...*

Eventually, she found employment in an administrative position where she worked for two years. She left when she became pregnant. She returned to the labour market after she enrolled her second son at school.

*... If I was teaching, I knew that when they (her children) got home I also got home. On holidays I will also be on holiday, ... this was important to me...*

In the early stages of her teaching career, Saira taught a diverse selection of subjects both at secondary and primary schools. This resulted in her continued studies.

*...When I did my diploma in library sciences I had been placed in charge of the library ...because I already had credits I decided to complete the library science degree. When I did my B.Ed. I actually did a specialization in the teaching of gifted children because ... I was teaching children whom I could see were gifted. Like last year, I did a course in Zulu because ... we now have Zulu speaking people and I needed to understand what they were saying ...*

Her teaching career spanned over nineteen years, the last five years of which were spent as a commerce teacher. After acting as the head of department in commerce at the school for two years, she was promoted to the position, when she applied for the vacancy. She taught Accounting, Business Economics and Economics in grades eight to twelve.

The school Saira taught in, was in a middle-to-high socio-economical, historically designated, Indian, residential area. All the teaching and administrative staff were Indian. Saira was one of the two female heads of department. Her 'office' was a cubicle in a large room in the administration block.

The learner population at Saira's school consisted of an Indian majority and a few blacks from the area. There were also some black, coloured and white children from the neighbouring areas. This learner population came from low-to-middle socio-economic homes. Many of the high-income learners were enrolled at a neighbouring ex-Model C (historically designated white) school. The lower school fees affected maintenance and services at the school.

Saira lives in a middle-to-high socio-economic residential area, home to a majority Indian population with her husband, mother and children.

#### **4.2.4 Elizabeth Johnson**

Elizabeth, forty years old, was born and raised in a white residential area on the coastline of the Durban Metropolitan area. She was the younger of two children.

*I came from a very secure home – a mother, a father and an older brother...*

She attended a girl's school in the area of her residence. She chose to study English, Afrikaans, History, Biology, Typing and Accounting during her senior secondary years. In addition to History and Biology being her favourite subjects, she also chose them for "practical" reasons.

*... I wanted subjects that I could be versatile with...*

This strategy was based on the premise that a diverse selection of subjects in secondary school would expose her to a range of tertiary education choices, although she wanted to be a teacher from an early age.

*... I didn't want to do anything else...*

*...I always wanted to become a teacher, from the time I could speak maybe.*

She completed her tertiary education as a full-time student at a university designated for whites in the Durban Metropolitan area. Here she attained her "higher education requirement" (Diploma in Higher Education) to teach commerce subjects. As she had keen interests to travel overseas she knew her commerce training would stand her in good stead to find administrative positions so she could work and travel simultaneously.

Elizabeth was of the opinion that studying should have a purpose and she felt no need to study after she obtained her degree.

*...When I started studying at tech they (her parents) wanted me to register at the same time at UNISA to get a degree which I then did later on and then I had children...and the subjects were boring and did not interest me. I wasn't going to get a degree for the sake of getting a degree...I registered to get another degree now, in computers because it interests me. I mean it's not for the qualifications...It's from a practical point of view...*

Elizabeth believed it to be divine intervention for her continued service in the teaching profession. Her attempts to resign from teaching seemed to fail on many occasions.

*...I've tried many times to get out of it and I can't. It's like God's will.*

*... I resigned from teaching. I went overseas for two years...but the day I landed here (South Africa) I was offered the job... and two years ago when I wanted to give up again and open my own college...I don't know whether it was God's will again but I didn't secure my loan. So I stayed here and applied for promotion.*

At the time of the interview, Elizabeth taught at a well-resourced, ex-Model C school, historically designated for the white population. The school was a brick structure with extensive gardens and a rugby field. The school fees collected from the learners seemed to provide amply for the teaching aids, the teaching and auxiliary staff, the sports facilities and the scenic gardens. This was the first research participant who had her own office and a personal computer in her classroom.

The learner population comprised middle to high socio-economic class. Although the school retained a large population of white learners, a number of black, coloured and Indian learners were present. While majority of the learners lived in the area, others came from the neighbouring black, Indian and coloured areas.

Elizabeth's work experience included teaching in single and co-educational schools. She also worked as a secretary in the private sector while she travelled overseas. She taught Accounting, Typing and Business Economics "*right up to matric*".

*In the last two years I have taken the highest grades in each from the point of view that the other teachers who are teaching Accounting with me don't have enough experience to teach.*

Her teaching experience spanned over nineteen years. After three years of acting as head of department, her position became permanent when she applied for the vacancy. Elizabeth resided in the neighbouring, historically designated white area, near the school site.

### **4.3 DATA ANALYSES**

The experiences that shaped and impacted on the lives of the four research participants is analysed from an eclectic feminist perspective drawing on radical, socialist and poststructural feminist theories. The analyses explore how gender, race and class are inextricably interlinked in the lived experiences of the research participants.

#### **4.3.1 Teaching as a career**

In order to understand how old patterns become habits, I explore the way in which dominant gender discourses have taken up much of the way the research participants constitute themselves as particular subjects within the domain of teaching as a career for them.

#### 4.3.1.1 Teaching welcomes all women

Two of the research participants had their minds set on teaching as a career from an early age.

*Bongiwe: ... I wanted to be a teacher... I always wanted to be a teacher...*

*Elizabeth: I didn't make any other choices, I didn't want to do anything else. ....always wanted to become a teacher, from I time I could speak, maybe.*

Despite their personal career preferences Gail and Saira, too, realized that teaching was a job that readily accepted women. Unlike the private sector, where they were unable to find jobs to match their qualifications and fulfil their dreams, they met with no resistance when they applied for teaching positions. They were accepted immediately in the teaching profession.

Teaching also enabled the participants to have a career as well as fulfil their motherly and wifely duties without conflict.

*Gail: No, that (teaching) was definitely not my choice in career that time. I was in the private sector, working out there ... I so much wanted to ...go out and be working as a public relations officer or something like that...*

*... With young children it was ideal for me to be at home in the afternoons and during the holidays as well. So that was the major reason why...*

*Saira: I didn't actually choose teaching...I wanted to go into the industry....*

*...because of my children I went into teaching. Because I felt that I needed to be there because when I was home, I used to watch what happened with children*

*who were left alone, and their parents were at work. I needed to be there when they are at home.*

The fact that the two research participants were welcomed in the service sector and unable to find jobs that were compatible with their qualifications, illustrates that higher paying jobs in the private sector were the preserve of men. As the participants experienced little difficulty in obtaining teaching positions, unlike their experiences in the private sector, this classifies teaching as 'woman's work'.

The choice to teach was met with no resistance from their parents and spouses. One deduces that society prefers women in roles that service the community, an extension of their maternal traits.

**Bongiwe:** *After standard ten she (her mum) said 'It's not finished yet...She knew that I wanted to be teacher and she encouraged me.*

**Saira:** *I suppose at that time parents did not want their daughters to continue studying...With the result that there were fewer women in studies...and they allowed them to study something like teaching ...  
I don't particularly know why. But they were happier when they were teaching.*

**Elizabeth:** *...(T)hey always pushed and wanted the best for me...whatever decision I made, as long as it was to my advantage they didn't hassle me at all.*

Although Gail and Saira's dream to work in the corporate world (their initial choice) did not materialize, they seemed perfectly happy with teaching as a career. All participants seemed to attach much significance to these roles. The 'extra' time (working hours at school and vacation) spent with their children was deemed as valuable with regard to their roles as mothers.

**Bongiwe:** *(D)uring the week I would say I don't have a lot of time to do some of my household chores but over the weekends I'm able to do that and over the holidays I am able to be with my children.*

The three women in Gail's Bachelor of Commerce class and her sisters easily found jobs in the teaching sector.

**Interviewer:** *Why did you choose to teach? Surely, you had other opportunities with a Bachelor of Commerce degree.*

**Gail:** *Well that is about all we could do at that time.*

*...My sister, second eldest, went into nursing first and then changed it into a physio degree and now she's lecturing as well. My sister, third eldest, did a degree in physical education and she's teaching as well...*

Saira concurred with Gail, about teaching being an appropriate career choice for women.

*I don't think it had a particular status at this time but teachers were respected. I would say that if you were a teacher then you had a certain amount of respect. The thing with the Indian community was that educators were very important and your education was always respected. I remember...we were always told to respect our educators. Even in our religions, we were told to respect our teachers.*

Teaching seems to be a profession for women based on the original division of labour between man and woman, regardless of race. The traditional identity of the research participants, developed from their gendered, political, social, historical and cultural experiences as women, also has much to do with this perception. Since the research participants constructed their identities in terms of male and female, I and not-I, they view teaching as feminine and what society expects of them as women. The research

participants perceive this to be a natural and socially accepted role in terms of the dominant discourses they find themselves in – in relation to the white, heterosexual male norm.

Elizabeth's experiences in college created an early mindset that teaching was a woman's job.

*Well we were nearly all women...there were no males in those years that we were there - no males at all. Not even male lecturers...*

Elizabeth's reason for this situation was:

*They don't pay enough for men to teach.*

The exploitative economic relations between paid work for men and women have a bearing on the above. It proves further that it seems natural for women to teach, as the dominant discourse within the woman is that this is an extension of her femininity and housework. This seems to be based solely on biological assumptions of women's capabilities, as mothers and wives, by society.

The number of men in the teaching fraternity is indicative of their protection of certain jobs in the labour market. The inclusion of women in the teaching sector enables the men to preserve the decision-making, higher paying occupations within the private sector in the science and technological fields. This results in the women being categorised as the 'working class' in terms of their lower paying jobs as teachers in the 'service' sector - an extension of their housekeeping and child-caring tasks.

The two research participants, Gail and Saira, whose first choice was commerce-related jobs in the private sector, found it extremely difficult to find such a job. Both research participants thought apartheid created the barrier.

**Interviewer:** *Was it because of your gender?*

**Saira:** *No, no. it was general, because of apartheid. You couldn't get into a whole lot of different fields.*

**Gail:** *...(A)t that time applying for a job – that demoralized me because apartheid was still high at that time ...*

Both Saira and Gail felt that certain jobs were the preserve for individuals of the white race.

**Gail:** *...(T)hose were all the jobs obviously earmarked for others (whites) and not for us.*

**Interviewer:** *So you chose to teach?*

**Gail:** *That was the other job open to coloureds at that time and they ended up there. It was either nursing or teaching or social work. And I felt I could only go with my subjects where I could teach.*

Gail was quite certain:

*If I were a white woman at that time, I would obviously have had better luck in the private sector.*

As a black woman Bongiwe was not exposed to a racial South Africa as she lived in a black area, attended black schools and colleges, and this automatically led her into a black school as a teacher. She seemed to have learned the art of racial avoidance.

*I would say though I was aware that all blacks had problems in this country...I didn't have any racial problems that I can talk about. Though I did have they*

*were minor...I have to be aware of the fact that I am black, that there are whites that hate blacks...*

Elizabeth could not understand how the apartheid era disadvantaged the non-white women. She believed determination was the factor that made people achieve their dreams.

***Elizabeth:** You know I've always strongly believed that it doesn't matter the colour of the skin. It's just who you are and how determined you are to get there. I've seen **some**...even in the apartheid era that I knew. And those people actually got to the places not because of who they are and not by climbing on the bandwagon and saying that I'm disadvantaged. To me – I don't accept disadvantaged because I think people in extreme circumstances normally achieve more than people in privileged society. I sometimes really think that.*

***Interviewer:** Do you think that determination gets one to places?*

***Elizabeth:** ...You know I could have sat back and said that I was disadvantaged because in the Afrikaans era a female was considered subservient, because we were paid less for pension, the day we got married we lost our medical aid, we lost our housing subsidy....There were times when I taugt ...when you could not open your mouth because they had an agent on staff...*

While the coloured and Indian research participants found the effects of race to be a crucial factor in determining their careers, the white research participant does not mention race as it applies to her own identity. Given the dominant construction that race is about being black and that white is not a racialised identity, perhaps, this is not surprising.

Although, Elizabeth was advantaged socially, historically and politically she was not as advantaged as her white male colleagues. Marriage meant that she had to relinquish

certain privileges (medical aid, housing subsidy) allowed by her white, male employer. This would result in her dependence on her male partner for these 'benefits'.

#### **4.3.1.2 Finding fulfilment**

All participants interpreted teaching as a career that embraced the moulding of learners. They project themselves as role models and mentors for their learners. The positive responses from the learners nourished them with pride and fulfilment.

*Interviewer: It seems like educating the youth is important to you?*

*Bongiwe: I always want to do my best, so I expect my kids to do likewise...*

*...I'll say I do sometimes feel great as a commerce teacher...some of our students are now accountants so I feel great being a commerce teacher...Some of them tell us that they'll like to be commerce teachers*

Gail, like Bongiwe, shared the same love for her learners.

*Gail: I enjoy the kids...School, everyday is the same routine...but the kids make a difference...I don't know what it would be like in any other job...*

*Interviewer: I see you have been teaching for long, despite the fact that teaching was the last career on your mind.*

*Gail: ...(T)he fact that I've stayed in it for so long does say that there is something positive in it*

*And you also see the results at the end of the day. And you meet these kids after a few years...and they're proud to tell you of their achievements. And it makes you feel good. At least you had some input there...*

**Interviewer:** *Are your learners grateful to you?*

**Gail:** *Oh, yes. You see this in their expression.... But the rewards, when you meet them after they leave school – that's when you know you've made a difference. They tell you of their achievement with pride and you know you did something special.*

Saira also received the same fulfilment from teaching as a role model and mentor.

**Saira:** *Quite often in my teaching I don't limit myself to the syllabus but I speak to them, for example about career choices, of the different fields they can go into or bring something from my experience of what happened...*

Although, Elizabeth projects a much sterner character as a teacher, she also finds her job as a teacher fulfilling.

*I love the children. Unbelievably...I don't know what they see in me. Sometimes they see me as a bitch that controls and keeps them in the afternoon, that shouts at them...but I try and always build up their self-esteem...I found last year, with the failures that we were having through the year; they were children who had the least amount of self-esteem and all they needed was love and caring and showing that you had an interest in them and they can fly...They start working ...they trust you, that you're not going to spill it around the world...and that you're genuinely interested in them and want the best for them they generally open up like a textbook.*

Elizabeth keeps record of fulfilment by getting her learners to assess her lessons. This illustrates that she cherishes what her learners think about her, further verifying her need for maternal fulfilment.

*...I do give them questionnaires about me because you can't grow unless you ...know what they think about you.*

#### **4.3.1.3 Community commitment**

Although all research participants showed a strong sense of community commitment, the non-white (black, coloured and Indian) participants seemed to encourage more financial security and economic contributions to the community than the white participant. As commerce teachers, they viewed financial security as empowering for the community. The non-white participants, in particular, promoted the idea of community contribution by highlighting the importance of education, entrepreneurship and job creation. Their motivation seemed to be fuelled by their maternal and pastoral traits. The adjectives “*soft hearted, sentimental, gentle, emotional*” (Archer & Lloyd 1992:235) reinforce these maternal and pastoral traits. They seemed fulfilled by their community-orientated lives – an integral aspect of the role they ascribe to themselves as wives, companions, mothers and community managers (Wolpe et al 1997).

***Bongiwe:** Some of them regard me as their mother. We're actually very friendly to one another...whenever I'm in their class they enjoy it because we talk a lot about this and that regarding commerce...They regard me as their mother and also respect me because of the way I teach...*

*I always tell them that the first thing one must know is where you are going. Secondly, they are aware that in our country the state of unemployment is very high. When studying commerce they can be helped. Even though they cannot be*

*hired by anybody else, they will be able to open their own businesses. By hiring people to work for them, they will contribute towards employing.*

*I think it's something I owe to the community, as a black person (I don't believe in politics). I see what's going on. So I feel I need to give to the kids as most of their parents are not educated. So they can go out there and be something and give back to their parents or anybody else.*

*Saira: ...My kids sometimes look at me and they can't believe that anyone can be so passionate about the fact that Accounting is important. I've tried to show them that Accounting is used in every part of your life. You need not become an accountant to use Accounting...You need Accounting whether you're a doctor, lawyer or in any profession...So when they leave school and can't get a job, you create your own job because with the Accounting you can have your own little entrepreneurship of business and in that way you will use your Accounting.*

Clough (1994) concurs that in nurturing others, women do the work of producing communities. The women's experiences can produce an understanding of the relationship between power, community and *eros* (Clough 1994:67). Drawing on Chodrow's and Rich's descriptions of pregnancy and thinking, Clough (1994) suggests that women's experiences can produce a:

*sense of connectedness and continuities both with other persons and with the world. (Clough 1994:67)*

#### **4.3.1.4 Conclusion**

The data presented thus far illustrates teaching as a job for women. It reflects the patriarchal structure within the economic level that operated for the research participants. A complex form of patriarchy exists. The waged labour not only excludes the research participants from the careers they wanted to pursue, but also segregated them into service

orientated, lowly paid job sectors. The experiences of the coloured, Indian and white participants illustrate that the state, in addition to being patriarchal, was capitalistic and racist. The state seemed to have a systematic bias towards patriarchal interests in its policies and actions. It did not promote equal opportunities in tertiary institutions as part of the primary goal of getting the best from its citizens. By attracting white men to other job sectors through higher wages, white women endured teaching as a career for women – a form of blatant class segregation.

The research participants role-play their subjective roles as interpreted by them from their political, historical, social and cultural discourses of their social worlds. Hence, they assume and prescribe maternal roles as expected of them from society thus making teaching an ideal to satisfy the extended roles they want to experience as women.

The study, thus far, reveals that the research participants take up a definition of who they are from the coercive gender regime and hold strongly on to this definition.

#### **4.3.2 Women teach, men manage**

##### **4.3.2.1 Management control**

Data elicited from the research participants reveals that the position of power and authority as heads of department is marginalized either by departmental decisions taken by upper management (principal and deputy) or being outnumbered by men in administration positions. These heads of department in commerce are not delegated the power and authority to act independently in their positions of leadership.

*Bongiwe: ... management decides...maybe I will not be able to fulfil the requirements.*

*Gail: ...the principal still has quite a lot of say in it (department of commerce) according to subject allocation. Okay, I give him advice, a sort of input, but other final decisions are obviously made by him...*

*Saira: ... The domination actually only comes from the fact that we have two more males, the deputy and the principal. So when it comes to decision making there are more males there making a decision ....*

The research participants are faced with male domination, illustrating the existence of patriarchal power in educational institutions. The pervasiveness of male domination in the school sites is a way to keep men in control. Hence, upper management (men) can be assured of control if they exclude the women heads of department in decision-making processes. This emphasises that the male upper management ignores the role of the women as heads of department in their schools. They seem to class these women in duties that society places them in, that of maternal and pastoral roles, not management roles.

Bongiwe does not think of herself as being marginalized as head of department in commerce, when the principal makes decisions regarding the department of commerce. She interprets his actions as supportive and his right, as the head of the institution.

*...(M)anagement decides. It is better that way*

*Our school is a commerce school. So the HoD , the deputy principal and the principal make the decisions concerning the commerce department.*

Gail, too, despite her teaching and head of department experience, believes that her principal acts in his line of duty. She bases his actions as implementation of policies issued as instructions, to him, by the DOE. Although Gail's principal makes the final decision, she describes him as "democratic". She interprets democracy as an invitation to sit together in a management meeting.

*The principal still has quite a lot of final say ... the final decisions are obviously made by him. But he's a very democratic guy, I mean we can sit around the table and discuss whatever.*

Saira interprets the principal's exercise of authority as a matter of being 'outnumbered' by the males at administrative meetings.

*The domination actually comes from the fact that we have two more males, the deputy and the principal. So when it comes to management there are more males than females. And when it comes to decision making there are more males there making a decision than females.*

Democracy in South Africa heralded affirmative action. Affirmative action gave women equal access to a range of jobs, including those with high status and responsibility. The promotion procedure documents for teachers recognises this. However, the above narratives illustrate that promotions exist in policy and not in practice.

Foucault's description of power as something being everywhere, inherently neither good nor bad, not something we promote or destroy seems to be qualified by the respect accorded by the research participants to the male deputy principals and principals. The 'relations of power' as one which is not repressive, negative and owned, seems to prevail in the professional experiences of the research participants. In their construction of themselves, based on influences from their social and cultural identities of what defines a woman, the research participants seem to determine the way they act in this discourse of power relations. The research participants casually accept that they are the 'other' in their schools despite having powerful leadership positions.

Although the authority of the principal differed in the school contexts, the factor that remained constant was that each research participant respected the principal and his decisions as the manager of the institution. Within the school structure, the research participants seemed to accept that power and authority lay in the hands of the principal

only. They did not seem to mind the controlled power and authority delegated to them by their principals. There was no power struggle in the relationship between upper management and the research participants.

The data illustrates that Elizabeth shared more power and authority than the non-white participants. She had the authority to decide on the allocation of subjects to teachers and made autonomous decisions when faced with a dispute in her department. However, Elizabeth tries to avoid these disputes and differences by regular meetings. She sees regular meetings as a way to make mutually acceptable arrangements. Hence, Elizabeth avoids a power struggle, not creating any animosity among the teachers under her supervision. Hence, she rejects the power and authority allotted to her as the head of department in commerce.

*We have a meeting every Monday ...and its collectively, we decide what we should not do...when there's a dispute I decide that maybe we should do it this way, but most times we have a general consensus among us...*

*It's all very structured. I mean the department has got their own rules as to how things how thing should operate and how they should be done so there is no real decision that you have to make.*

Saira's more democratic attitude, compared to Elizabeth's, seemed to be vastly influenced by her experiences of subordination when she occupied a level one teaching position. When delegating duties she remembers how her feelings were hurt when the male head of department made autocratic decisions. Hence, she prefers to consult with the teachers under her supervision and allows them to be included in the decision making process.

*I would say we try and make it (teaching subject choices) collectively. If it has to do with the subjects that we teach and which classes they would teach, we sit and*

*work it together, as far as possible. In this way they too can understand that you can't always get whichever class you want because it doesn't work like that...*

The above data illustrates that the research participants reject power and authority. They prefer to lead, as heads of the department in commerce, by adopting a more democratic and collaborative style of leadership.

#### **4.3.2.2 Role models**

In addition to the research participants' belief that patriarchal power and authority relations should exist, they seem to confirm this by their choice of role models. All research participants name men as their role models. The role models for two of the research participants are principals. These role models (men) are admired especially for their hard work in their management positions at the school. This trait, accompanied by a no-nonsense, serious attitude to work and supportive relationships, are the primary reasons for this choice of role model. Gail, who mentions her husband as her role model, also describes him as hard working and supportive.

Bongiwe's choice of role model was a deputy principal

*...because he is a very hard worker...He's a very friendly person. Whenever you want to see him, no matter how busy he was, he will see you by the end of the day. But you don't just go into his office when he is busy, although he is very friendly and very hardworking...*

Elizabeth's role models were two principals she worked with.

**Principal 1:** *...(W)onderful man. His expectations of a person were just unbelievable and because he expected so much from you, you fulfilled it. Incredible leader, an incredible role model, somebody you just want to aspire to.*

*Principal 2: ...Everybody aspires to him. And the guidance he gives in every respect...it's just absolutely amazing. I would say he's the best at the moment.*

Both principals were also admired for being:

*Incredibly hard working*

and having

*Impeccable human relations.*

*Their subject knowledge is just astounding. They know!*

Gail's Accounting teacher captured her interest in the field of Accounting because

*He sort of created the love for the subject and the interest in the subject and in that I found that I was good at what I was doing*

The above narratives illustrate that the preponderance of male domination in upper management results in a dearth of female role models. This seems to be borne out of the fact that women are perceived in motherly roles. Part of this role is to ensure that children are entertained. Elizabeth, the only research participant who also had a female role model, illustrates this adequately.

*She gave me a totally different aspect of teaching - a fun aspect which I didn't have in my first three years of teaching. She just turned it into a fun thing to do.*

One reason that can be attributed to the participants' having difficulty in finding mentors may be that more men occupy managerial positions. This results in female educators lacking role models upon whom to pattern their career aspirations and goals. Another reason, for is that women consider upward mobility as a very lonely route – in addition to

there being few women, it does not have support structures as networked for the men (Edson 1989).

### 4.3.2.3 Aspirations

Perhaps, the reason for the research participants' hesitance in aspiring for higher administrative positions lies here. One factor attributed to the participants not aspiring for promotion is a question of whether they encounter the glass ceiling (invisible barriers within women preventing them from climbing the ladder of success) (Davidson & Cooper 1992; Swiss & Walker 1993; Burke 1993; Heward 1994). The data illustrates that women have greater difficulty attaining higher positions even though they are talented, committed and dedicated.

Gail seems to think that the obstacles women teachers encounter in aspiring towards upward mobility are more external than internal.

*Gail: ...I think it is easier for men to get ahead in teaching quicker because I think it's a very sexist thing and they still look after each other.*

*In my school, there was a deputy principal post available... (a) lady with a few years more experience than me ...applied. She didn't get the post. They brought a person from another school, ...I don't know how he qualified... the other lady who was acting as deputy and applied is still doing the work. ... I didn't apply because I could see that this was going to happen.*

*There are more women in administrative positions now. But the males are obviously sitting in the post as either deputies and principals – and work closely with their governing bodies and can control those places.*

Bassow (1996) provides another alternative. She asserts that males are generally more competitive than females. She adds that the social world is more accepting of competitive males, and competitive females may be concerned about social approval. The rationale for this is that men, in general, are thought to be more achievement motivated than women.

The management positions the research participants find themselves in, seem to be the end of the line for them. They see little value in aspiring towards the position of deputy principal or principal. All of them prefer teaching (pastoral childcare) to management (administrative) positions. They state categorically that they applied for promotion (head of department) because it also included pastoral care. As higher positions denied them of pastoral care, they found these positions unfulfilling. Hence, they neither cared for nor wanted to apply for these positions of leadership.

***Bongiwe:** I see myself as continuing to teach. I would like to teach at a university or training college because then I think I will be able to achieve more than what I am doing at the school...I think that teaching grown-ups is more challenging and rewarding...because basically they know where they are going, what they want and what they are there for.*

*Let's say I become principal, the problem is that I will not be able to teach and that's my problem.*

***Elizabeth:** Well I never really wanted to be the king of England. I am very content with who I am and what I'm doing at this moment...I'm very satisfied with my life and don't have this craving to study further, to become principal...that doesn't bother me, that doesn't interest me. I would like to enjoy the day that I live it to the fullest.*

*It's (aspirations and achievements) never been an issue to me. The reason I applied for promotion is that I still had the classroom care side of it too much - the interaction with the pupils. That is the main reason why I applied.*

*...To me career is not the be all and end all. You know that's just a third of your life. no, it's not important to me*

Gail, on the other hand, chooses to retire as soon as her second son matriculates. Gail opts for a job change.

**Gail:** *... When I retire I will try something different...I will like to see what the whole small business environment is all about. And if I like it I will go into it. I will also like to create some employment as well*

Gail seems to find other roles, such as being a 'fulltime' mother and wife, more fulfilling.

Feminists agree that if women are generally less persistent, it is the result of their female socialization - they have other roles to fulfil first - at the expense of career development. This could result in lack of self-esteem and self-confidence – thus giving males an advantage in the workplace. (Measor & Sikes, 1992).

#### **4.3.2.4 Conclusion**

The study reveals that the participants do not realize their positions as head of department in commerce as power and authority vested in them. They allow upper management to dictate and delegate the extent of their power. The participants do not contest this. They seem to be entangled in the feminine (wife and mother) and masculine (head of department) dilemma. The daily professional duties of the research participants are saturated with the assumptions about their subordination to the male in the work place.

These assumptions are internalised to such an extent that they subconsciously, co-operate with males in their own subordination.

Luke and Gore's (1992) description of women forming the majority of the teaching profession yet dominated by male and masculine rules, in their administrative duties, is clearly evident in this study. The norm seems to be that principals and deputy principals (males) make the final decisions. Management is defined as masculine and is therefore considered as an 'unwomanly' status to the research participants. Its absolutist status asserts certain truths thus silencing 'others', resulting in the participants becoming a 'muted' group (Delamont 1989), dominated by the ideologies of society and contrasts with what 'woman' means - *soft-hearted, sentimental, gentle, emotional* (Archer & Lloyd 1992:235) as opposed to *forceful, enterprising, assertive, confident, rational and tough* (Archer & Lloyd 1992:235). The way the media projects 'woman' further exemplifies what it means to be 'woman'.

*...women stand hip deep in cultures saturated with phallogocentric knowledges, in institutional structures ruled epistemologically and procedurally by men and masculinist signifiers, and in a discipline which, despite its historical terrain as "women's work" - a caring profession- remains the theoretical and administrative custody of men. (Luke & Gore 1992:2)*

Conventional romantic ideology rely on its phallus dominated male organisation and management. From the South African perspective, the overall organization of South African schools is essentially as authoritarian institutions (Christie 1996) as males dominate upper management.

*If you go into school –white or black- you'll soon know who is in charge. There is a ladder of seniority, with the principal at the top, then the deputy principals and vice principals, then the senior teachers, then the ordinary staff. You can even tell this hierarchy from the position and size of their offices and where they sit in the staff room! (Christie1996:146)*

Although it is no longer believed that men are intellectually superior to women (Archer & Lloyd 1992), it is still a widely held view, that the two sexes think differently and have a natural, inherent trait for different work activities.

### **4.3.3 A woman's place**

#### **4.3.3.1 Study and teaching experiences**

From the very outset of their adult lives, all research participants shared gendered experiences of domination and subordination. They seemed to accept these events as a way of life for women. Their first lesson began when they enrolled at tertiary institutions.

Bongiwe described her college experiences as:

*It was nothing much. We were all adults. But the males were sometimes bad. I actually was a very reserved person, so I did not experience bad things. Although I did have some problems. Some of them were rude. They used to drink and come to the lady's hostel create a big fuss. Fortunately for me, I suppose because I was reserved most of them were not rude towards me.*

*Well, I noticed that they actually took more males than females...As females we were looked down upon at that time. So I think that is the reason why.*

She elaborated

*...with us blacks and I think it signifies the way parents think. They think it is better to give education to males than to females.*

Bongiwe avoided this kind of unruly behaviour by being *reserved*. Being *reserved* was a solution to not being harassed by some male students. Bongiwe thought that the male students at the college had their own definitions of the status of women in society. She also believed that there were norms that women should abide by. Hence, she created and remained within a boundary, a code of behaviour, to avoid being the target of harassment. The way the male students treated the female students seemed natural (normal) to Bongiwe.

Gail enjoyed her studies at university. She felt *accepted* as a female and this seemed to enhance her enjoyment.

*...(W)e were quite a nice group, a mixed group (males and females). We were accepted as females at the time at the tertiary institution...I think I played around a bit, enjoying varsity life...We were **accepted**. I don't think there were issues at that time...*

The term "**accepted**" connotes a secondary status allocated to females, indicating that tertiary studies were primarily for the male, and a female's place was with homely duties.

*Obviously there were more males than females. I think it ended off with a lot of students dropping off...We ended off with the last three **die-hards**, three girls...*

This conveys the message that to be female demanded highly intelligent and resilient traits, qualities possessed primarily by males and lacking in females.

Saira also experienced the intake of few females at the tertiary institution she attended. She elaborated that this was not a university restriction. The *minority* of females who did attend seemed to opt for more service-orientated courses.

*It was teaching, law or medicine. There was little that we could do.*

In the year, that Saira started her tertiary education she “*was the only female*” enrolled for the Bachelor of Commerce degree.

*There were no females before. After I had started then the following year there were...*

Saira was proud to be the only female in the commerce class. She received all the attention in the commerce classes she attended. She was eagerly supported in her studies by the academic staff and her male colleagues.

**Interviewer:** *As the only female (studying for the Bachelor of Commerce degree) can you describe your experiences.*

**Saira:** *More privileges definitely because nobody refused you help. For example, at lectures (I didn't do accounting at school. It wasn't one of my matric subjects and I didn't know what was happening in accounting) the lecturer would do the lecture and then he'd come and sit next to me and give me- personally help me.*

Saira's reason for the lecturer's special attention was:

*I think it was a feather in his cap. It's 'I have a female and this is the first and she has done well'.*

Hence, Saira and Gail agree that tertiary education is geared primarily for men. The covert message was: male equalled intelligence. To be female meant you had to prove your worth.

As non-white and women, Gail and Saira experienced problems when they searched for their dream jobs.

**Gail:** ...I enjoyed studying ...it was the part of finding work that was the problem because being woman and being black at that time was difficult.

*It was either nursing or teaching or social work. And I felt I could only...go with teaching...That was the only other job open to coloureds at that time...*

**Saira:** *There was very little we could do.*

*When you went out after university and wanted to go into different fields, you couldn't really get into different fields so you had to do something that you could get into.*

Except for Elizabeth, the other research participants had different experiences regarding their choice of grades and standards to teach. Their experiences seemed to depend on the availability of men to teach the commerce.

**Bongiwe:** *Where I teach you usually start with the kids in grade eight and then you take them up to grade twelve. (E)ach teacher... is loaded with subjects from the previous year, for example if a teacher started in 1999 with a grade eight then in 2000 he takes a grade nine etcetera.*

**Gail:** *Oh they looked at my qualifications and just thought that because of my degree that was where I was qualified to teach...I taught down at the bottom, the sixes and sevens....Not very long. And even now too you help out. If there are a few classes...and they need you down you teach. But now I teach grade twelve and eleven and last year I had a grade nine class. Because of the scarcity of accounts teachers you must teach across the board.*

**Saira:** *...It took a very long time before I moved on into the higher grades. It was more circumstantial in that because at that time there were no other teachers to take the higher grades that I was asked to teach that. But all along whenever I asked to teach grade twelve he would never give me that opportunity. The male*

*teacher taught grade twelve because I think they felt that if they gave it to us and when it came to promotion they would have to compete with us so if they didn't give us the higher grades they would have no competition from us.*

In Elizabeth's case, there were no males to compare with. Hence, the decision on who took what grades, was based purely on where the vacancy lay and whether she had the necessary knowledge and qualifications to teach the subjects.

This above data confirms Sara Delamont's (1990) findings that teachers who come from lower-middle class backgrounds are most likely to hold traditional gender role stereotypes.

#### **4.3.3.2 Making choices**

It seems that the research participants made a choice between careers and motherhood when they were young parents. This seemed to be necessary for their role as mothers.

*Saira: ...I felt that I needed to be there because when I was at home I used to watch what happened with children who were left alone and their parents were out at work. I needed to be there when they are at home.*

The family still seems to be the cornerstone of the sexual division of labour for the research participants. They seem to see the role of woman as that which is primarily responsible for housework and men as primarily responsible for waged work. This results in control of women's labour, by men, both within and outside the family.

The research participants never lose sight of the fact that there is always another job, the job of motherhood. This seems to be an innate quality in the participants, regardless of their race. Being a mother, a wife and a housekeeper is natural to them - a traditional, unquestioned role. Parenting, especially, does not create or have any potential for a

collision between career and family. They see child rearing as their unique responsibility and even leave the employment sector to undertake this vital function.

**Gail:** ... gave it up for three years and then I took a break in service. I had a baby and then at that time they didn't pay teachers accouchement leave or anything like that. Obviously finances were needed so I resigned, picked up my benefits, had my babies and stayed at home for four years.

**Saira:** ...I worked for two years in the industry. Then when I found out that I was pregnant I left work and then I was at home for seven years or so and then I decided to go and teach.

Being wife and mother is viewed by the research participants as their primary role - a natural structure of femininity by which women can achieve fulfilment. Even though the research participants have 'able' partners they assume the primary responsibility of parent and housekeeper. Although motherhood was a particularly intense emotional commitment for the majority of the participants, this commitment was one, which the research participants valued and enjoyed, even though at times it was frustrating and draining.

**Bongiwe:** It is difficult to work now with having kids because you must give them love, you must give them support and yet you still have to work.

When he (husband) does work at home...sometimes I see that he's had enough so I step in

**Gail:** Yes. I love being a mother.

Although, the data seems to prove that people's priorities cannot remain fixed over time motherhood still occupies primary status for the research participants. At different phases of their lives, women recalibrate the balance between profession and children, as careers evolve and family circumstances change.

Like men, women too, derive personal satisfaction from achievement in their careers. However, they seem to prefer a balance in their lives. They display realistic needs in accomplishment with some tradeoffs between family and work.

#### **4.3.3.3 The role of husbands**

The research participants accorded priority status to their husbands' careers. They seemed comfortable with the role of their husbands - the fact that their husbands rarely extended their support to housekeeping and child rearing matters did not seem to bother them. The careers of their husbands occupied privileged status, resulting in their own careers taking second position.

Gail perceives her role as the driving force behind her husband's career.

***Gail:** ...I always said to my husband: 'I will support you because I'll work as long as I have to'. I always pushed him. And that is why we moved ...to Durban at that time because he was promoted at that time.*

***Interviewer:** On what basis would you promote your husband than yourself?*

***Gail:** Maybe I am of the old school of thought where husbands are meant to work and I want to ...enjoy the home comforts...*

***Interviewer:** Does your husband's career always take first place?*

***Gail:** Yes, his career first. I somehow admired him for his guts to go from nothing to make himself a success. But I also believe that behind every successful husband is a wife.*

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**Interviewer:** *Do you believe this?*

**Gail:** *off course, yes....they go off course at times so you need to keep them on track.*

This seems to confirm Skevington and Baker's (1989:4) findings that women define themselves in terms of their husband's occupation and position. In devoting their efforts to improving his social status, they also enhance their own self-image.

**Bongiwe:** *I'm married to a very supportive husband...I said my husband is very supportive because ...I would say he contribute a lot towards my career and with this in mind he helps me a lot. Sometime, he realizes that I have to bring work home, so he looks after the kids and does some work for me. So my marriage and work – I am able to look after properly.*

*It's so difficult to work now with having kids because you must give them love, you must give them support and still have to work. And also when studying ...its actually not that easy. I do manage ...because my husband is always there. My husband is in a better position to aspire in his career than myself because, although he helps, sometimes I see that he's had enough and I step in.*

**Saira:** *He supported me in whatever I choose to do because I've studied a lot part-time... and at all times he was supportive of me...*

The roles the research participants assume seems to guarantee the sexual division of labour within the family. They convey the idea that to be woman is to be responsible for domestic labour and childcare first, thereafter career driven. This balance seems to be as natural in terms of men's work and politics. Therefore whatever the husband does, is regarded as commitment from his understanding and supportive nature, not his duty as a parent. The belief that prevails is that men are supposed to be providers for the family, a natural order internalised by men and women through their subjective and patriarchal

upbringing. According to Bhalalusesa (1998), a woman's job is viewed as a luxury that provides for the extras and gives her personal satisfaction and fulfilment, even though it may be essential.

#### **4.3.3.4 Stereotyping behaviour**

The research participants seem to imitate the role of their mother, as they give cognisance to the influential role their mothers played in their lives. The intensity of the influential role of their mothers is defined by their (mothers') experiences as wives without careers and financial independence.

Chow et al (1996) support my findings of the role middle class families play in the roles of the lives of their daughters. They assert that although working class families encourage daughters to marry, they recognise the need for working-class women to contribute to the family income or to support themselves financially. To achieve this working-class girls are encouraged to pursue education for work in gender segregated occupation as work in these fields presumably allow women to keep marriage, family and child-rearing as life goals while also contributing to the income of the family.

Bongiwe's mum, divorced with three children, seemed certain that Bongiwe should not endure her plight. She perceived education as the key to financial security and independence.

*My mother, she's a very great person, a strong person...she was in a position where my father divorced her so she was just there for us...*

*...She encouraged me. After standard ten she said: 'It's not finished yet. You have to do something.' ...She knew I wanted to be a teacher and she encouraged me. She gave me money to go ...to collect the forms.... Then, for registration she organized transport for me. She accompanied me. We registered. So definitely*

*she was always there and she encouraged me. She said: 'If you get married I don't want you to suffer. Look what your father did to us? So I want you to have a profession so you won't suffer.*

*...Even now, she keeps calling me and asks: "What are you doing? ...Look at your brother, although I'm not comparing you, I don't want you to be left behind.'*

Gail who describes her mother as *not very literate* also seemed to value financial independence.

*... she sewed at home. She had her own home industry.*

Saira seemed to uphold the humane, maternal qualities of her mother's teachings that everyone shall have their day.

*...My mother always had an influence, in that she's very patient, very strong. She always advises us never to hold bitterness about anything because that is a stumbling block to any progress.... In teaching you are held back because you are female. You don't become bitter about it. Because if you are bitter you are not going to enjoy what you are going to do and your bitterness will in fact reflect on your relationship with others as well...*

*My mother was very fortunate ...in that her father believed that children should be educated, even the girls...My grandfather actually had a tutor coming home to teach his daughters...*

*...(S)he never told any of us that that we may not go ahead with our education. So even at that time when girls never furthered their education she didn't stop me at any time.*

*...initially when I got married I went on my own but when I moved into my new home which was at the time I started teaching she came to stay with me. Even when I was teaching I knew that she was there. My children were not alone. I knew they were cared for. So all the time I knew I had support.*

The research participants view family responsibilities as an inseparable commitment around which a career revolves. This point reflects conclusion that internal barriers (glass ceilings) exist within women constraining their ambition. Elizabeth, given the situation of no family responsibilities, will still opt to remain in her teaching position.

The treatment of working mothers in the mass media mirrors the ambivalence of the cultural and social confusion about women's contemporary roles. This is validated by the messages that women receive from the media. For example, women's magazines address the question of how women might best manage their familial demands as well as their career worlds. Relationships with husbands and children are central to the features, fictions, advertising and advice columns, which constitute the message to women in feminine magazines. The type of advice given to women overall is to make the best of the oppressive structures of family life. As wives and mothers, women are encouraged to accommodate themselves and their families at the expense of their own feelings and the quality of their lives.

Society's image of a supposedly 'normal' family is white, middle-class, with the husband as the breadwinner, a domesticated wife and two children (Jackson 1993), is an image three of the research participants live up to. All three have working husbands and two children each.

The radical and socialist-feminist discourses theorize the family as *the* instrument of oppression of women and label this as men's control of women's sexuality and procreative powers. They see the family as the major social instrument which binds women to heterosexual monogamy and constitutes their sexuality masochistically in the interest of the satisfaction of male desire. These feminist theories see such behaviour as

resultant in oppression - through exercised legally, economically and ideologically as defined structures of the family and through the internalisation of a masochistic form of femininity. There is failure to see that it is natural for women to defer constantly to the interests of men and children.

Hence, all the research participants seem to take a conservative discourse towards the family as the natural basic unit of the social order. Keeping the family together is seen as a dominant task of the research participants seems to meet their individual, emotional, sexual and practical needs as woman (maternal and feminine).

The term 'working father' is non-existent in our vocabulary. Society exerts no pressure on fathers to play the dual role of parent and professional. The study indicates that all research participants, in addition to their careers, carry a major share, if not all, the domestic responsibilities. The organization of society in family units differed in certain ways when race and class are considered. For example, Bongiwe remained responsible for housekeeping and childcare although her husband was temporarily unemployed. On the other hand, Elizabeth negotiated that her employed husband share some chores, such as fetching the children from school on days that she attended lectures for her studies. Saira, on the other hand, had her mum living permanently with the family to provide some auxiliary maternal service to the household. This enabled Saira to work and study further. Gail seemed to think her motherhood days would be over as soon as her son completed his secondary schooling and therefore looks towards early retirement.

Nonetheless, all research participants have managed away logistical conflicts between work and family, or have simply assumed all the responsibilities when demands arose between careers and child care needs. There still exists a strong persistent belief that the proper and prime role for a woman is that of a wife, mother and career (Measor and Sikes 1992:111).

The reality of the situation, however, is that the family as a social institution, is defined and materially supported by the law, the welfare system, education, the media, religious

houses and a range of other social institutions. This combined with a lack of an alternative to the patriarchal nuclear family makes it difficult for women to opt out of their family life. A change in this new subject position will only arise out of a new set of material relations, as evidenced by Gail's decision to retire soon.

#### **4.4 CONCLUSION**

This chapter highlights the gendered experiences of four women heads of department in commerce, in four historically classified race groups. Their experiences are impacted on by how they construct their identities and roles as women.

Commerce is regarded world wide as the domain of men. One tends to believe that women interested in commerce share similar traits to men, in terms of job fulfilment. The assumption is that women commerce teachers would strategise upward mobility in their career paths, would readily accept power and authority in their positions as heads of department and would contest their relationships with upper management if not accorded the relevant power and authority accompanied their position. These commerce women heads are perceived as being different from other women heads of department in the education sector, essentially because commerce is linked with the masculine fields of science and technology. Yet, the data elicited from the research participants portray no such evidence.

This data demonstrates that the participants, women heads of department in commerce (positions of power) are marginalized, in terms of exercising their authority. The research participants willingly and non-grudgingly accept these subordinate positions. They choose to teach in the classroom and shy away from the decision making process at their schools; despite their qualifications, skills, knowledge and specialization.

The qualifications, skills and knowledge these women possess stand them in good stead to find managerial positions in the corporate world, that are higher paying, power-

orientated and have guaranteed upward mobility. Yet, they prefer to occupy the position of head of department, enabling them to retain their roles as pastoral care givers. This position enables them to maintain contact with the learners, which they find fulfilling. Hence, they reject a leadership positions that carries power and authority. Rather, they offer themselves in terms of their teaching experience, their commitment to community and as role models to the learners.

The research participants (commerce heads of department) find teaching empowering. It enables them to fulfil certain roles, which they see as primary to a woman, namely, mother, wife and caregiver. They view this as a balance in their wife and motherhood roles. Teaching is also seen as an extension of motherhood and they find this vastly empowering.

They do not aspire towards upper management positions as this is not only a lonely road (few women heads of the department in commerce occupy these positions) but, also one that is preoccupied with planning, organising, leading and controlling an institution. They prefer pastoral care relationships with learners. This climb up the proverbial ladder would increase their administrative duties resulting in a decrease in pastoral care. Moving into a higher institution though, does guarantee contact with the youth, and the participants prefer this.

Thus, they form their identities in terms of romantic storylines (Davies 1992) and the marriage plots (Aisenberg & Harrington). They split their lives into work, woman and head of department. The position of head of department seems uniquely masculine while higher status positions (deputy principal and principal) is reserved for the male. Hence, unlike their male colleagues whose professional lives cohere around marriage and career, for the research participants it is either marriage *or* career. So the storyline is very simple- women are *outsiders in the in the sacred grove* (Ainsberg & Harrington, 1988).

Race is associated with class, culture and history. The non-white participants found this to be an obstacle in their search for employment to suit their qualifications and dreams in

the apartheid era. However, race was not a factor that marginalized the participants in their employment as teachers. All the participants found that teaching embraced them as women. However, the power and authority accorded to the status of head of department, was denied to all participants regardless of their race.

The gender equity policies that the DOE implemented in South African schools resulted in an increase in the number of women in management positions at schools. However, men still occupy upper management positions in schools. Just as upper management, experience difficulty in relinquishing power and authority, the participants, find it difficult to accept their positions of power and authority. The pervasive male dominating relations that exist between upper management and women commerce heads also impedes these women from aspiring towards upward mobility.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

*As women we may share certain experiences of sexism and domestic responsibility and we may differ in ethnic origin, class or culture; but what unites most of us is our consciousness that it is other people who set the agenda. Thus, what serve to link powerful social groups are their experiences of 'otherness' and exclusion from the sites of power and meaning-making. (Weiner 1994:7)*

This study of four women heads of department in commerce, in four historically race classified school contexts, is summarized and concluded in this chapter. The study tried to explore the experiences and challenges of the research participants under three broad headings:

- Teaching as a career
- Women teach, men manage
- A woman's place

The experiences were explored with the following critical questions in mind:

- What gender experiences shape the lives of women heads of department in commerce (positions of leadership) in secondary schools?
- How do these experiences impact on their roles as heads in the department of commerce?

The data reveals the following:

## **5.1 Teaching as a career**

It seems natural for the participants to be involved in a service-orientated task, like teaching. This is perceived to be an extension of a woman's femininity, as this is the way society defines the role of a woman. This dominant discourse of the participants seems to be based solely on society's biological assumptions of a woman's capabilities. This definition stems from the social, political, historical and cultural forces that form their identities. Thus, they express their identities as a 'muted group' in terms of the dominant male norm regardless of their race or class.

To the participant, teaching seems to be a profession for women, based on the original division of labour between man and woman. This definition, too, is derived from the social, political, historical and cultural forces that shape society. The participants construct their identities in terms of male and female, I and not-I, according to their idea of society's expectations of them. The participants define themselves as the working class, as they prefer to align themselves with this service-orientated, low paying job. This results in principal and deputy principals retaining positions of power, thus limiting the participants in their decision-making positions as heads of department.

The inclusion of women in the teaching fraternity leaves other higher paying jobs, like science and technological fields, available to men who make it their preserve. The men that 'run' the school system (principals and deputy principals) also maintain their control as they 'operate' in a male dominated network supported by their male colleagues.

## **5.2 Women teach, men manage**

The appointment of women to leadership positions in the department of education in 1999 was an extraordinary moment in the history of South Africa with regard to fulfilling its gender equality promises. However, this was also accompanied by conflict and contradictions between policy goals and social justice. While the intention of the policy

was to bring about social justice, the research participants regarded the leadership position that accompanied it as ‘masculine’.

The conventional romantic ideology that women teach and men manage forms a dominant discourse within the research participants. They do not perceive their careers in a traditional way e.g. by strategizing for upward mobility. They seem to choose family over their professional aspirations, placing their own careers second to their husbands. They “drift” into the position of head of department with their focus at a pastoral and maternal care level, equivalent to that of classroom teaching. This is evident in the way the research participants try to empower their learners and the management style they adopt – consultative and collaborative.

The participants seem to be fulfilled and driven by their maternal and pastoral traits. They take up the definition of who they are from a coercive gender regime and hold strongly onto this definition.

Race was a crucial factor in determining the power and authority delegated to the participants as well as their job options. The white participant has more power and authority delegated to her compared to the non-white participants. According to two non-white participants race excluded them from their dream jobs, due to separate amenities for whites and non-whites. Race also determined respect for people. Bongiwe illustrates this by the respect she accords her white principal by not concerning him with personal problems while these problems were shared with the black principal. This emphasizes that Bongiwe classes the white race higher than the black race.

The study shows that, despite an overarching discourse of gender equality to which social justice is attributed, discourses of leadership, which were both gendered and racialized, structured the lived experiences of the research participants. All four research participants experienced gender as shaping their view towards their work. Constructs of leadership were more gendered than raced. They believed that the role of men was to lead, and women, to follow. In addition, the notion of ‘leadership’ abounded with

notions of masculinity, as it was associated with control and performance. On the other hand, the research participants saw themselves in adopting more collaborative, supportive, empathetic, teaming-building and democratic leadership styles. These qualities were seen as less masculine by the participants and were thus insufficient to penetrate through the glass ceiling.

This study argues that despite the positions of leadership given to women their deeply expected social, historical and cultural values remain a driving force to their functioning as women. They see their role as mother and wife first, and teacher and administrator second. It becomes clear that the identities of the research participants are shaped in accordance with the subordinate and power relations they experience. They become the 'other'. Everything they experience, think and react to, is determined by their belief of the subordinate roles they play in society.

I believe that hegemony is never total; it is always open to contestation. Women and men, the 'other' and the norm, have a vital role to play in dismantling oppression and generating a more just society. If both genders analyze policies and practices and unify in solidarity to support each other, change in discourse and subjectivity can occur.

For women to take personal strides forward, breaking the glass ceiling, climbing old walls, and dumping the baggage of the past takes concerted effort. Such concentrated effort means planning and strategizing or developing strategies. The first step towards upward mobility involves analyzing personal and professional goals, competencies and potential. It means that a woman who thinks about management positions in schools should be proactive. However, she should not lose sight of discriminatory policies and be willing to find paths around those obstacles.

### **5.3 A woman's role**

In defining their work as secondary to her husbands' work, in the family situation, seems to necessitate the continued economic dependence of the participants. If they understand the sexual division of labour within the home as a manifestation of patriarchy, then they would see that a partnership would be a more feasible means to create equality.

The reproduction of mothering seems to be the basis for the reproduction of the participants' location and responsibilities in the domestic sphere. This mothering, and its generalization to a woman's location in the domestic sphere, links the woman-mother as a fundamental feature of the sex-gender system: It is basic to the sexual division of labour and generates a psychology and ideology of male dominance as well as ideology about the participants' capacities and nature.

The research participants' mothering also portrays the family as constituted in a male dominated society. The sexual and familial division of labour depicts the research participants as socially gendered women who enter into asymmetrical, heterosexual relationships. They seem to turn their energies toward nurturing and caring for children – in turn portraying the sexual and familial division of labour.

### **5.4 Conclusion**

This study has argued that the raced and gendered organizational culture and discourses within which men and women work raises serious questions about the relationship between policy and practice. This is reflected in the lived gendered experiences of four women heads in the department of commerce. Integral to the way the research participants see their gendered world is their race and class experiences. These experiences structure their perceived ideologies of what woman should be and how women should act as heads of department.

The analysis indicates that the research participants interested in pursuing a professional career are disadvantaged from the start. They may have the option of postponing marriage and bearing children to avoid interruption, modification or abandonment of their career goals. However, they are faced with conflicts and contradictions both psychologically and externally (what society expects of them as women).

The experience of the research participants appears more infinitely layered, if we recognize that their experiences are shaped by their location, not only in relation to gender, but also by race and class. If we think that this is the universal experience of all South African, white, middle class women, we are misled. In South Africa, the fundamental characteristic of apartheid society has deep rooted divisions based on race, accompanied by deeply entrenched patriarchal structures, thus having different effects for women located in different social groups.

This study confirms the findings that social, political, historical, cultural, gender, race and class shape women regardless of their education. Entering a male domain, position of leadership associated with power and authority, does not necessarily mean, that the role functions of women change. Women regardless of race or class fulfill the same traditional roles, that of maternal and pastoral care. Hence, a leadership position is no guarantee that the subordination of women ends. In fact, gender, race and class combine powerfully to subjugate women to determine their identity, role function and action in leadership spaces.

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# **APPENDIX A**

## **PRELIMINARY INTERVIEW**

### **BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS:**

Describe your childhood in terms of place of birth, parents, siblings, schools attended, favourite subjects at school?

### **PROFESSIONAL AND ACADEMIC QUALIFICATION**

What tertiary education did you pursue to become a teacher?

What teaching qualifications do you possess?

What academic qualifications do you possess?

### **TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

How long have you been in teaching?

What subjects have you taught?

What subjects are you teaching this year?

What position do you hold at your school?

How long have you held this position?

### **MARITAL STATUS**

Are you married?

Do you have any children? How many?

### **REASONS FOR CHOOSING TEACHING AS A CAREER**

Why are you a teacher?

## **APPENDIX B**

### **IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

#### **CHILDHOOD UPBRINGING**

Describe your childhood in terms of your birthplace and family structure.

#### **SCHOOL EXPERIENCES**

Which schools did you attend during your primary and secondary years of study?

What were your favourite subjects at secondary school?

What subjects did you study in your senior secondary schooling phase?

Why did you choose these subjects?

Did you mentor any teachers at your school? Why did you choose this/these persons?

#### **CAREER CHOICES**

What were your childhood career ambitions?

Did you fulfill this?

Who were your role models?

#### **QUALIFICATIONS AND TERTIARY EXPERIENCES**

What commerce qualifications do you possess?

What other qualifications do you possess?

What motivated you to study?

Which tertiary institutions did you attend?

Why did you choose this/these tertiary institutions?

How did your male colleagues and lecturers at this tertiary institution treat you?

Why do you think they behaved in this way?

What was the distribution of males and females at the tertiary institution? Why was it like this?

Did the males and females pursue the same courses?

What courses that the females enroll for?

## **CAREER OPPORTUNITIES**

Did you find a job in the desired field when you completed your tertiary training?

Why was this possible/impossible?

## **TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

For how long have you been teaching?

How long have you occupied the position of head of department of commerce?

How many other females occupy this position in your school?

How many heads of department are males in your school?

Are your principal and deputy male or female?

What authority do you have as the head of the department in commerce in your school?

What subjects have you taught?

What subjects are you teaching this year?

How do you allocate the commercial subjects in the department of commerce?

What other administrative duties do you have as a head of department in your school?

Do you have any role models in the teaching career?

Why did you choose this/these person/s?

## **FAMILY INFLUENCE AND SUPPORT**

Who in your family motivated you towards a career?

Did your parents treat your career aspirations any different from your other siblings? How did they do this?

What were your parents' inputs in terms of your career choice?

Why do you think they adopted this attitude?

How does your husband support your career?

How would you compare your career in terms of your spouses?

## **CAREER ASPIRATIONS**

You are now the head of department of commerce. What steps do you intend taking hereon?