



UNIVERSITY OF  
**KWAZULU-NATAL**

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INYUVESI  
**YAKWAZULU-NATALI**

**IMBALANCES OF THE PAST: MARGINALISATION OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP  
ROLES IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION.**

**BY**

**SNENHLANHLA NTOMFUTHI ZUNGU**

**219095947**

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the academic requirement for  
the degree of master's Coursework of Education in Higher Education:  
Leadership in Higher Education.**

College of Humanities, School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Supervisor: Dr T. Mnisi

2023

# DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

## COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

### DECLARATION - PLAGIARISM

I, ..... Snehlanhla Ntomfuthi Zungu ....., declare that

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.
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3. This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
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Signed



.....  
Date: 24 January 2024

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to give glory to the God for giving me strength, courage, and determination to continue the journey that was very challenging yet rewarding and very educational until I finish this race.

I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the following people for incredible contribution to the successful completion of my study:

To my loving and kind supervisor, Dr Thoko E. Mnisi, for not giving up on me but always believe in me and made me realise my capabilities. The role you have played in my life, you went beyond than being a supervisor and you have been a good friend and a counsellor. You provided me with professional support and guidance throughout the journey. Thank you for your unwavering support.

To Dr Shawa, who during my coursework unpacked the theory guiding this study and for always landing his hand of support for me to finish my study.

To my participants, UKZN School Deans, thank you so much for featuring me on your busy schedule to participate in my study. Thank you for realising the importance of the study and the contribution you have made to Women Leadership research.

To my former Campus Management Team and colleagues, Mr Zondi, Mr Blose and Mrs Mzimela, Coastal KZN TVET College, Umbumbulu Campus, for always encouraging and supporting me. I couldn't have made it without your support.

My fiancé, Mr P. Luthuli and my adorable son, Ntsika Lethokuhle Luthuli, thank you for unwavering support, encouragement and willingness to assist me through this journey. Thank you for always believing in me.

To my Zungu family, my brothers, sisters and my father, thanks for your constant support, prayers and encouragement.

Thank you so much to my colleagues and friends for the support, this study would have not been possible without you.

**DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my late mother, Mrs N.T Zungu (MaZulu) who always prayed for me, taught me to fear God and most of all believed in me.

I am sure she would have been proud to see me accomplishing this significant milestone.

## **ABSTRACT**

The gender equality policy encourages the full and equal participation of women in the workplaces. However, there has been a significant dearth of women in South Africa senior leadership roles. The main aim of the study is to explore the roles of social capital in promoting women into senior leadership positions in higher education institutions. I have drawn social capital as a theoretical framework to analyse data to understand the impact of social capital in advancing women into senior leadership.

The study is qualitative. I used the semi-structured interviews to generate data. Three women who were school deans were interviewed. The interview questions were constructed to answer these critical questions of the study: What influence does the social capital have in advancing women to senior leadership positions in higher education? How significant are the professional networks in contributing to career progression of women leaders in higher education? How can the aspiring women leaders be supported by women who have ascended to leadership position in universities? What do women leaders recommend for women who desire to be in senior leadership roles? Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data to look for patterns in the meaning of data to find themes.

The findings suggest the four key points: The influence of social capital in advancing women to senior leadership, professional networks in career advancement of women leaders, importance of supporting aspiring women leaders by the experienced women leaders and insight gained by experiences of women leaders. The study suggested the following recommendations for the higher education institutions in South Africa: (1) The reviewing of the promotion criteria to accommodate women as they have dual responsibilities between work and family, and (2) Continuing mentorship of aspiring women leaders to increase their job proficiency.

## **LIST OF ACCRONYMS**

KZN- KwaZulu-Natal

SA- South Africa

DVC- Deputy Vice Chancellor

VC- Vice Chancellor

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter serves to introduce the study on women in senior leadership, particularly Vice Chancellor position in higher education institutions. The study aims to explore the roles of social capital in promoting women into Vice chancellor positions in higher education institutions. This chapter begins by highlighting the background to the study, followed by the rationale and the purpose of the study. The objectives of the study and questions informing the study are presented. Later, a brief review of the key concepts, theoretical framework and the research methodology are discussed.

### **1.2 Brief motivation/Background**

The underlying principle of this study arises from the problem of gender imbalance in Vice Chancellor positions in South African higher education institutions. Women in higher education institutions are still marginalised from reaching senior positions in academic leadership, particularly Vice Chancellor (Toni & Moodly, 2019). There is a dearth of women in Vice Chancellor position South African universities. In 26 universities in South Africa, only four Vice-chancellors are women (Naidu, 2018). Some women have progressed into Dean positions but there is a constraint in ascending to Vice-chancellor positions. The position of Vice-chancellor is still dominated by men in South African higher education institutions. The number of women graduating for postgraduate and PhD qualifications has increased in higher education institutions, which indicates that women meet the requirements for senior leadership positions (Cloete, Sheppard, & Bailey, 2015).

Multiple studies were conducted on the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions (Krause, 2017; Beckwith, Carter, & Peter, 2016; Moodly, 2015), but the issue of gender Imbalance still exists. This issue has been redressed for women at the lower level of academic leadership in higher education institutions as women continue to be more represented in the roles of Faculty or school Deans (Airini, Conner, McPherson, Midson, & Wilson, 2011). The foregoing arguments show that women are still marginalised in Vice-chancellor positions.

### **1.3 Rationale**

The rationale for this study emanates from the persisting issue of the treatment of women in Vice Chancellor positions in South African higher education. The study may

improve knowledge of the current and future studies on South African women in middle leadership and to women lecturers in general. This study may contribute significant knowledge to women in higher education as it may provide information that may be helpful in their career trajectories. It may also inform policy on women who are in Deanship positions on the role of social capital towards progressing to Vice-chancellor positions. The study is considered as topical because it investigates the phenomenon that currently exists in higher education institutions in South Africa. This research hopes to contribute and have a noteworthy influence on the future leadership of higher education. The huge gender disparity promotes the patriarchal practice of leadership that associates leadership with the masculine and that has implications for institutional culture (Moody, 2015). The current research on gender imbalance in leadership positions confirms that further research is needed in South African higher education as there is a marginalisation of women in Vice- chancellor positions.

#### **1.4 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the role of social capital in promoting women into senior leadership positions in higher education institutions. The dimensions of social capital are used to explore the experiences of women currently in Deanship positions in rising to senior leadership positions. Interviewing women Deans about their lived experiences in leadership positions created a new discourse on the career progression opportunities for women using social capital. The knowledge that will be acquired from this study will be useful to the young women who seek senior leadership positions. The information may also supplement the existing literature to assist women who aspire to be in leadership positions as it will give clarity on the impact of social capital in career progression.

#### **1.5 Research questions.**

The main research question of the study was:

What are women's experiences in advancing to higher education senior leadership?

The sub-research questions that guided the study were:

1. What influence does social capital have in advancing women to senior leadership positions in higher education?

2. How significant are professional networks in contributing to the career progression of women leaders in higher education?
3. How can the aspiring women leaders be supported by women who have ascended to the leadership position in universities?
4. What do women leaders recommend for women who desire to be in senior leadership roles?

These research questions are derived from the objectives of this study. The objectives of the study were:

1. To ascertain the impact of social capital in advancing women into senior leadership positions.
2. To explore the worth of professional networks in contributing to the career progression of women leaders in higher education.
3. To explore the importance of support by experienced women leaders to the women leaders aspiring to ascend to senior positions.
4. To expand the set of recommendations for women who desire to be in leadership positions, by using the results from this research.

## **1.6 Review of key concepts**

### **1.6.1 Career development**

Career development is the continuous process of improving your skills in your career trajectory to qualify for advancement in satisfying long-term professional ambitions (McDonald & Hite, 2023). In higher education institutions, career advancement involves working while publishing academic papers, teaching and/or administrative roles (Zacher, Rudolph, Todorovic, & Ammann, 2019). In academics, Zacher et al., 2019 indicate that career development focuses on academics being trained for various ranks and employment arrangements such as doctoral students, postdoctoral researchers, lecturers, and professors.

### **1.6.2 Professional networks**

Professional networks are types of social networks that are essential in building interpersonal relationships to assist in career development (Casad, Franks, Garasky, Kittleman, Roesler, Hall and Petzel (2021). These networks focus on interaction to maintain the relationships with individuals in your career field and in other related fields

to help in navigating a professional career goal, with less emphasis on the personal life (Davis, Wolff, Forret , & Sullivan, 2020).

### **1.6.3 Leadership**

The term leadership has been defined by different authors. Most of them provide a similar definition that leadership is a when followers are successfully persuaded by leaders to perform certain tasks with the aim of achieving a certain goal that represents the values, motivation, needs, aspiration, and expectations of both the leaders and followers (Burns, 2012; Daft, 2014)

## **1.7 Theoretical framework**

### **1.7.1 Social Capital**

According to Bourdieu (1986, p. 248) social capital is “the aggregate of the actual potential resources that are linked to possession of a durable network of more-or-less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition”. Social capital theory will be used to understand the treatment and marginalisation of women in senior leadership in higher education (Choi, 2019). Lin (2017) measures social capital through its roots in social networks and social relations as it was suggested after a debate and clarifications. Social capital, according to Lin (2017), is about the connections you must access in resources embedded in social networks to gain returns such as finding a better job.

Fine (2010) provides the dimensions of social capital theory. These dimensions will be employed in this study to understand it in connection with the social capital theory. The dimensions consist of the formal network of social relations, the norm of trust and the norm of reciprocity (Fine, 2010). I will use social capital theory to explore the sources of gender disparity in leadership positions in higher education. I will also examine the influence of social capital on the treatment and marginalisation of women in senior leadership positions in higher education. I believe this is best suited to help me understand my study. Generally, people (both males and females) draw from social capital, that is, accessibility to social networks, resources and social relations imbedded in social structure. This is to mobilise these for purposive action to achieve their goals. However, in the world of patriarchy, when women tap social capital, they are seen as using strategic sexual performance as social capital to influence a target person to get top positions (Watkins, Smith & Aquino, 2013). With all the

understanding of such debates, I will still use the social capital theory to understand the treatment and marginalisation of women in senior leadership in higher education (Choi, 2019).

## **1.8 Approach to study.**

### **1.8.1 Research methodological approach.**

The study is qualitative by nature, which is a research approach that uses words, images, and descriptions of things. The qualitative research approach focuses on observation and interpretation, which means that the analysis is built by the researcher using the explanation of the participants (Tracy, 2019). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) define qualitative research as “a study-situated activity that locates the observer in the world” where it is made visible by the set of interpretive material that transforms the world into a sequence of representations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). Qualitative research is an approach that “examines the various social settings and groups or individuals” to understand perspectives of their lived experiences in a setting through meanings, symbols, and description of things (Lune & Berg, 2016, p. 15). Qualitative research intends to transform the world using interpretive practices. The study is guided by the main research questions that reflects on the marginalisation of women in senior leadership positions in higher education.

The research study is located within the critical research paradigm. I use the critical paradigm because it blends with the qualitative approach, both qualitative research and the critical paradigm seek to understand the complexity of the issue and transform society. Qualitative research and the critical paradigm seek to empower people by listening and sharing their experiences (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Critical theory is implanted in a rhetorical and political drive and intends to uncover hidden agendas, while qualitative study is planned to identify the social, political, and historical context of the research problem (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Furthermore, I am exploring the marginalisation of women in senior leadership positions in South African higher education. Therefore, a qualitative approach is relevant when there is a need for the exploration of the issue or problem. This approach works well when exploring the group or population, as it gives an opportunity to talk to the participants directly and allows them to share their stories, which was the ultimate aim of the study.

The study will be conducted in one of the public universities located in KwaZulu-Natal. The reason for the selection is the difficulty in getting the other institutions in KwaZulu-Natal to participate in the study due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The type of institution where the study will be conducted is a research university. I decided to choose the participants in different colleges within the institution. The participants in the study will be identified through the websites of the institutions of higher education. Criteria will be used to ensure that the participants are in similar positions to those that the study is focusing on. The interest of the participants in sharing their experiences on their career advancement to the senior leadership positions will be considered. By that, I mean that participation is voluntary, and that confidentiality will be maintained.

I will use snowballing sampling as it is recognised as one of the most popular methods in generating qualitative data, since the design enables the researcher to reach inaccessible individuals to participate in a study (Parker, Scott, & Geddes, 2019). I intend to get four women who are in Faculty or School Deanship position in one of the public universities in KwaZulu-Natal. The public institution where the study will be conducted is a research university. The reason for choosing women Deans while the study focuses on Vice Chancellor positions in academic leadership is the dearth of women in the position. The reason for choosing one institution is the difficulty in getting access to other institutions due to the Covid-19 pandemic. I believe that conducting the study in one institution will give me sufficient information to answer my research questions because the institution has five campuses with different colleges. I believe that the information I will obtain from women who are in Deanship position will be sufficient since the Deanship position is the pathway to Vice Chancellor position. The snowballing will assist me in recruiting the hard-to-reach participants with the required attributes to provide the rich information (Parker et al., 2019). The purpose of the study is to explore the lived experiences of women leaders in higher education institutions, so the information required for the study is only going to be obtained from women who have experience in a position of leadership in academia.

### **1.8.2 Participants**

The study target four women Deans in one of the four higher education institutions, located in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The choice of my research participants involves gaining access to potential participants to take part in the study (Saunders & Townsend, 2018). A study conducted by Saunders and Townsend (2018) reveals that

choosing a small group of participants who are in a similar position will represent a large population that the research study is targeting. Women targeted to participate in the study are the faculty or school Deans from one of the public universities in KwaZulu-Natal. The institution where the study is conducted is a research university. I will use a criterion to ensure that the participants are in a similar position to that which the study is focusing on. The interest of the participants in sharing their experiences on their career advancement to the senior leadership positions will be considered. This means that participation is voluntary, but confidentiality will be maintained.

### **1.8.3 Data generation tool**

The data will be generated to explore the experiences of women Deans in advancing into leadership positions. It will also investigate the influence of the social capital in progressing women into senior leadership positions. The study will use interviews as a data generation method. An interview is a data generation method where people exchange opinions about a theme of their interest for a certain purpose, one being an interviewer and the other being an interviewee (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This method allows both the interviewer and interviewee to converse and share their viewpoints on how they understand the world. Women Deans will be interviewed to share their experiences on their journey to leadership positions. Three women Deans in one of the public universities in KwaZulu-Natal will be interviewed. The participants in the study will be selected from different colleges within the institution.

Data will be generated through semi-structured interviews. This will be done to allow the participants to narrate their stories in a detailed way as a two-way conversation between a researcher and the participant. Fylan (2005, p. 65) defines Semi-structured interviews as conversations in which one engages with the understanding of what one wants to discover “and having the set of questions to ask and a good idea of what topics will be covered”. Due to the situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, interviews will be conducted through a recorded Zoom communication. The participants will be informed that they will be recorded in terms of ethical issues. Using the semi-structured interviews will help me to ascertain the experiences of women Deans on the influence of social capital in advancing to senior leadership roles. The semi- structured interviews will allow me to investigate initial responses (Vithal & Jansen, 2005). Semi- structured interviews will enable me to talk to the participants to give their opinions about their experiences and feelings about a subject in which I am

interested in. Creswell & Poth (2016) mention that semi-structured interviews are a suitable method of collecting data when exploring the perceptions and opinions of the participants concerning the sensitive and complex incidence.

#### **1.8.4 Data analysis**

In the data generation process and analysis, as a researcher, I will use a phenomenological approach as the design for this study. Phenomenology will be selected since it provides a framework for understanding the lived experiences of human beings and their experiential view of the world (Creswell, 2013; Creswell and Poth, 2016 and Lester, 1999). Phenomenological research “describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon” with the aim of understanding its in-dept and reach the essence of the participants’ lived experiences of the phenomenon (Cresswell & Poth, 2016, p. 57). Since the study focus on the marginalisation of women senior leadership roles South African higher education, in particular Vice Chancellor positions, women Deans will be interviewed to share their experiences on their journey to leadership in higher education

The categories and instruments of analysis for the semi-structured interviews that are planned in qualitative research are developed based on the choice of material used to collect data (Schmidt, 2004). In this study, as a researcher, I will use recorded Zoom communication and transcripts to record data during the interview in the field. I will use a thematic analysis to analyze qualitative data that will be collected during the interview. A thematic analysis is an “accessible, flexible, and increasingly popular method of qualitative data analysis” that helps a researcher in “identifying, organizing and offering insight into patterns of meanings (themes) across a data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57). Transcribing data using thematic analysis will allow me to have a wider understanding of the stories shared by the participants about their experiences. This will also allow me to identify what is common from the participants’ stories and making sense of those commonalities (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The stories of the participants about their lived experiences will assist me to interpret and construct the themes that will organize the data from the semi-structured interview. Manual coding will be used to assist me in understanding what the data means. Coding ‘as a

process of data reduction is an element of data organisation in most qualitative approaches” (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2016, p. 103).

### **1.8.5 Outline of the study**

This dissertation is presented in six chapters, and the structure of the research follows.

#### **Chapter 1: Background and orientation of the study**

This chapter presents the background and motivation for the study, explains the purpose and the rationale of the study. The research questions and the objectives of the study are presented. The review of the key concepts and introduction of the methodological approach of the study follow.

#### **Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical framework**

This section provides the review of literature relating to the phenomenon under study. The review begins with the discussion of the research paradigm selected for this study, followed by the theoretical framework underpinning the study. Lastly, the review begins with the overview of the hierarchical structure of management, general review of women and higher education leadership and challenges affecting women from advancing to prestigious positions in higher education are outlined.

#### **Chapter 3: Research methodology**

This chapter begins by restating the research objectives and the critical research questions. Following is the discussion of research designs and methodology that was followed to conduct the research. The research paradigm was also explained. The sections that follow thereafter outline the sampling and context data generation and data analysis. The fundamental issues of trustworthiness were elucidated. Lastly, the ethical issues were clarified.

#### **Chapter 4: Presentation and analysis of findings**

This chapter presents the themes that developed from the narratives of the participants. The section tabulates the research questions, data from the stories of women leaders about their lived experiences and the themes which emerged. This

chapter provide answers to the critical research questions that focus on the experiences of women in ascending to higher education senior leadership.

### **Chapter 5: Discussion of findings**

This chapter presents the discussion of findings. The themes that emerged from the stories of the women leaders' lived experiences are discussed. The themes are presented in relation to the research questions.

### **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

This chapter presents the conclusion of the research study about the lived experiences of the women leaders in higher education institutions. This section will provide a summary of the study, conclusions drawn from the study and recommendations for women who desire to be in leadership positions in higher education institutions. The limitations of the study will be provided.

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: MARGINALISATION OF WOMEN IN SENIOR LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION.**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter provided an orientation to the study. In this chapter I provide a synthesised critical review of related literature on the different studies that investigate the marginalisation of women in senior leadership positions in higher education. In so doing, I will present my discussion thematically under the overview of the hierarchical structure of management, women and higher education leadership, challenges affecting women from advancing to prestigious positions in higher education, etc. The overview relates to the study as it elucidates the leadership levels in higher education and which positions are regarded as senior leadership in a public university. Women and higher education leadership provides the background information on the marginalisation of women in higher education leadership. The challenges affecting women in advancing to senior leadership provides the factors and barriers that persist in the marginalisation of women in senior leadership. Towards the end of the chapter, I will discuss social capital as the theory that guided the study.

### **2.2 Overview of hierarchical structure of management**

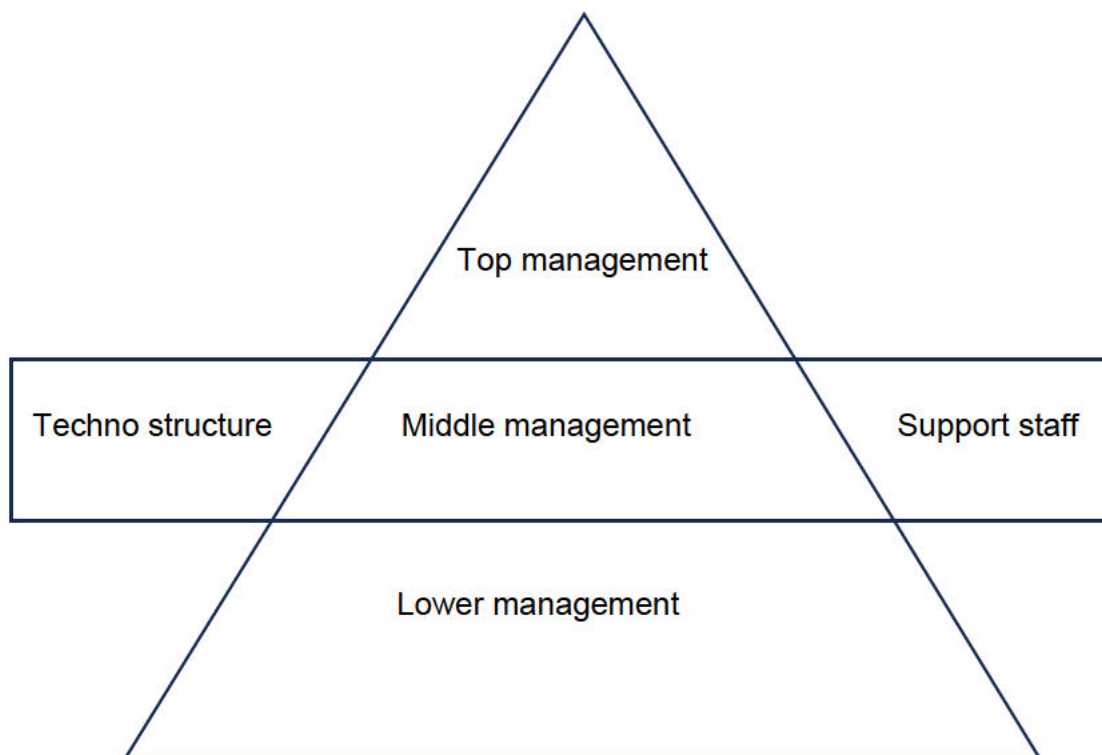
Burns (2012) defines leadership as when followers are successfully persuaded by the leaders to perform a certain task with the aim of achieving a certain goal that represents the values, motivations, needs, aspirations, and expectations of both the leaders and followers. Daft (2014, p.15) explain that leadership is “concerned with communicating the vision and developing a shared culture and set of core values that can lead to the desired future state”. On the other hand, management is defined as the “attainment of organisational goals in an effective and efficient manner through planning, organizing, staffing, directing and controlling organisational resources” (Daft, 2014, p. 13). Although the source of power is the key distinction between leadership and management, there is a strong relationship (Daft, 2014). A study conducted by Mande, Nambatya and Nsereko (2015) classifies the structure of management in a university setting. This hierarchical structure is categorized into three levels:

- Top management, together with the other governance structures, determine the long-term activities of a university. These activities include policies, strategic plans, annual budgets and other programmes. Top management includes Vice

Chancellors, Deputy Vice Chancellors, University secretaries, Academic registrars.

- Middle management generally focus on medium term stretching between one semester and a year. The activities in this level include supervision of the lower-level managers, technical staff, and others. Middle management comprise principals, Deans, Librarians, Directors, Heads of Departments, Bursars/ finance directors and deputy registrars.
- Lower management officials carry out the assigned activities. The lower management comprise the academic staff and administrative staff (Mande et al., 2015, p. 16).

The structure below illustrates the general hierarchy of management in a university setting.



**Figure 2.2: The organisational structure (Mande et al., 2015, p. 16)**

### **2.3 Women and higher education leadership**

A great number of studies have been conducted to track the status of women's representation in higher education, but the literature indicates that the gender imbalance is still remarkable in senior leadership positions (Redmond, Gutke, Galligan, Howard and Newman (2017); Moodly (2015); Toni and Moodly (2019); and Olson-Strom and Rao (2020). The institutions of higher education are facing the problem of gender disparity as women are underrepresented in senior leadership positions. Women are still marginalized in higher education as they are underrepresented in executive and senior leadership positions (Toni & Moodly, 2019). Olson-Strom and Rao (2020) argue that gender disparity does not affect all the spheres of the hierarchy of the higher education institutions. They submit that women continue to be overrepresented in certain fields in higher education but there is a low representation in top level positions.

In a global context, the gender imbalance in higher education leadership positions still exists in many countries regardless of the policies that were framed that emphasize gender equity (Moodly, 2015). A study conducted by Redmond et al., (2017) indicates that the higher education institutions in Australia are not exempted in the issue of gender disparity as women are underrepresented in senior academic and Vice chancellor positions. Lipton (2015) explains that in 44% of females' academic staff in Australia, about a quarter of this 44% of women who are in senior lecturer and Vice chancellor positions. In Zimbabwe, Shava and Chasokela (2020) indicate that, although the number of women is greater than that of men in the workplace, they are still poorly represented in senior leadership positions. Shava and Chasokela (2020) further point out that although most women obtain college and university degrees than men in Zimbabwe, which increase the representation of women in various fields, women remain underrepresented in top leadership positions. In the United Kingdom, there is a visible gender disparity in higher education leadership as it has reported that women experience gender prejudice in the appointment processes (Manfredi, 2017). The issue of gender disparity in leadership positions is a global phenomenon because, in most higher education institutions in the world, there is a great gender disparity (Morley, 2014). This clearly shows that women are sidelined from taking positions that are considered prestigious in higher education.

The studies show that South African institutions of higher education are still facing the same challenge of gender imbalance as women are underrepresented in vice-chancellor positions (Naidu, 2018). Stereotypically characteristics of leadership were associated with male-hood and that has increased the gender bias in higher education institutions (Elsessor & Lever, 2011). In South African higher education institutions, a gender imbalance has been redressed within academic staff as women academics outnumber men (Council on Higher Education, 2016). However, the gender disparity is still a problem in senior leadership, and this is supported by the study conducted by Macupe (2020) which indicated that, in 26 institutions of higher education in a country, only five Vice- chancellors are women. This shows that women are sidelined from senior positions.

The advent of democracy in South Africa prompted the democratic government to reformulate the regulations to redress the inequality of the apartheid government including gender in the workplace environment (Council for Higher Education, 2016). A report from the Council for Higher Education (2016) indicates that South African labour legislation has been trying to redress the severe imbalances of the apartheid labour system by developing the Employment Equity Act of 1998, which put the affirmative action strategies in place for designated groups, including women. Affirmative action refers to government policies that are intended to increase the representation of those that were not well represented in certain areas based on gender, race, nationality etc (Warikoo & Allen, 2020). Moodly (2015) concludes that the implementation of policies based on gender appears to be a continuing problem in higher education institutions as they were formulated in many countries. The dearth of implementation of policies that emphasise the fair representation of gender in senior leadership roles perpetuates the gender gap as women are still underrepresented in higher education. This shows that there are barriers that block women from advancing to senior leadership positions. Literature indicates that the barriers that block women from ascending to senior leadership positions is called the glass ceiling.

#### **2.4 Glass ceiling**

Although the concept of the glass ceiling has been accepted in literature, different authors provide different definitions of the concept. Lockwood (2004) explains a glass ceiling as a barrier that hampers women from advancing to leadership roles in the workplace. Johnson (2017. p. 5) views the glass ceiling as a “long-standing metaphor

for the intangible systematic barriers that prevent women from obtaining senior-level positions". Chisholm-Burns, Spivey, Hagemann and Josephson (2017) understand a glass ceiling as an indistinguishable barrier that is faced by most women who have managed to progress to other positions in their career trajectories but obstructed from reaching the senior levels of leadership. Chisholm-Burns, et al., (2017) further mention that the barriers that prevent women from ascending to leadership positions are numerous, spread-out, and imbedded in organisational essence. This statement is supported by Lockwood (2004) as he further indicates that corporate policies and practices can indirectly maintain the status quo that favours the patriarchy.

Lockwood (2004) indicates that women who attempt or aspire to advance into senior leadership are hit by a glass ceiling as the hiring practices, training, and development as well as the promotional opportunities are excessively in favour of men. Johnson (2017) remarks that women still experience this intangible barrier as they are not promoted to associate professor or full professor positions regardless of the increased number of female graduates. Another barrier that is associated with the concept is the salary discrepancies that are in favour of men, while women are paid less for the same position (Lockwood, 2004). This shows that women are still blocked by the unseen barrier from ascending to senior positions than are their male colleagues. Chisholm-Burns et al., (2017) point out that, regardless of the fewer women who have managed to break through the glass ceiling and advance to the upper echelons of leadership, most women are still experiencing this unseen barrier in institutions including academic circles. The existence of this glass ceiling that prevents women from advancing to upper leadership positions prohibits women and institutions of higher education equally to realize their potential and the benefit of gender diversity in senior leadership is denied (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017).

## **2.5 Challenges affecting women from advancing to prestigious positions in higher education.**

The literature reveals contributing factors and barriers that perpetuate the issue of gender imbalance in senior leadership. Women still experience marginalisation in higher education leadership as the gender disparity is still remarkable.

### **2.5.1 Bias and discrimination against gender stereotype**

Literature demonstrates that women experience a stereotypical norm relating to gender difference in ascending to senior leadership positions in higher education (Shava & Chasokela, 2020). The stereotype that the characteristics of leadership are associated with male-hood has increased the gender bias in higher education institutions (Manfredi, Grison & Handley, 2014). The division of power and labour that is gender-based prejudices women as men regard themselves as dominants and women are seen as subordinates (Shava & Chasokela, 2020). This shows that a stereotypical norm about gender difference between men and women makes it difficult for women to obtain the opportunity to be placed into senior leadership positions. Shava and Chasokela (2020) indicate that the gender bias against women is caused by their dual responsibility, as their mothering responsibility may cause them to be less productive. Findings on the study conducted by Kuzhabekova and Almukhambetova (2021) indicate that young women continue to experience the gender prejudice since they are not normally promoted as it is believed that they are not performing to their full capacity while raising their children.

A study conducted by the Council for Higher Education (2016) indicates that the number of women who have obtained PhDs in South Africa has increased, which signifies that women are well equipped to take up leadership positions. Shava and Chasokela (2020) indicate that women continue to feel sidelined although they have managed to ascend into the middle leadership positions like the departmental chairpersons, Deans, and directors. Morley and Crossouard (2015) point out that gender disparity in senior positions in higher education institutions clearly indicates that women's skills and competencies are not valued. Women continue to experience gender bias and discrimination in the workplace as women are underpaid compared to their male colleagues who are in the same positions (Johnson, 2017). A study conducted by Johnson (2017) reveals that women experience gender discrimination in organisations even with salaries as they are paid less than their male counterparts. The discrimination against women in the workplace persists, despite the willingness of women to climb the ladder of leadership in higher education.

### **2.5.2 Chilly organisational and societal culture**

Literature suggests that women experience unfriendly organisational and societal culture in ascending to senior positions. The unspoken organisational rules and norms

of conduct are a major challenge for women to advance into a senior leadership position (Shava & Chasokela, 2020). Shava and Chasokela (2020; p. 9) further explain that the stereotypically gendered roles and “the associated attitudes for both males and females, are evidently a major factor underlying the variables that function at individual, organisational, and societal levels” intensify the misrepresentation of woman in higher education senior leadership. These understood rules have instilled the idea that women are not leaders even if they possess the same leadership skills as men. In higher education, it is normal that women are excluded in male-dominated positions of leadership, especially the Vice-Chancellor roles. A study conducted by Toni and Moodly (2019) indicates that the absence of proper programmes and formal policies that support aspiring women leaders perpetuates the issue of gender disparity, which makes the higher education institutions unfriendly for women.

It is believed that the senior positions can be handled by males as it is demanding. Morley and Crossouard (2015) indicate that a dual responsibility of women that demands their time makes it difficult for them to develop their career into senior leadership positions as the institutions have the tacit culture that leaders work longer hours than normal. This shows that the organisational structure is not gender neutral since the unspoken organisational culture discourages women from advancing their career as they believe that they will not handle the demands of the senior leadership positions while they have full time family responsibility. These organisational cultures prohibit aspiring women leaders to take up the senior leadership roles as it not accommodative to them.

Research suggests that women experience the undeclared societal culture from ascending to the senior leadership roles. Societal culture is defined as the beliefs, values and conduct that is shared by the majority of people (Schwartz, 2013). Shava and Chasokela (2020) submit that society makes it difficult for women to advance into a senior leadership as the culture empowers men to climb the ladder of leadership while women are expected to take care of their families. They argue that this historical discourse of gender and leadership in society was rooted in past decades (Shava & Chasokela, 2020). Collins (2020) suggests that the expectations about women’s place in society shape the work-family policies, as they have an influence in supporting or obstructing the gender parity in organisations. The patriarchal society has made women to believe that the prestigious positions are only for the males as it is believed

they have powers. It is assumed that the career success must be a priority and it requires undivided commitment. Therefore, women are seen as less committed workers as it is believed that they cannot have children as their priority and be excellent in their job (Collins, 2020).

### **2.5.3 Lack of internal and external networks**

Low representation of females in senior leadership positions in higher education makes it difficult for women who aspire to be in leadership to have access to social connections. Even though the affirmative action strategy has been put into place for people who form part of the designated group (Council for Higher Education, 2016), women are still left out of the social network and interpersonal relationships with commanding individuals that were groomed by men (Choi, 2019). The limited pool of female senior leaders makes it difficult for young women who seek to be in leadership, to accumulate their social connections. In a study conducted by Morley and Crossouard (2015), it notes that women have been sidelined from networking with people to build their connections to better their chances of getting promotions, self-promotions have traditionally associated with the masculinities since men self-advertise themselves as capable and accomplished at any skill they want to represent. This nonexistence of benefits from networks makes women to lack a self-assurance that they can lead.

### **2.5.4 Limited mentorship and role models**

A lack of support and guidance to women who aspire to be in leadership positions has been found to be most challenging in higher education institutions. A study conducted by Redmond et al. (2017) indicates that women may have ambitions to be in the higher echelons but experience the absence of role models throughout their career. Morley and Crossouard (2015) state that women may get support from their families by allowing them to spend time at work, but the professional mentoring is very important to gain knowledge and political information for women who have a goal to be in a senior leadership position. Morley and Crossouard (2015) further indicate that the dearth of women leaders makes it difficult for women who aspire to be in leadership position to have mentors that will give them support and equip them with the necessary leadership skills. Women therefore find themselves working in a male-dominated culture where female role models are scarce. In contrast, a study conducted by Hill and Wheat (2017) indicate that mentoring plays a minimal role in promoting women

into senior leadership positions in higher education institutions. This shows that the absence of role models makes it difficult for aspiring women leaders to rely on mentorship for career progression.

#### **2.5.5 Work-life balance.**

Most women in higher education institutions have difficulties in advancing their career into senior leadership roles due to family responsibilities that demand a lot of time. Women are taught at a younger age to be caregivers and to be responsible for their families (Krause, 2017) and that makes it more difficult for women to advance their career than men. Morley and Crossouard (2015) indicate that senior leadership positions demand more commitment whereas, on the other side, a family has their expectations of caregiving, and this limits women from applying for leadership positions. Women face a challenge of having to balance family responsibilities and work demands since being in a leadership position necessitates a leader to work beyond normal working hours (Shava & Chasokela, 2020). This makes women reluctant to apply for senior leadership positions even if they meet all the requirements since they are more concerned about their families as they are the natural nurturers.

The literature points out that the patriarchal exercise makes women comfortable in being submissive and to accommodate their family-work responsibilities (Morley & Crossouard, 2015), whereas men are more concerned about their careers and shift the family responsibilities to women. A study conducted by Manfredi et al. (2014) indicates that women limit themselves when applying for senior positions because they are more concerned about their families than their career, whereas men grasp every opportunity that arises, including the positions that will require them to relocate. These dual responsibilities of work and caregiving hamper women from ascending to senior echelons as they are unable to relocate. Overall, the evidence suggests that having dual responsibilities makes women subconsciously believe that senior leadership positions are for males as they demand a lot of time and thus cause the absence of women leaders in higher positions.

#### **2.5.6 Enabling programmes**

The absence of programmes that support women in higher education institutions cause an obstacle for them to apply for these positions. Both formal and informal leadership development is necessary to enhance the leadership capacity in any

organisation (Redmond et al., 2017). Morley and Crossouard (2015) indicate that training and development opportunities for women to acquire leadership skills are very scarce. This shows that the institutions of higher education are not doing enough to empower women to become leaders. The dearth of training opportunities for professional development reduces the willingness of women to progress into leadership roles. In a study conducted by Howe-Walsh and Turnbull (2016), the findings suggest that the lack of career guidance and support provided by the institutions of higher education disempower women from advancing into senior leadership as they are uninformed regarding their expectations to gain promotions. Manfredi et al., (2014) indicate that the dearth of career guidance causes women to make wrong choices that will not qualify and equip them for leadership responsibility. Consequently, some women in academia have experience from other sectors but they do not have the required qualifications like a PhD to advance into Vice-Chancellor roles (Manfredi et al., 2014).

## **2.6 Theoretical framework**

Theoretical framework is defined as a set of concepts that are connected and logically developed by a researcher from a single or multiple theory to structure a study (Varpio, Paradis, Uijtdehaage, & Young, 2020). A theoretical framework was used to assist me in ensuring that the research project is well organized and focused on what the study seeks to achieve. A theoretical framework helps the researcher to understand data or evidence as it was used as an analytical lens to analyse the data generated. My research seeks to explore the experiences of women's experiences in ascending to higher education senior leadership. A study is guided by social capital that works by building social relationships and networks. Using this theory provided me with sufficient backing to explain the need for the study. It further assisted me to gain insight and discrepancies as a theory together with paradigm and research questions shaped the methodology and designs of the study (Tamene, 2016). I have placed my research within a critical paradigm since the aim is not just to understand the structural shaping of the experience but to do so in order to bring the change. As a women researcher using critical paradigm, I want to understand the bias women experience as they ascend the ladder of leadership and to uncover the injustice.

### **2.6.1 Social capital theory**

The social capital theory is used by many different theorists and development practitioners. This theory, which was originated by Bourdieu, received much attention as many debates and discussions emerged on its nature. Multiple definitions have been used to understand this theory. Bourdieu (1986, p. 248) defined social capital as “the aggregate of the actual potential resources that are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationship of mutual acquaintance and recognition”. Lin (2017) measures social capital through its roots that are in social networks and social relations as it was proposed after the debates and clarifications. According to Lin (2017), social capital is about the connections you must access in resources that are rooted in social networks to gain returns such as finding a better job. As noted, in this study it was used to find responses on how women experience marginalisation in ascending the ladder of leadership in higher education. A social capital theory was used to examine the influence of social capital on the treatment and marginalisation of women in senior leadership positions.

The rationale for this research emanates from the persisting issue of gender imbalance in senior leadership in S.A higher education institutions. In positioning the study to meet its objectives, social capital theory is used to provide data and tactics towards increasing networks that will enable women to ascend into senior leadership positions in higher education institutions. The social capital works as a resource within communities, which is formed by being involved in formal and informal social networks and social relationships, and which can be exchanged to reinforce the relationship among the community (Julien, 2015). Generally, people (both males and female) draw from social capital, that is, accessibility to social networks, resources and social relations imbedded in social structure, to mobilise such for a purposive action to achieve. The high level of trustworthiness, reciprocity, shared norms of behaviour and networks is built and strengthened (Putnam, 2000). However, in the world of patriarchy, when women tap social capital, they are seen as using strategic sexual performance as social capital to influence a target person to get top positions (Watkins, Smith, & Aquino, 2013).

There are different forms of social capital that can be used to benefit individuals or a group. Putnam (2000) explains that these forms may benefit individuals and groups: Bonding social capital, which is also called exclusive social capital, strengthen

identities and homogenous groups that connect members of a family, neighbours, close friends and colleagues. These are also called the strong ties of social capital as they connect with a strong group of loyalty that will ensure that reciprocity and unity is firm. Bridging social capital is also called exclusive social capital and links people from different ethnic and occupational backgrounds, including formal and informal social networking. These are also called the weak ties of network as they link people with distant acquaintances who also interchange different circles of connections. Putnam (2000, p. 23) explains bonding social capital as sociological superglue and bridging social capital as sociological WD-40. Linking social capital links with unequal contacts due to their differences in power, status and resources imbedded in them.

For individuals to enjoy the resources imbedded in social connections, they need to be richer in all three forms of social capital. Social capital is an important source of power and influence that helps people to have a greater size of networks to get things done. Women may have the same level of education and experience as men, but they also need to have a wealthier social capital for them to be in a better position to find prestigious positions. The findings from the study conducted by Casad et al., (2021) indicate that dearth of women in senior leadership positions is caused by the weaker social capital as they do not have access to powerful social network that can assist them to build the interpersonal relationships. Family obligations limit women from building their social networks and social relations, while men, on the other side, invest their time in growing their body of formal and informal networks (Manfredi et al., 2014).

Fine (2010) suggests the dimensions of social capital theory. The dimensions of social capital theory are employed as concepts to understand its quality in connection with the social capital theory. These concepts will be used as lenses to explain the phenomenon and identify the problem in order to liberate those who are oppressed by power and bring change. These dimensions consist of:

- the formal network of social relations,
- the norm of trust
- the norm of reciprocity (Fine, 2010).

These dimensions will be used to explore the source of gender disparity in leadership positions in higher education. The social capital theory will be used to understand the

treatment and marginalisation of women in senior leadership positions in higher education. The individuals who have high social capital usually enjoy the benefits of finding prestigious positions. Using this theory and its dimensions as a lens in this study will help me understand women's experiences in ascending the ladder of leadership and the influence of social capital in advancing them to senior leadership positions. This theory will help me to understand the importance of professional networking in contributing to career progression.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This chapter addressed the review of previous literature on the subject of the marginalisation of women in higher education senior leadership and the theoretical framework I have used to plot out my research. The literature review proposed that the aspiring women leaders face challenges as they climb the ladder of leadership. The reason for the challenges is that most prestigious positions are occupied by men, which makes it difficult for women to invade men's territory. The dearth of women in senior leadership positions and barriers to advancement has been reported as the contributing factors to the gender imbalance as there is a shortage of role models and inspirations. Vice-Chancellor positions have been associated with men as it is a male dominated field. Women who are in middle leadership experience the unfriendly organisational culture that makes it difficult for them to hunt for career progression to senior leadership roles. The focus of my study was to investigate the marginalisation of women in leadership roles in South African higher education. The social capital theory was used to understand the influence of social capital in advancing women to senior leadership and the worth of professional network in career progression of women leaders in higher education.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In a previous chapter, I provided a synthesised review of different literature on a study on the marginalisation of women in senior leadership and the theory that guided the study. In this chapter, I present the research methodological approach used in this study. The purpose of the chapter is to explain how the research design and methodological approach was used to conduct the study. Firstly, I have restated the research objectives and the critical questions that seek answers to the study for the reader for ease of the connection between what is happening in the field and what the study intends to achieve. Following is the discussion of research designs and methodology that conduct the research. The research paradigm was also explained. The sections that follow thereafter outline the sampling and context data generation and data analysis. The fundamental issues of trustworthiness are elucidated. Towards the end, the ethical issues were clarified.

### **3.2 The objectives of the study**

The aim of the study is to explore the role of social capital in promoting women into senior leadership positions in higher education institutions. The dimensions of social capital were used to explore the experiences of women currently in Deanship positions in rising to senior leadership positions. The objectives that guided the study were:

- To ascertain the impact of social capital in promoting women into senior leadership positions.
- To explore the worth of professional networks in contributing to career progression of women leaders in higher education.
- To explore the importance of supporting the aspiring women leaders by the experienced women leaders in ascending to upper positions.
- To expand the set recommendations for women who desire to be in leadership positions, by using the results from the research.

### **3.3 Research questions.**

The critical research questions that I intended to answer by undertaking this study of marginalisation of women in advancing to senior leadership positions were:

Main research question:

What are women's experiences in ascending to higher education senior leadership?

Research sub questions:

- What influence does social capital have in advancing women into senior leadership positions in higher education?
- How significant are the professional networks in contributing to career progression of women leaders in higher education?
- How can the aspiring women leaders be supported by women who have ascended to the leadership position in universities?
- What do women leaders recommend for women who desire to be in senior leadership roles?

### **3.4 Research Design and Methodology**

#### **3.4.1 Research design.**

In this study I adopted a qualitative, critical, and phenomenological research design which is described in the sections that follow.

#### **3.4.2 Qualitative research**

This study was qualitative by nature, which is a research approach that uses words, images, and description of things. The qualitative research approach focuses on observation and interpretation. This means that the analysis is built by the researcher using the explanations of the participants (Tracy, 2019). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) define qualitative research as “a study-situated activity that locates the observer in the world” where it is made visible by the set of interpretive material that transforms the world into a sequence of representations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). Qualitative approach is an approach that “examines the various social settings and groups or individuals” to understand perspectives of their lived experiences in a setting through meanings, symbols, and description of things (Lune & Berg, 2016, p. 15). Women who had the experience in the higher education leadership were interviewed to understand their lived experiences. Qualitative research intended to transform the world using interpretive practices. The explanations that were provided by the participants during

the interview assisted me to construct the data analysis. The study was guided by the main research questions that reflected on the marginalisation of women in senior leadership positions in higher education.

I was exploring the marginalisation of women in senior leadership positions in South African higher education, hence, a qualitative approach worked well as I was exploring the issue of a group or population. The qualitative approach gave me an opportunity to talk to the participants directly and allowed them to share their stories, which were the essential aim of the study. The information obtained from the participants assisted me in understanding the magnitude of the issue facing women and also to get the recommendations on how the society could be emancipated. In the next section I discuss the paradigm I chose for this research.

### **3.4.3 Research paradigm.**

A paradigm is a set of principles and recognized models that are used by a research community to investigate the problem or research phenomena to find a solution (Cohen et al., 2018). Cohen et al. (2018) further explain paradigm as a way that the world is viewed and understood using different assumptions about what the world is like. I placed my research within critical theory paradigm. A critical theory paradigm is associated with the term in Institution of Social Research, which originated in Germany in 1923 (also referred to as the Frankfurt school), and gradually developed later (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). A critical theory paradigm, according to Ryan (2018), seeks to challenge how the world understands the complexity of the issue or phenomena and the underlying power struggle to transform society. Critical theory paradigm questions the issue of power relations to create awareness and to transform society. Critical theory is implanted in a rhetorical and political drive and intends to uncover hidden agendas (Cohen et al., 2018). I used critical theory paradigm because it blends with the qualitative the qualitative approach. Qualitative research and critical paradigm seek to understand the complexity of the issue and transform society. Qualitative research and critical paradigm seek to empower people by listening sharing their experiences (Cohen et al., 2018). This paradigm helped me not only to understand the women's experiences but to change the situation in the world by liberating women from social beliefs and restrictions.

A paradigmatic belief of a researcher is fashioned by the lens on how they position on epistemology, ontology, axiology, and methodology of seeking answers to a phenomenon (Killam, 2013). Killam (2013) defines axiology as the researcher's beliefs about what is right and valuable. According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) ontology refers to the researcher's beliefs about the existence of reality. The ontological stance of critical theory is that reality is there, but it is shaped historically by socio-political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values. To change the world to be better for human beings, people need to design or reconstruct their own world through action and critical reflection leading to an epistemological stance, which is emancipation.

Epistemology, according to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) is defined as the way knowledge was acquired for people to come to know what they know. The epistemological stance is that the hidden part of reality found in the shared lived experiences and social relations that structure those experiences. Critical theory paradigm is suitable for my study as it focuses on understanding the complexity of the issue of the gender gap facing women in higher education senior leadership. Methodology discusses the procedure we go about in obtaining the knowledge of understanding the world in order to shift the balance of power to be distributed impartially (Aliyu, Singhry, Adamu, & Abubakar, 2015). Critical paradigm seeks to understand the complexity of the issue and transform society. The data generation method used in this study, semi structured interviews, allowed an extensive understanding of interaction between me and the participants. This also helped me to understand the marginalisation of women from ascending the prestigious positions in South African higher education institutions.

#### **3.4.4 Phenomenological research design**

According to Cresswell and Poth, 2016, p. 57, "phenomenological research describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon" with the aim of understanding its in-dept and reach the essence of the participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon. Since the study focus on the marginalisation of women senior leadership roles South African higher education, in particular Vice Chancellor positions, women Deans were interviewed to share their experiences on their journey to leadership in higher education. I targeted the women Vice Chancellors to participate in the study, but the shortage of women in a position made it impossible for me to get the targeted group. Since the deanship position is the pathway to Vice Chancellor position, I chosen women who were in deanship position

to participate in a study to share their lived experiences on the phenomenon. The phenomenological research was selected as the most suitable approach to understand and describe the specific phenomenon about the marginalisation of women and reach the essence of the women Deans lived experiences on the phenomenon. The dimensions of social capital were used to explore the experiences of women currently in Deanship positions in rising to senior leadership positions.

A phenomenology approach was adopted as a research design for this study. Phenomenology was selected since it provides a framework for understanding the lived experiences of human beings and their experiential view of the world (Creswell, 2013; Creswell and Poth, 2016 and Lester, 1999). There have been critiques on the adequacy of phenomenology when it comes to understanding the intersectionality that exists in societies. However, a phenomenological approach was deemed appropriate since this study focused not only on tracing the lived experiences of women leaders but also sought to critically reflect on the intersection between women leadership, gender, and social capital power in this institution in South Africa. The idea was not only to understand women's experiences but to change the situation in the world by liberating women from social beliefs and restrictions.

### **3.5 Sampling and Context**

Sampling is a plan of choosing the sources where the data will be gathered, including the study setting, participants, time of day, and types of the study. I used snowballing sampling as it is recognised as one of the most popular methods in generating qualitative data, since the design enables the researcher to reach inaccessible candidates to participate in a study (Parker, Scott, & Geddes, 2019). I intended to get four women who were in the Faculty or School Deanship position in one of the public universities in KwaZulu-Natal, but only managed to get three women. The public institution where the study was conducted was a research university. The reason for choosing one institution was the difficulty in getting access to other institutions due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The reason for choosing Deans while the study focused Vice Chancellor was the difficulty in getting the women to participate in a study as there was a significant shortage of women in a position. I believed that conducting the study in one institution gave me enough information to answer my research questions as the institution had five campuses with different colleges. The snowballing assisted me in recruiting the hard-to-reach participants with required attributes to provide rich

information (Parker et al., 2019). Although this method proved to be difficult as it sounded as if I am giving the extra work to the academics, but it worked for me as I managed to get three participants out of four. The purpose of the study was to explore the lived experiences of women leaders in higher education institutions, so the information required for the study was only going to be obtained from women who have experience in that position of leadership in academia.

As much as it was difficult to get participants of this calibre due to of the nature of their work, I managed to get three women who are in Deanship positions. They were interviewed at different times, and it took me 12 months to conduct interviews because they were not available at the same time. I would make an appointment only to find that during the day of an appointment, the participant was either not available or the network connection is poor due to load shedding. I would be forced to set another meeting with the participants for when they were available and that took more time. Two of the participants were interviewed in the office, in a quiet space with no interruptions or noise from the outside. One of the participants was interviewed in a car at a mall parking lot. The reason for the interview setting was the difficulty in getting the participants. The participant responded to my email that I should call her in an hour time from the time we were communicating. By that time, I was at the mall since it was after work. When I called the participant an hour later, she said that was the only time she had for me to conduct the interview. I created a Zoom meeting, invited the participant and the interview meeting was conducted.

### **3.6 Access to participants**

I ensured that the participants are informed about the study by sharing the information and consent letter, which explained what the research was about and the research objectives. The informed consent included the procedure of the study, the justification, the purpose, risks and anticipated benefits and the statement that offered a participant the opportunity to ask questions and to withdraw from the study anytime if they no longer wanted to participate. The participants were informed that the participation was entirely voluntary, and they may withdraw at any stage, to ensure that they are free from coercion and their rights, dignity and autonomy is protected (Vanclay, Baines, & Taylor, 2013). Ethically, participants should not be coerced but they must be willing to participate in the study. In my study, I was dealing with women in leadership, so it was difficult to know whether the participants were no longer willing to participate, or their

job kept them busy. I was targeting four women in Deanship position, but I ended up getting three participants. To ensure the autonomy and not to subject participants to any coercion I, as the researcher, decided to continue with the number of participants that I managed to interview. The fourth participant agreed to participate in the study, but the researcher could not distinguish whether the participant had withdrawn, or she was swamped. However, the rights of the participants to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences to them remained my main concern. Since my study was not about generalisation, I still believe that the data generated can be inferred to the other contexts.

### **3.7 Data generation**

The data was generated to explore the experiences of women Deans in advancing to senior leadership positions and investigated the influence of social capital in promoting women into senior leadership positions. The interviews were used as a data production method. An interview is a data generation method where people exchange opinions about a theme of their interest for a certain purpose, one being an interviewer and the other being an interviewee (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). I believed that the interviews would work well in a study because they allowed the participant and myself to engage in a topic and share points of view on how they understand the world. Women who were in Deanship positions were interviewed to share their experiences on their journey to leadership positions. Three women who were in Deanship positions in one of the public universities in KZN were interviewed. I managed to get women Deans from different colleges in one institution to participate in the study. This method enabled me to get first-hand information from women Deans on their lived experiences in ascending a ladder to their leadership roles in higher education institutions.

Data was generated through semi-structured using a series of open-ended questions based on the topic. Fylan (2005, p. 65) defines semi-structured interviews as conversations in which you engage with the understanding of what you want to discover “and having the set of questions to ask and a good idea of what topics will be covered”. Due to the current situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, an interview was conducted through Zoom communication. The participants were informed that they were recorded in terms of ethical issues. Using semi-structured interviews helped me to ascertain the experiences of women Deans on the influence of social capital in advancing to leadership roles. The semi-structured interviews enabled me to talk to

the participants and get their opinions about their experiences and feelings about a subject in which I am interested. Cresswell and Poth (2017) mention that a semi-structured interview is a suitable method for collecting qualitative data, when exploring the perceptions and opinions of the participants about sensitive and complex events.

In this section, I discuss what actually happened in the field while I was generating data using interviews. I interviewed three women Deans in one of the public universities in KwaZulu-Natal. The interview meeting was conducted through Zoom audio recording. The interview was conducted in English. Since the participants were academics; they were able to express their emotions and feelings using that language. The purpose of the interview was articulated to the participants before the start of the interview session. The duration of the interview was 30 minutes, but other participants took up to 45 minutes to finish the interviews. I allowed the participants to speak without restrictions and interference. I used the semi-structured interview, and I prepared the open-ended interview questions to assist me to structure and direct the conversation to meet its objectives. This method allowed me to gain a deeper understanding as the women shared their experiences and it also allowed me to clear any misunderstandings as it allowed me to ask further for clarification. At the time the interviews were conducted, the participants were at work as I could hear the interruptions on the background; they were recorded on the transcripts. Although the meeting took place in Zoom audio recording, I managed to observe the participant's emotions when conversing since it was also in my interest as the researcher. The voice inflection and emphasis made by the participants were noted and transcribed.

### **3.8 Limitations of the study**

Conducting a study in one of the public universities in KZN had few challenges. Getting women leaders to participate in research was a real struggle since participants of this class were hard to get and women were underrepresented in leadership positions in higher education. Some of the potential participants were willing to participate in a study but their term of office was complete. The other potential participants wanted to participate in research, but their duty load could not allow them as they were packed. This study could not be generalised since it was conducted in one university, but the data generated should be sufficient to improve knowledge on the perspective of the study.

### **3.9 Data analysis**

The motive behind qualitative data analysis is to ensure that the researcher presents precise, reliable, comprehensive, and meaningful data. The meaning of the data analysis assisted me to interpret the pattern of responses from the participants on how they perceived a phenomenon. According to Schmidt, categories, and instruments of analysis for the semi-structured interviews that are planned in the essence of qualitative research are developed based on the choice of material used to collect data (Schmidt, 2004). I used recorded Zoom communication and transcripts to record data during the interview in the field. I used the thematic analysis to generate and analyse the narratives of the participants. A thematic analysis was used to organize and offer insight into patterns of meanings (themes) across a data set to analyse the qualitative data that was collected during the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A thematic analysis is an “accessible, flexible, and increasingly popular method of qualitative data analysis” that helps a researcher in “identifying themes in a relationship between the participant’s responses” (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57). Transcribing data using thematic analysis allowed me to have a wider understanding of the stories shared by the participants about their experiences. This also allowed me to identify what was common from the stories they shared and made sense of those commonalities (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The stories of the participants about their lived experiences assisted me to interpret and construct the themes that organized the data from the semi-structured interview.

Manual coding was used to understand what the data meant. Coding “as a process of data reduction is an element data organisation in most qualitative approaches” (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2016, p.103). Coding assisted me to interpret and identify the relationships in the words or phrases to form themes in the responses provided by the participants during the semi-structured interview (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Although manual coding is time consuming, it assisted me in reading data thoroughly to formulate and assign codes and themes for the analysis process. I used inductive coding. Vaismoradi et al. (2016) mention that inductive coding allows the researcher to create new themes from scratch based on the current qualitative data. This type of coding assisted me to code data fairly without having preferences on the kind of responses I was expecting from the participants.

I have followed the six steps of analysing data that were elucidated by Braun and Clarke (2006). I found these steps suitable for my qualitative study since they explained clearly how themes can be formed by understanding the patterns of meanings in the data. Below, I have explained how I followed Braun and Clarke (2006) six phase step-by-step data analysis.

Phase 1: Familiarising myself with the data.

This is the initial stage of data analysis where I engage with the data to familiarise myself with it. This material includes the transformation of data into text, and includes transcription of data, field notes, videos, and photos (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). In this stage, I read the data in searching for patterns and meanings in preparation for coding.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes.

In this stage, I looked for the relationships in the data and wrote down the interesting concepts of the data. This is the first stage of generating codes by organising data as I highlighted according to meaningful groups. I did the inductive manual coding of data to construct new themes.

Phase 3: Searching for themes.

In this phase, I identified and constructed the themes from the gathered data that was organised into codes. To identify and construct themes I used mind maps, tables and writing of each theme on a separate page.

Phase 4: Reviewing themes.

Reviewing of themes involved two levels. These were reviewing and refining the themes identified in the previous phase. Reviewing involved the thorough reading of the collated extract for each theme to consider whether they form a coherent pattern. The second level, which involved refining the entire data and considering the validity of each theme in relation to the data and whether the thematic map accurately reflected the meaning evidenced by the whole data. Themes were mapped in a thematic map at this stage.

### Phase 5: Defining and narrating themes

The themes shown in a thematic map were defined and further refined by identifying the essential meaning of the themes that presented in the data analysis. For each theme, I conducted and wrote a detailed analysis to identify the story communicated by each theme.

### Phase 6: Writing up.

In this stage, I created a concise and comprehensive view of the phenomenon as the story line developed. I was narrating a story through the connection of themes and answering the research question. In this phase, I convinced the reader of my study reports of the merits and validity of the data analysis. This is where I changed the raw data into a coherent plausible story (Vaismoradi et al., 2016) by providing the evidence of themes and relating the themes into a literature review of the study and presented a convincing argument in relation to the research question.

### **3.10 Trustworthiness**

The objective of qualitative research is to construct and incorporate methodological strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings (Noble & Smith, 2015). The interviews were used by the researcher to ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings. Open-ended questions were prepared to guide and direct the semi-structured interviews. The participants were invited to comment on the semi-structured interviews record by sharing their lived experiences in higher education institutions. The drive behind my study was to understand the role played by social capital in promoting women into senior leadership positions. The goal is to provide the qualitative results that are credible, transferable and dependable as well as confirmable.

Credibility refers to the way the report findings correspond with reality (Stahl & King, 2020). This implies the accuracy of the research findings. To ensure the credibility of the research findings, I conducted a semi-structured interview with the participants who have the experience in a phenomenon. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the interviews were conducted through recorded Zoom communication. The participants were audio recorded during the interviews.

Transferability refers to the level of applicability of the patterns and descriptions from one context to another (Stahl & King, 2020). In ensuring transferability in my study, detailed information on the context and background as well as a description of all the processes followed during the study was provided.

Dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of the study (Stahl & King, 2020). The audio recordings and the field notes were taken during the interview to increase the dependability of the data.

Confirmability refers to the extent to which researchers can validate the reality of the research findings (Stahl & King, 2020). In ensuring the confirmability of the study, I transcribed the audio recordings and considered the field notes taken during the interviews.

### **3.11 Ethical issues**

Researchers need to be sure to respect the rights, privacy and welfare of the society and people where the study is conducted (Lune & Berg, 2016). Therefore, the study was conducted after ethical clearance that was granted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal ethics committee. The formal letter requesting the participation in a research interview, and which has the information about the study was attached in an email. The potential participants, who are women Deans that were obtained through snowballing were sent the email. The participants were invited telephonically to further discuss the study if they had questions or require further clarification. The participants were given an information letter that explained the study and informed them that the study is entirely voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the research anytime if they wish to do so. They were requested to sign the informed consent form. The information letter also explained that the participants will be audio recorded during the interview and the recording transcribed for the purpose of using the data for the study.

Anonymity was ensured in the analysis and reporting of the findings in the research. The names of the participants were changed for privacy and confidentiality reasons from the beginning of the data generation process. The participants' actual names were changed to a false or case number when recording data to ensure that anything discussed between them remained strictly confidential. Their names were kept secret after they signed the consent form and were substituted by pseudonyms. The

researcher made sure that the participants' rights and human dignity were not compromised.

### **3.12 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I endeavoured to give a detailed discussion of the research design and methodology adopted for this study. In my discussion I justified the use of qualitative approach and phenomenological research design. Trustworthiness and ethical issues that guided the study were also outlined. The limitation issues to the study were also outlined. The following chapter provides a detailed presentation of narratives as it emerged from the research site and the participants.

## CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

### 4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed the research design and methodological approaches used in this study. In this chapter, I present the themes that emerged from the narratives of the lived experiences of women leaders in higher education. Due to the Covid-19 restrictions, the semi-structured interviews were conducted through Zoom recording meetings. The main research question was used to understand women's experiences in ascending to higher education senior leadership. The following research questions were used to analyse and develop themes from the data gathered during the semi-structured interviews:

1. What influence does social capital have in advancing women to senior leadership positions in higher education?
2. How significant are the professional networks in contributing to career progression of women leaders in higher education?
3. How can the aspiring women leaders be supported by women who have ascended to leadership positions in universities?
4. What do women leaders recommend for women who desire to be in senior leadership roles?

### 4.2 Section A: Data presentation

Research question	Data (description)	Themes
What influence does social capital have in advancing women to senior leadership positions in higher education?	Prof. Charlotte: I think the strength of social capital is built on the strength of relationships, and relationships are built on the strength of trust and credibility, integrity. I think it is extremely important to pay attention to the relationships and to be trustworthy, to have integrity and to be credible, and you can never let your guard down as a leader with regards to those characteristics. If you break trust, then you undermine social capital. As far as I can see, social capital is built on the strength	Influence of social capital in advancing women to senior leadership

	<p>of relationships. And so, a lot of what you do is trying to build relationships, trying to build connections within my school, between schools, with external partners, with research organisations, and make sure that those communication lines are open and that we honour the promises that we make to each other, so that they can be incremental building of relationships and incremental building of social capital in there.</p> <p>Prof. Bella: I can say that social capital is important in a sense that wherever you go whatever position you apply for, even for promotion purposes, you need people that are going to be referring those people who are going to be assessors. And it also depends on the type of the person you are, it can end up only there. If you are like other people who are social climbers, who suck on other people, that's a different story. For me, social network is simple as you know my work, you will provide me with the reference that is going to assure me to get the job that I want, because you believe in me. I wouldn't say depend on people just to get favours, but you need to be good in what you are doing and then people will do what is right. You should just do your best as an individual, and people will notice you. I don't think I would ascribe my career transition to people or connections. Maybe they can be mentioned as networks in terms of being referees, but there isn't a single position where I got in because somebody who is my network said this is a position. In all my life, I have senior position I have</p>	
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	<p>used them as referees, but I would not want to use them to feel that they have done anything other than their job which was to be my supervisor in that way and to be my referees when I asked them. Then that, having any person who said come in for the position I have opened for you, it never happened.</p> <p>Prof. Athena: It is so crucial to build social capital to advance in your career. To thrive in a hostile environment, only your networks can assist you. In academia you need peer recognition, not only from your institution, but you need peer recognition nationally and internationally. As an academic, you need to build a strategic network of women who are in similar positions in other places, that you meet in conferences and when you work on academic pieces, so that they will share important information such as workshop for women empowerment or leadership and so on. Social capital is very necessary because it allows a platform of sharing experiences. If you isolate yourself from having networks, you may think that there is something wrong with you as a woman. I have women who have been encouraging me, they were all young, about eight years younger than me, but I saw them as my superiors and peers in a way. I would always lean on their breast for strength. I got so much inspiration from women who were also in the same space. Regardless of the male hegemony in the institution, I can identify one male who supported me and other women who are in the</p>	
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	<p>same position now. I truly appreciate the support I got from my supervisor who was a male, it is a kind of support we need as women to thrive.</p>	
<p>How significant are the professional networks in contributing to career progression of women leaders in higher education?</p>	<p>Prof Charlotte: I can describe my journey to leadership with the word 'serendipitous'. I do not think for myself I have ever aspired to leadership positions. However, I have either recognized the need to take on a leadership position or I have been asked to take on a leadership position. My leadership roles started by being asked to coordinate a postgraduate programme and I did it for five years. After that I was asked to apply for the leader of academic, I was asked to be Assistant Dean for postgraduate affairs. This is in the old structure of the university. When the university restructured, I was asked to apply for the academic leader of teaching and learning. After I did that, I was not in any leadership position for a while, and I took a sabbatical leave. When I come back from a sabbatical leave, I was asked to act as a leader of research. I did that for five years. After that, I was asked to act as a dean, and I did that for two years. Now I am appointed as a dean. I did not plan for each of those positions, they just sort of happened. When I was asked to perform a leadership role, I learned more about that role and I became familiar with the university structures, with the university policies and with the university procedures. I think each time you become more familiar with the university, how the university functions, you are being readied for</p>	<p>Professional networks in career advancement of women leaders.</p>

	<p>leadership in different places in the university.</p> <p>Over time, I have established a good relationship with peers and now that I am asked to fulfil this role of my peers, I can count on their trust and so their support. I am very appreciative of the support that I get from what are now in the university hierarchy my juniors, but who in the academic spheres are really my peers. I regard them as equal they even though I line manage them, when we talk about school issues, I value their opinion as peers. And so, we have been able to achieve so far as a school has been because of the good relationship within that group not so much with the superiors.</p> <p>To be truthful at the moment, I am more interested in the development in this role, I am more interested in the development of academics in my school rather than my own personal development. I would rather be spending my energy helping others to develop themselves in this role, because I think that is what this role demands of me.</p> <p>Prof. Athena: You should submit yourself to mentorship in order for you to grow your professional relationships and make them stand in the way that will enhance your career aspiration. You start by linking with those same people at a very personal level, you try to create a very strong, personal interpersonal relationships with then in mentorship form, in a way that you voluntarily submit yourself to mentorship. So, mentorship is very important and the type of mentorship</p>	<p>Influence of social capital in advancing women to senior leadership.</p>
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	<p>that will equip a female for an executive leadership position is one where a mentee voluntarily submits herself to mentorship. When you submit yourself voluntarily to a female mentor who is well-known, she already has the existing networks of academic professional relationships. So, they will take you in because you are now their mentee and you have positioned yourself to learn from them. They will now take you and link you to their own professional networks and then you can use that network to grow and expand in your career.</p> <p>When I got into a leadership position in 2007, I realised that there were not many black academics, especially females. Even among the students who were studying at that time, we had black students who will get their first degree, get their honours, and they will disappear. I cannot put my finger on what was the reason, but I decided to become intentional to start encouraging black females to continue with their studies until they get their PhDs, because, in academia, you need a PhD. PhD is like a birth or an ID to even begin to think of leadership at any higher education institution. I strategically took on supervision of black females and encouraged them by sharing my experiences with them. I started supporting and encouraging them to continue to further their studies. I can tell you that about four of the women whom I supervised from Masters, PhD and Postdoc are in leadership because I was intentional. I groomed them into the kind of leadership roles</p>	<p>Professional networks in career advancement of women leaders</p>
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	<p>I created for them in the school. You cannot just take a person without managerial skills and experience and give them a dean position. It starts with basic qualification which is a PhD following the basic skills. I did this to ensure that many black South African women and men get their PhDs.</p> <p>I tried to leave in 2014 when it became too much for me. At that time, I became an associate professor. I was called back in 2015 and they pleaded with me that there is a gap in leadership, and I was qualified. I could have chosen the same path as my other two colleagues who just left because of the hegemonic masculinity we saw in that space. I decided to just press on, and I told myself that I am going to fight, if I will step down from the leadership, it will be by choice not by force and not because of the challenges. Prof. Bella: First one is that you need to be good in what you are doing. If you are good in what you are doing, and give whatsoever that is going to be asked, to talk about you not giving them excuses if you have to do your work. If you are going to network just because you want people to be your referees, that's not how it should be. You should just do your best as an individual and people will notice you. People who are in higher positions should train people to be good so that anyone can grab them without their influence. It should not be such that you are getting a job because someone has influenced. Someone should mentor you so well, that even if you did not ask them to</p>	
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	<p>be you referees, or even if the person was not your supervisor or mentor but would still notice that you are well equipped. It should not be I am pushing you because you were once my student or a good riddance, but it should be I am pushing you to get the position because I believe in you, I have trained and mentored you so well.</p>	
	<p>Prof. Charlotte: To help women in leadership, I think we need to develop what we call cooperative circles where women meet with the express intent to support each other. There was once an initiative in the university, I think it is still there called Women in Leadership (WIL). Usually what happens in those meetings is that one successful woman presents to others and says, "this is my journey, this is how I did it". And it emphasizes "I", "I". I think what we need are circles of support where "women can flock together" like birds they flock together. When the front bird wild geese, they flock together and when the front runner is tired, the front runner flies to the back and then a new bird takes a lead. There is never one person that is more important than the other one. Everybody shares an equal role in supporting everybody else, so that everyone can succeed and at different times will be called on to play different roles. For example, I am playing this role of being a dean and it is not a lifetime role; it is for five years. Within those five years, I am playing the front runner role in the flock, but I will soon, after five years, have to move back again and</p>	<p>Importance of supporting aspiring women leaders by the experienced women leaders.</p>

someone else will take the lead. That is what we need as women to help each other in leadership, and maybe we can transform the institution, not just so that women can be in leadership positions, but also so that there will be a different way of being in the institution, even with male colleagues and male leaders.

Prof. Athena: Mentorship is very important and the type of mentorship that will equip a female for an executive leadership position is one where a mentee voluntarily submits herself to mentorship. When you submit yourself voluntarily to a female mentor who is well-known, she already has the existing networks of academic professional relationships. So, they will take you in because you are now their mentee and you have positioned yourself to learn from them. They will now take you and link you to their own professional networks and then you can use that network to grow and expand in your career. It can start on a very personal space. I have been telling you that I had a male mentor who is now a DVC of the college. That man is so professional. I have never experienced a sexual harassment or sexual request from him, I am very bold to call his name because he had provided me support in my academic journey from the beginning. The male mentor supported us and created an enabling environment for black South African women to thrive.

Prof. Bella: I do talk about mentorship because I am in the position of mentoring other people, however, in

	<p>my journey there were no programs or expectations that you should have a mentor. If there is one thing that I should do differently, it would be to make sure that I look for a mentor because you do not certainly think that your supervisor is supposed to be your mentor, but you must search for a mentor. It is something I was not doing before because mentors were not existing, but currently doing since they exist. Before the word mentor was not even loosely used as it is today. That is the only thing that I had known, or had it been used, then I would have used it more effectively as compared to now. So, now I have several people I have mentored and some of them even got senior positions which is why I was saying had I known this I would long been in a position I am in, even further.</p> <p>Prof. Athena: Women should be strong, and they should believe in themselves. They should remind themselves on a continuous basis that women do not need a genital to lead people. You do not need to have a certain private part to lead but you need a better brain, and the brain is not gender based. Women should believe in their own abilities and women must be strong and assertive. If women are not assertive, they tend to take advantage of themselves. Women should stick together to fight patriarchy, because our problem as women is that we do not stick together whereas men do. Women should be mentored and be given leadership training at a very basic level.</p>	
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<p>What do women leaders recommend for women who desire to be in senior leadership roles?</p>	<p>Prof. Charlotte: In my journey to leadership, I experienced an indirect prejudice. You know that there is a policy for racial transformation in the university. I am absolutely in support of it, and I am not against the policy at all. But when I become the only candidate that officially applied for the post after I had been acting for two years, I think I was acting for two years because they were trying to find somebody else for the post instead of me, because of the equity, and the transformation agenda of the university. So, I think I acted for a very long time because of that, but then I was the only applicant for the post. In some way the university was forced to appoint me because there were no other applicants. I think there are also personality differences that I have experienced, where I have not been supported as much as I could have if they were not as many personality differences between me and my line manager. So, I managed to do the job, but there was always that tension that I need to be aware of. It is not something that is in your face prejudice or in your face discrimination, but it is an undercurrent.</p>	<p>Insight gained by experiences of women leaders.</p>
	<p>I think often women suffer from the 'I'm not good enough syndrome'. I think often women look for external validation. And so, I think, often women self-sabotage. I think that is probably why, from a woman's perspective, there are not many women in those top leadership positions. I also think that from</p>	

external to women, I think that what women have to offer is not often appreciated and recognized, because we are primarily in a patriarchal, competitive society that recognizes alpha male type characteristics. I also do not think that there are enough spaces where women do flock together so that women can be seen and heard. We have all been in spaces as women where we offer an opinion about something and are not heard, and when the man says it, everybody recognizes it whereas it is the same thing. It talks to organisational culture. I mean, even in our Senate, the people who talk the most are white men. It is about creating the space where everyone, not just women, but everyone is seen and heard for who they are and what they have to offer. It also goes back to organisational culture; I believe that it is multi layered. I think it is the context within which women work, societal context, but also organisational cultures within which we are all working, not just women, but men too because genuinely they are men who are quiet and more reserved, and they suffer the same consequences that women do.

Prof. Bella: In my journey to leadership, with other positions, I have experienced so much indirect prejudice because there were times where I would feel that I did not get other opportunities because of race. There were times where I would feel that maybe if I was another race, I would have been in this position. I would have been a professor 10 years earlier but because I was not

that race, I had to work even harder for me to climb the ladder of leadership in the university.

Prof. Athena: I do not even want to describe the level of prejudice I encountered as I ascended the ladder of leadership. It has not been easy; patriarchy was all over the show. There were times where I was under investigation for numerous reasons several times on my different levels. In that period, there is a time, around 2014, where I decided to throw a towel and say you know I am done with leadership because I realised that there were men who were very patriarchal in the university. I remember the other day when I received an email from my male colleague telling me to step down and focus on raising children because I have got my children. He was patronizing and bullying me, trying to create problems in my life.

I was not the only woman who experienced prejudice and who suffered the kind of rejection, but there were other women in the same space. I recall one of them, in her exit interview with the Human Resource Officer, she said "I am leaving because of this man, I cannot work with this man". The abuse was too much in the university. They would always make you feel like do no not have the skills set, you are not capable, and they are the only ones who are capable.

I decided to just press on, and I told myself that I am going to fight, if I will step down from the leadership, it will be by choice not by force and not

because of the challenges. I planned to hang in there to create an enabling environment for other women to thrive, so that they will not be subjected to the same kind of discrimination and prejudice I encountered. Women are very strong but do not realise that. I had to make myself a sacrificial lamb for other women to rise today in the school.

Prof. Bella: Sometimes we miss opportunities because we think we are marginalized. A friend of mine who is a Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) in one of the universities got head hunted and she asked me if she should apply. I told her that you are a woman have been head-hunted apply. I mean if they head hunted her, how do they know if she exists if they were marginalizing? So, women who are raising their hands up high are getting those positions. There is a huge change I am seeing in the higher education institutions top leadership.

As much as I believe that women should be given opportunities, for me I rather would want women to be treated as any other person, but at least the universities should design a criterion of promotion in support of women, especially those who are in the child-bearing age, to have a less publications than men. If the institutions of higher education can have that understanding, women can be encouraged to advance their career and would justify the attitude of thinking that if women publish less does not mean that they are less clever than men, but it probably

because woman was on maternity leave. The institutions should design programmes that will understand the natural part of being a woman, that the person is not going to be the only a university employee, there is going to be a time where they will need to take not just a sabbatical leave, but also maternity leave, therefore, if three publications are expected in a year, at least women should be expected to publish two. Women have additional roles and responsibilities at home whereas men have none, women must deal with the in-laws and there are times where women are going to be off riders and stop publishing while men are publishing. Women have to actually be able to raise their hands, because even though women have gotten into those positions of power, they are the ones who voluntarily take minutes in meetings and not influencing decision. Women should know themselves that when they are in meetings, they are in position of power, and they must use their power the way any other person would have use it.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I was presenting the themes that developed from the narratives of the women leaders lived experiences on their leadership journey in higher education. The narratives of the participants presented were organised into themes that emerged in answering the research questions. The narratives presented in this chapter were generated through the semi-structured interviews. In the next chapter I will be discussing the themes that emerged from the narratives of the women leaders and indicate how they answer the research questions.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### 5.1 Introduction

In a previous chapter, I presented the narratives of the participants and organised them into themes that emerged from the research questions. In this chapter, I discuss the findings of the study from the narratives to gain insight into the lives of women leaders by scrutinising their narratives of their experiences. The purpose of this chapter is to present the analysis of data that I collected to indicate the extent to which data has successfully answered the research questions that guided the study. I used research questions to organise and present the data. I then identified the relationship and pattern of answers, which I used to generate themes. I have used the dimensions of Social Capital theory as outlined by Fine (2010) as the lens to interpret the data.

### 5.2 Emergence of new themes

Four themes were clarified from the participants' experiences.

- Influence of social capital in advancing women to senior leadership
- Professional networks in career advancement of women leaders
- Important of supporting aspiring women leaders by the experienced women leaders
- Insight gained by experiences of women leaders.

The overview of the themes that emerged from the analysis of participants' lived experiences is tabulated below. Following, I describe the themes according to the participants' responses in answering the research questions.

Research question	Theme
What influence does social capital have in advancing women into senior leadership?	1. Influence of social capital in advancing women to senior leadership
How significant are professional networks in contributing to career progression of women leaders in higher education?	2. Professional networks in career advancement of women leaders

How can the aspiring women leaders be supported by women who have ascended to leadership positions in universities?	3. Importance of supporting aspiring women leaders by the experienced women leaders
What do women leaders recommend for women who desire to be in senior leadership roles?	4. Insight gained by experiences of women leaders

**Figure 5.1: Themes that emerged from the narratives.**

### **5.3 Women’s experiences in higher education senior leadership**

Below, I present a theme that emerged from the data analysis. A theme discussed answers the first research question which is: *What influence does social capital have in advancing women into senior leadership positions in higher education?*

#### **5.3.1 Influence of social capital in advancing women to senior leadership**

##### **5.3.1.1 Merits of social capital in career advancement**

Women need to consider the benefits of building relationships in higher education to progress with their career trajectories. Social Capital theory originated by Bourdieu (1986), which underpins the study, explains that is about having access to a collection of potential resources that belong in durable social networks of mutual associations and recognition. The findings of the study reveal that all three women leaders acknowledge the worth of social capital in career advancement and ascending the ladder of leadership in higher education. Two out of the three participants mentioned that they were able to ascend the ladder of leadership through having a good relationship with their colleagues and/or seniors. Professor Charlotte reported that although her journey to leadership was very challenging, she had a very good relationship with her peers who helped and encouraged her to progress in her career. Professor Athena also reported that having a good relationship with her peers and superior assisted her in advancing to senior leadership. They have been providing her with the support that all women need to climb the ladder of leadership in higher education. Professor Bella mentions that she never got any help as she climbed the ladder of leadership. She mentions that she only used her superiors as the references but not as the connections to find the job.

This is what Prof. Charlotte reported about having a good relationship with her colleagues:

*Prof. Charlotte: Over time, I have established a very good relationship with peers. And now that I am asked to fulfil this leadership role of my peers, I can count on their trust and on their support. I am very appreciative of the support that I get from what are now my university hierarchy juniors, but who, in academic spheres, are really my peers. When we talk about school issues, I value their opinion. What we have been able to achieve so far as a school has been because of the good relationship within that group and not so much with the superiors.*

Correspondingly, Prof. Athena reported on how she was assisted by her colleagues and male supervisor.

*Prof. Athena: I had women who provided support, they were all about eight years younger than my age, but I would see them as my superiors and peers. I would always lean on their shoulder for strength. Moreover, my supervisor provided me and other women who are also in the same position a kind of support that we need as women in order to thrive.*

Prof. Bella indicated that she did not get any help in climbing the ladder of leadership.

*Prof. Bella: I do not think I would ascribe my career transition to people. Maybe they can be mentioned as networks in terms of being referees, but there is no single position where I got because somebody who is my network said this is a position. In all my life, I have senior positions, I have used them as referees, but would not want them to feel that they have done anything other than their job which was to be my supervisor in that way and to be my referees when I asked them.*

The participants' narratives suggest that building and strengthening a relationship with not only superiors but more importantly with colleagues who are in the same position can assist in advancing to senior leadership positions in higher education. Although other women did not ascend the ladder of leadership because of connections, all three participants acknowledged the competencies of social capital in career advancement. The Social Capital Theory element proposed by Fine (2010) insists on the formal network of social relations, norm of trust and norm of reciprocity that they are very important when building and maintaining a relationship with other actors. This is

evident by the women leaders who managed to ascend the ladder of leadership through having a good relationship with their colleagues and supervisors.

#### 5.3.1.2 Importance of building of connections.

The findings of the study suggest the importance of building relationships not only to ascend the ladder of leadership but to advance in functional career development in higher education. The participants emphasised that, in academia, you need peer recognition, not only from your institution but you also need to be recognised by the peers from other universities nationally and around the world to advance your career. This peer recognition can only be achieved through the building of relationships with people who are in similar positions in other institutions that you meet at conferences. The participants mention different but common views on how powerfully the building of relationships can contribute to an individual's career growth. Prof. Charlotte believes that social capital is built on the qualities of trust, credibility, and integrity in the relationship. Prof. Athena mentions that having a pool of reliable connections within the university and in other universities can help the individual to have a platform for sharing knowledge and experiences. Having a pool of connections can allow them to have a group that they can use for collaborations.

This what Prof. Charlotte believes about social capital:

*I think the strength of social capital is built on the strength of relationships, and relationships are built on the strength of trust and credibility, and so integrity. I think it is extremely important to pay attention to the relationships and to be trustworthy, to have integrity and to be credible, and you can never let your guard down as a leader regarding those characteristics. If you break trust, then you undermine social capital. As far as I can see, social capital is built on the strength of relationships. And so, a lot of what I do is trying to build relationships, trying to build connections within my school and between schools with external partners, with research organisations, and making sure that those communication lines are open and that we honour the promises that we make to each other, so that there can be incremental building of relationships and incremental building of social capital in there.*

In agreement, Prof. Bella further explains the importance of social capital:

*I can say that social capital is important in the sense that, wherever you go and whatever position you apply for, even for promotion purposes, you need people that are going to be referring those people who are going to be assessors. And it also depends on the type of the person you are, it can end up only there. There are also other people who are social climbers, who suck on other people, that's a different story. For me, social network is simple as you know my work, you will provide me with the reference that is going to assure me to get the job that I want, because you believe in me. I wouldn't say I depend on people just to get favours, but you need to be good in what you are doing and then people will do what is right. You should just do your best as an individual, and people will notice you.*

Correspondingly, Prof. Athena explains the wealth of social capital in higher education institutions:

*It is so crucial to build social capital to advance in your career. In order to thrive in a hostile environment, only your networks can assist you. In academia you need peer recognition, not only from your institution, but you need peer recognition nationally and internationally. As an academic, you need to build a strategic network of women who are in similar positions in other places, that you meet at conferences and when you work on academic pieces, so that they will share important information such as workshops for women empowerment or leadership and so on. Social capital is very necessary because it allows you to have a platform for sharing experiences. If you isolate yourself from having networks, you may think that there is something wrong with you as a woman. The moment you begin to expose yourself and network with other women, listen to them sharing their experiences, that's when you will realise that we are dealing with the same enemy manifesting itself in different forms and, as women, we pull our strength from each other as we share our experiences.*

The data generated above indicates the abilities of social capital in career progression in the workplace, particularly in higher education institutions. The participants' stories show that the building of strong ties in networks is very important in career advancement. The building of relationships can assist in having a platform for sharing important information regarding, and forming, collaborations when you work on academic pieces. Julien (2015) indicates that social capital works as a resource within the communities, which is formed by being involved in both formal and informal social

networks and social relationships, and which can be exchanged to reinforce the relationship among the community. Participants indicate that the social capital is built on the strength of relationships and relationships are built on the strength of trustworthiness, credibility and integrity, and people should never break any of these characteristics. Putnum (2000) indicates that the high level of trustworthiness, reciprocity, shared norm of behaviour and network is built and strengthened in social capital. The norm of trust and the norm of reciprocity, as the dimensions of the Social Capital theory, has been recognised as the most important elements in benefiting from the community of networks. The results show that, in academia, you need to be recognised by your colleagues not only within your institution, but also in other institutions of higher education, since you will need them for collaborations when writing academic papers and sharing other important information relating your field in the academic world.

#### **5.4 Women's experiences in higher education senior leadership**

Below, I present a theme that emerged from the data analysis. A theme discussed below answers the second research question which is: *How significant are professional networks in contributing to the career progression of women leaders in higher education?*

##### **5.4.1 Professional networks for career advancement of women leaders**

###### **5.4.1.1 Women leaders career journey in relation to professional networks**

The use of professional networks has enabled women leaders to ascend the ladder of leadership in higher education. Participants in the study said that having a good relationship with their co-workers and supervisors played a huge role in developing their career and advancing them to leadership positions. Professor Charlotte explained that she was able to advance to a Deanship position because she was trusted by her colleagues whereas Professor Athena explain that she was called back, after leaving a position to focus on her career, as it was believed that there was a gap in leadership after she left the position. The participants said:

Prof. Charlotte:

*I can describe my journey to leadership with the word 'serendipitous'. I do not think for myself I have ever aspired to leadership positions. However, I have either recognized the need to take on a leadership opposition or I have been asked to take on a*

*leadership position. My leadership roles started by being asked to coordinate a postgraduate programme and I did it for five years. After that I was asked to apply for the leader of academic, I was asked to be Assistant Dean for postgraduate affairs. This is in the old structure of the university. When the university restructured, I was asked to apply for the academic leader of teaching and learning. After I did that, I was not in any leadership position for a while, and I took sabbatical leave. When I came back from sabbatical leave, I was asked to act as a leader of research. I did that for five years. After that, I was asked to act as a dean, and I did that for two years. Now I am appointed as a dean. I did not plan for each of those positions, they just sort of happened. When I was asked to perform a leadership role, I learned more about that role and I became familiar with the university structures, with the university policies and with the university procedures. I think each time you become more familiar with the university, how the university functions, you are being readied for leadership in different places in the university.*

Correspondingly, Prof. Athena indicated that she got into leadership position because there was a gap in leadership after she decided to leave and focus on her career.

Prof. Athena explains:

*...I was called back in 2015 and they pleaded with me that there is a gap in leadership, and I was qualified. I could have chosen the same path as my other two colleagues who just left because of the hegemonic masculinity we saw in that space...*

The conclusion from the participants narratives suggest that the professional network can be very helpful in advancing women into senior leadership positions in higher education. The participants shared a story on how their networks helped them to ascend the ladder of leadership. The majority of the participants, 2 out of 3, gave detailed examples of network connections that assisted them to gain leadership positions. One of the two participants indicated that her colleagues played a huge role in advancing her career in leadership. Prof. Charlotte indicated that she never aspired to senior leadership, but her good relationship with her co-workers who are her networks made her to advance in leadership position, however, Professor Athena indicated that having a good relationship with her supervisor who was also her mentor assisted her to advance into a senior leadership role. The findings of this study revealed that the participants in the study acknowledged the dimension of social

capital theory which is the formal network of social relations in creating opportunities for career growth in higher education. Aspiring women leaders who build formal social relationships can have a platform of discussing professional matters and exchange information with other leaders, which can have a positive impact on career development.

#### 5.4.1.2 Momentousness of Professional communities

Women who aspire to be in a leadership role should join the professional groups of networks where they can create and build relationships and obtain the knowledge. All the participants acknowledged the utmost importance of professional networking for career advancement in higher education. They all agreed that intentionally building and maintaining relationships with other co-workers and other stakeholders who are in your field and in other fields, locally and globally, can help you to develop in your career is very important. Professor Athena mentioned that the great benefits of professional networks are that you get guidance and valuable insight from your networks, which can assist you as a leader towards your professional goals and determinations. Participants in the study approved the professional network as most valuable form of building relationships for career growth and for sharing knowledge in the academic field.

Professor Charlotte stated:

*I am very appreciative of the support I get from what are now in the university hierarchy, my juniors, but who in the academic spheres are really my peers. So, I regard them as equal even though I line manage them, when we talk about school issues, I value their opinions as peers. What we have been able to achieve so far as a school has been because of the good relationship within that group and not so much with the superiors.*

Professor Athena also indicated the importance of professional communities. This is what she articulated:

*...grow your professional relationships and make them stand in a way that will enhance your career aspiration. You start by linking with those same people at a very personal level, you try to create a very strong, personal interpersonal relationships with them in mentorship form, in a way that you voluntarily submit yourself to*

*mentorship. So, mentorship is very important and the type of mentorship that will equip a female for an executive leadership position is one where a mentee voluntarily submits herself to mentorship. When you submit yourself voluntarily to a female mentor who is well-known, she already has the existing networks of academic professional relationships. So, they will take you in because you are now their mentee and you have positioned yourself to learn from them. They will now take you and link you to their own professional networks and then you can use that network to grow and expand your career.*

This is what Professor Bella shared in relation to this concept:

*I can say that social capital is important in the sense that, wherever you go and whatever position you apply for, even for promotion purposes, you need people that are going to be referring those people who are going to be assessors. And it also depends on the type of the person you are, it can end up only there. There are other people who are social climbers, who suck on other people, that's a different story...*

The above narratives from the participants in the study propose the importance of joining professional networks in building and maintaining relationships that may assist in career development. The results of the study suggest that professional networks can be very helpful to aspiring women leaders as they can be involved in communities where they can share information and offer support and assistance for career progression. The participants use a bonding form of social capital which strengthens the identities that connect members of a family, close friends, and colleagues into a strong tie of relationships as it connects strong group of loyalty that will not undermine the dimensions of social capital but will ensure that reciprocity and unity is firm (Putnam, 2000).

#### 5.4.1.3 Effectiveness of mentorship programmes for women

The study has found that women leaders assert that mentorship is an imperative tool in grooming women for leadership positions. All three participants suggest that mentorship is very important for women to build a strong professional relationship for career advancement. Professor Athena believes that you should submit yourself to mentorship. Your mentor can introduce you to their existing network of academic

professionals and you get to be matched up with people to whom you would have not exposed in academia. From then, you will expand your network and a platform of sharing information for your career growth. Prof. Athena recognised the need of grooming and supporting female academics when she notices that there is a shortage of female academics as she was joining the leadership in 2007. She started by encouraging them to continue registering for PhD and supervised them because the journey to leadership demands the relevant qualification, which is a PhD. She was intentional about supporting and grooming black female academics for leadership in various positions in higher education. Professor Bella reported that if you submit yourself to mentorship, you advance early in the career trajectory. Additionally, Professor Bella mentioned that since they are in the Deanship position, they are in position of guiding and supporting their subordinates through mentorship in their schools. The participants mentioned that, in the past, there was no formal mentorship programme, even the word mentorship was not often used then.

Prof. Bella explains about mentoring other people in her school:

*I do talk about mentorship because I am in the position of mentoring other people, however, in my journey there were no programmes or expectations that you should have a mentor. So, now I have a number of people I have mentored and some of them even got senior positions which is why I was saying had I known this I would have long been in the position I am in, even further.*

This is what Prof. Athena said:

*When I got into a leadership position in 2007, I realised that there were not many black academics, especially females. I strategically took on supervision of black females and encouraged them by sharing my experiences with them. I started supporting and encouraging them to continue to further their studies. I can tell you that about four of the women whom I supervised from Masters, PhD and Postdoc are in leadership because I was intentional. I groomed them into the kind of leadership roles I created for them in the school. You cannot just take a person without managerial skills and experience and give them a dean position. It starts with a basic qualification which is a PhD following the basic skills. I did this to ensure that many black South African women and men get their PhDs. PhD is like a mini factory where we grow our own timber because that's when you get the people who can be groomed to lead different*

*places in the university, for example, leader of ethics committee, leader of proposal for postgraduate studies, they can become coordinators of their discipline and so on. I shadow mentored them for the management positions.*

This is what Prof. Charlotte said about mentorship:

*I am more interested in the development of academics in my school rather than my own personal development. So, I would rather be spending my energy helping others to develop themselves in this role, because I think that is what this role demands of me.*

The narratives of the participants clearly suggest that having a mentor can be a valuable benefit for the career advancement of aspirant women leaders. The programme for formal mentorship is vital for aspiring women leaders in higher education institutions. Morley and Crossouard (2015) indicate that women may be supported by their families by allowing them to spend time at work, but professional mentoring is essential for women to gain knowledge and political information for aspiring women leaders.

## **5.5 Women experiences in higher education senior leadership**

Below, I present a theme that emerged from the data analysis. A theme discussed answer the second research question which is: *How can aspiring women leaders be supported by women who have ascended to leadership position in universities?*

### **5.5.1 Importance of supporting aspiring women leaders by the experienced women leaders**

5.5.1.1 Support of aspiring women leaders through mentoring is important.

Women leaders suggest that women should develop the cooperative circles that they can use as a platform for meeting and expressing their intention to support each other as women. This will help women who search for knowledge to connect with the experienced women who can assist them by sharing their knowledge and learn from each other. Women who seek knowledge will have a platform where they can obtain and get guidance from women who are knowledgeable. These cooperative circles can help aspiring women leaders to navigate careers through the experiences shared by other women leaders who mentor them. Professor Charlotte suggested that women should have circles where everybody shares an equal role in supporting everybody

else, so that everyone can succeed. Prof. Athena mentions the importance of supporting women through mentorship so that women who wish to advance their career should voluntarily submit themselves to mentorship that will equip them for an executive leadership position and that kind of mentorship will then introduce them to the existing professional network that the mentor has built.

This is what Prof. Charlotte thinks about supporting aspiring women leaders:

*I think we need to develop what we call cooperative circles where women meet with the express intent of supporting each other. There was once an initiative in the university, I think it is still there called Women in Leadership (WIL). Usually what happens in those meetings is that one successful woman presents to others and says, "this is my journey, this is how I did it". And it emphasizes "I", "I". I think what we need are circles of support where "women can flock together" like birds they flock together. When the front bird wild geese, they flock together and when the front runner is tired, the front runner flies to the back and then a new bird takes a lead. There is never one person that is more important than the other one. Everybody shares an equal role in supporting everybody else, so that everyone can succeed. And at different times will be called on to play different roles, for example, I am playing this role of being a dean and it is not a lifetime role, it is for five years. Within those five years, I am playing the front runner role in the flock, but I will soon, after five years, have to move back again and someone else will take the lead. That is what we need as women to help each other in leadership, and maybe we can transform the institution, not just so that women can be in leadership positions, but also so that there will be a different way of being in the institution, even with male colleagues and male leaders. I don't know if I am describing a utopian dream, or if, again in dream world, but that is what I long for.*

This is what Prof. Athena said about supporting women:

*You should submit yourself to mentorship for you to grow your professional relationships and make them stand in a way that will enhance your career aspirations. You start by linking with those same people at a very personal level, you try to create a very strong, personal interpersonal relationships with them in mentorship form, in a way that you voluntarily submit yourself to mentorship. So, mentorship is very important and the type of mentorship that will equip a female for an executive leadership position is one where a mentee voluntarily submits herself to mentorship.*

*When you submit yourself voluntarily to a female mentor who is well-known, she already has the existing networks of academic professional relationships. So, they will take you in because you are now their mentee and you have positioned yourself to learn from them. They will now take you and link you to their own professional networks and then you can use that network to grow and expand in your career. It can start in a very personal space. I have been telling you that I had a male mentor who is now a DVC of the college. That man is so professional. I have never experienced sexual harassment or sexual request from him, I am very bold to call his name because he had provided me support in my academic journey from the beginning. The male mentor supported us and created an enabling environment for black South African women to thrive.*

From the interview, Prof. Bella said:

*If there is one thing that I should do differently, it would be to make sure that I look for a mentor, because you do not certainly think that your supervisor is supposed to be your mentor, but you have to search for a mentor, which is something I was not doing before because mentors were not existing but currently doing since they exist. Previously, the word mentor was not even loosely used as it is today. That is the only thing that if I had known, or had it been used, I would have used it more effectively as compared to now.*

The above narratives indicate the wealth of mentoring aspiring women leaders in ascending the ladder of leadership. Aspirant women leaders should take responsibility in searching for mentors that can guide and support them for the leadership positions. From the participant's narratives, it is evident that mentorship contributes to producing great results in universities as it encourages the mentees to be enthusiastic about learning on how to become better leaders and it also encourages credibility between mentors and mentees. Both formal and informal mentorship has been found effective in equipping women who wish to develop their career with the required knowledge and support. A study conducted by Mazerolle, Nottingham and Coleman (2018) indicates that mentorship in higher education institutions emanates from internal and external mentors, where the internal mentors involve the institutional mentors that provide support concerning occupancy and help in navigating the policies of the university, and the external mentors provide support on the professional growth in higher

education generally. Professor Bella believes in mentorship as she indicated that, had she known about mentorship, she would have searched for her mentor from the beginning of her career and that indicates the power of mentorship. All women leaders indicated that since they are Deans of their school, they are in positions of power, and they are responsible for mentoring their colleagues in their school so that they will be capacitated with leadership skills. In this way, the women leaders are transferring their knowledge and experience to their subordinates.

### **5.6 Women's experiences in higher education senior leadership**

Below, I present a theme that emerged from the data analysis. A theme discussed answers the first research question which is: *What do women leaders recommend for women who desire to be in senior leadership roles?*

#### **5.6.1 Insight gained by experiences of women leaders.**

##### **5.6.1.1 Overcome bias and discrimination against gender and race.**

The women leaders were able to withstand the prejudice and discrimination they experienced on their journey. The findings from the participants' narratives shows that women managed to survive the direct and indirect prejudice as they continue to be in the middle level of leadership in higher education. All participants reported that they experienced prejudice on their journey to leadership. Although 2 out of 3 participants mention that they experienced indirect prejudice against race, one participant mentioned that she experienced a direct prejudice against gender. Professor Charlotte and Professor Bella mentioned that they felt indirectly discriminated against due to race on their journey as they ascend to middle level management, as they believe that if they were not that race, they would have been in this position and beyond earlier than they started. Professor Charlotte reported that, even though she was the only one who applied for the position because she was meeting the requirements, she was not appointed, instead she was acting in the position for longer than the normal acting period. The participant believed that she was acting more than the normal acting period because they were still searching for a candidate who was not her race. The participant reported that she understands the policy with regards to racial transformation in the university and she is in support of it, but she felt discriminated when she was not appointed even though she was the only applicant who qualified for

the position. Professor Athena reported that she experienced direct prejudice and discrimination against gender by the men in the university. The participant felt that she was discriminated against because she is a woman of child-bearing age, and she keeps taking maternity leave. The participant believed that there is still a patriarchy in the university as men still have a mentality that they should be the ones to hold positions of power.

Prof Charlotte reported on how she experienced the indirect prejudice in her journey to leadership:

*You know that there is a policy for racial transformation in the university. I am absolutely in support of it, and I am not against the policy at all. But when I become the only candidate that officially applied for the post after I had been acting for two years, I think I was acting for two years because they were trying to find somebody else for the post instead of me, because of the equity, and the transformation agenda of the university. So, I think I acted for a very long time because of that, but then I was the only applicant for the post. In some way, the university was forced to appoint me because there were no other applicants. I think there are also personality differences that I have experienced, where I have not been supported as much as I might have been if there were not personality differences between me and my line manager. So, I managed to do the job, but there was always that tension that I need to be aware of. It is not something that is in your face prejudice or in your face discrimination, but it is an undercurrent.*

Correspondingly, Prof. Bella explains how she felt indirectly prejudiced:

*...there were times where I would feel that I did not get other opportunities because of race. There were times where I would feel that maybe if I was another race, I would have been in this position. I would have been a professor 10 years earlier but because I was not that race, I had to work even harder for me to climb the ladder of leadership in the university. If I can say there is someone who prejudiced me, I would be lying, but I did feel the indirect prejudice.*

Prof. Athena reports on how she experienced the direct discrimination:

*I do not even want to describe the level of prejudice I encountered as I ascended the ladder of leadership. It has not been easy; patriarchy was all over the show. There*

*were times where I was under investigation for numerous reasons several times on my different levels. In that period, there is a time, around 2014, where I decided to throw in the towel and say you know I am done with leadership because I realised that there were men who were very patriarchal in the university. I remember the other day when I receive an email from my male colleague telling me to step down and focus on raising children because I have got my children.*

*I was not the only woman who experienced the prejudice and who suffered the kind of rejection, but there were other women in the same space. I recall one of them, in her exit interview with the Human resource officer, she said “I am leaving because of this man, I cannot work with this man”. The abuse was too much in the university. They would always make you feel like do not have the skills set, you are not capable, and they are the only ones who are capable.*

The participants' stories indicate that women were able to stand and fight patriarchy and the indirect discrimination against race as they managed to ascend the ladder of leadership. Professor Athena reported that the men in the university were so patriarchal in a way that they would make women feel like they do not have the required skills, or they are not capable of being leaders and they (men) are the ones who are capable. This indicates a resilience as Professor Athena was confident to pursue her journey to leadership regardless of the discrimination she experienced in the university. Professor Charlotte also showed determination as she has been applying for a position and was never appointed even though she was the only one who applied and was qualified for the position just because of the racial transformation policy in the university. Professor Charlotte reports that she acted for the position for too long and she did not get the support from her line manager because of the differences they had in terms of personalities. Aspiring women leaders should learn to remain unshaken by the level of prejudice and discrimination based on gender and race for them to ascend the ladder of leadership in higher education institutions.

#### 5.6.1.2 Withstand chilly organisational and societal culture.

The responses from the participants during the interview revealed that women have succeeded in holding out against unfriendly organisational and societal culture. Professor Bella indicated that women are now starting to join the male-dominated positions of leadership, especially Vice-chancellor roles. Professor Athena indicates

that the hidden overruling ideology of patriarchy still exists in the universities, and it makes men believe that women cannot lead regardless of possessing the set skills required in the position. Professor Charlotte reports that women and men should be seen and heard for what they have to offer. Professor Charlotte emphasises the issue of the organisational and societal culture where women work, that there should be a space where everyone, not just women but for men as well where they will be heard and seen because they are men who are quiet and more reserved who suffer the same consequences as women. Professor Bella reports that women are no longer marginalised, she has witnessed women being headhunted for senior leadership positions. The participant added that, if women were sidelined in higher education senior leadership, they were not going to headhunt a woman to apply for a senior leadership position. The participant mentioned that women who raise their hands when opportunities arise, climb the ladder of leadership. The findings of this study show that, regardless of the unfriendly organisational and societal culture in the institutions and within the societal context where women work, women are resilient as they manage to advance in their journey to leadership.

Prof. Charlotte explains:

*I think that what women have to offer is not often appreciated and recognized, because we are primarily in a patriarchal, competitive society that recognizes alpha male type characteristics. I also do not think that there are enough spaces where women flock together so that women can be seen and heard. We have all been in spaces as women where we offer an opinion about something and are not heard, and when the man says it, everybody recognizes it whereas it is the same thing. It talks to organisational culture. I mean, even in our Senate, the people who talk the most are white men. It is about creating a space where everyone, not just women, is seen and heard for who they are and what they have to offer. It also goes back to organisational culture; I believe that it is multi layered. I think it is the context within which women work, societal context, but also organisational cultures within which we are all working, not just women, but men, too, because genuinely they are men who are quieter and more reserved, and they suffer the same consequences as women.*

Correspondingly, Professor Athena reports on how she advanced her journey of leadership:

*... I decided to just press on, and I told myself that I am going to fight, if I will step down from the leadership, it will be by choice not by force and not because of the challenges. I planned to hang in there to create an enabling environment for other women to thrive, so that they will not be subjected to the same kind of discrimination and prejudice that I encountered. Women are very strong but do not realise that. I had to make myself a sacrificial lamb for other women to rise today in the school.*

This is what Prof. Bella said regarding this notion:

*Sometimes we miss opportunities because we think we are marginalized. A friend of mine who is a Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) in one of the universities got head hunted and she asked me if she should apply. I told her that you are a woman and have been head-hunted, so apply. I mean if they head hunted her, how do they know if she exists if they were marginalizing? So, women who are raising their hands up high are getting those positions. There is a huge change I am seeing in the higher education institutions top leadership.*

The above evidence indicates the change in the narratives of female leadership in higher education. This shows that women have managed to mitigate the hardship they were facing in higher education institution of being treated as insignificant while they possess the leadership skills simply because they do not belong to a certain social group. Even though the unspoken rules and norms of conduct are a major challenge for women to advance to senior leadership positions (Shava & Chasokela, 2020), the participants revealed women possess good leadership skills. Professor Bella reported that there is a huge change in the higher education leadership since women are now headhunted to take up senior leadership positions. Professor Athena decided to tolerate the unfavourable environment in the university to create an enabling environment for other women to succeed and have a role model. This clearly shows that women have found means of alleviating the problem of the unfriendly organisational and societal culture in the higher education leadership.

#### 5.6.1.3 Holding out against work-life balance

The findings from the study suggest that women succeeded in standing firm against the work and family responsibilities. The issue of trying to find a balance between work life and family responsibilities arises as one of the challenges encountered by women when trying to advance their career to senior leadership positions. All three

participants indicated that advancing their career while having a responsibility to give birth and raise children can be very daunting for women. Professor Bella mentions that the promotional criteria should accommodate women of child-bearing age as they will have to take maternity leave while men continue with their job. The participant indicates that if men publish more than women, it does not mean that men are smarter than women, but while women take maternity leave, men continue with their job. Professor Athena indicated that she managed to bounce back irrespective of the unfair treatment she encountered from her co-workers for having many children and continues to advance her career.

Professor Athena

*I remember the other day when I received an email from my male colleague telling me to step down and focus on raising children because I have got my children. He was patronizing and bullying me, trying to create problems in my life. I have kept a screenshot of the email from that male colleague and kept it on my record. When I am about to retire, I will write about my experience in leadership and how it has not been easy. I had to tell myself that that if I do not stand firm, other women will not have a frame of reference if I drop the ball. I told myself that if I quit, I will not be able to raise other women, I wanted other women to see me as a role model and gain strength from the fact that someone else had done this.*

Prof. Bella stated:

*...but at least the universities should design a criterion of promotion in support of women, especially those who are in the child-bearing age, to have a less publications than men. If the institutions of higher education can have that understanding, women can be encouraged to advance their career and would justify the attitude of thinking that if women publish less does not mean that they are less clever than men, but it probably because a woman was on maternity leave. The institutions should design programmes that will understand the natural part of being a woman, that the person is not going to be the only a university employee, there is going to be a time where they will need to take not just sabbatical leave, but also maternity leave, therefore, if three publications are expected in a year, at least women should be expected to publish*

*two. Women have additional roles and responsibilities at home whereas men have none, women have to deal with the in-laws and there are times where women are going to be off riders and stop publishing while men are publishing.*

The above evidence indicates that women are able to withstand the leadership positions irrespective of the family responsibilities that they have to take care of. It is for this reason that Professor Athena decided to stand firm in her position as a leader even though she had many children, but decided to withstand the challenges to create the friendly environment for other women who aspire to be in leadership position. Shava and Chasokela (2020) indicate that women are faced with challenges of having to balance between family responsibilities and work demands since being in a leadership position necessitates a leader to work beyond normal working hours. For that reason, Professor Bella believes that the universities should design a promotional criterion that will accommodate women's family responsibilities. Having women who are in leadership positions clearly indicates that women are using the platforms of sharing experiences where they provide each other with the professional advice and support.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed the themes that emerged from the narratives of the women leaders lived experiences in response to the research questions. I started by tabulating the themes that developed from the analysis matching with the research question they answer. I discussed the findings that developed from the analysis of the participant's narratives which are the influence of social capital in advancing women to senior leadership, professional networks in career advancement of women leaders and important of supporting aspiring women leaders by the experienced women leaders. The next chapter will be providing a summary of the of the study, limitations and recommendation for women who desire to be in leadership.

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the role of social capital in ascending women into senior leadership positions in higher education institutions. I wanted to find out from experienced women leaders whether social capital can assist women who desire to be in senior leadership positions. This chapter will provide a summary of the study as well as limitations and recommendations for the women who desire to be in leadership positions in higher education institutions.

### **6.2 Conclusions drawn from findings.**

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

#### **6.2.1 Strengths/competencies of social capital**

Drawing from the findings, this study shows that women need to consider the benefits of building relationships with colleagues within the institutions of higher education, both locally and globally. The findings of the study reveal that all three participants acknowledged the worth of social capital in career development and ascending the ladder of leadership in higher education. The social capital theory underpinning the study is about having access to a collection of potential resources that belong in durable social networks of mutual associations and recognitions. The participants shared their journeys on how they were able to ascend the ladder to a leadership position using the relationships they have with their co-workers. The dimensions of social capital theory were used by the participants to advance to leadership positions. The participants indicated that their journey to leadership required a great deal of effort, but the support from their colleagues and supervisors caused them to succeed. From the perspective of Social Capital Theory, I can conclude that women who build and strengthen relationships with their co-workers, within the vicinity and internationally, can advance their career trajectory sooner.

Another conclusion is the importance of building reliable connections. The results indicate that it is very important to have peer recognition in the higher education institutions. The peer recognition can only be achieved through the building of relationships with people who are in similar positions in other institutions that you meet at conferences. The women leaders indicated that social capital is built on the quality

of trust, credibility, and integrity in the relationship. The women leaders explained how important it is to have a pool of reliable connections that can help to develop a platform for sharing knowledge and experiences. The conclusion indicates that building a strong group of networks can help in having a platform where the information can be shared, and collaborations can be formed.

### **6.2.2 Professional network for career advancement**

In this study, it is evident that professional networks empowered women leaders to advance into senior leadership in higher education. The findings of the study clearly support the use of social networks since it was revealed that women leaders acknowledged the dimensions of Social Capital Theory which is the formal network of social relations in creating opportunities for career growth in higher education. It was shown that women who desire to be in leadership positions should intentionally join professional groups of networks where they can build relationships and acquire knowledge. It was indicated that the great benefits of joining professional networks as a female leader is that you get the guidance and valuable insight from your networks that can assist in achieving professional goals and determinations. The results of the study suggested that professional networks can be advantageous to aspiring women leaders as they can be involved in communities where they can share information and offer support and assistance for career progression.

### **6.2.3 Importance of supporting aspiring women leaders by the experienced women leaders.**

One of the significant findings that emerged from the study is that women assert mentorship as the imperative tool in grooming women for leadership positions. Women leaders suggested that having a mentor can be a valuable benefit for the career advancement of aspirant women leaders. One women leader realised the need to be intentional about grooming female leaders because there was a huge gender gap in leadership positions in higher education. All women leaders are currently in a position of professionally developing, guiding, and supporting their subordinates through mentorship in their schools. The programme for mentorship was found crucial for aspiring women leaders in higher education. The development of cooperative circles to be used as a platform for meeting and supporting one another to navigate their careers through their shared experiences was recommended for women leaders and aspiring women leaders. The results from the study suggested that women who desire

to be in leadership should search for formal and informal mentors as it was found effective in grooming and equipping women to develop their careers. Mentorship in higher education emanates from internal and external mentors, where the internal mentors involve institutional mentors that provide support concerning occupancy and help in navigating the policies of the university and the external mentors provide support on the professional growth in higher education generally (Mazerolle et al., 2018). Another significant finding revealed that the feminist approach to leadership can enable women to create professional relationships and networks where their voices will be heard.

#### **6.2.4 Insight gained from the narratives of the women leaders regarding their leadership experiences in the midst of obstructions.**

One of the significant findings from the study is that women leaders have found the means of mitigating the obstructions of bias and discrimination against gender and race. These obstructions have been indicated from the earliest literature conducted on women in leadership. In this study, it was observed that women have withstood the bias and discrimination against gender and race as they have managed to ascend the leadership ladder regardless of the visible and undercurrent prejudice. The conclusion from the study revealed that women are now able to stand and fight patriarchy and the indirect discrimination against race as they continue to be in leadership with the existence of direct and indirect prejudice in higher education.

In this study, it is evident that the chilly organisational and societal culture still exists in the institutions and are still influencing the leadership experiences of women. What women offer is not recognised and appreciated because the institutions are patriarchal as they still recognise alpha male type characteristics. The study has shown that when women offer an opinion about something they are not heard, but when the man says the same thing, everybody recognises it. This talks to the organisational culture. Hence, the results from the findings indicate the change in narrative of female leadership as it indicates that women have managed to mitigate the obstruction they were facing in higher education. Another finding is that women are now headhunted for senior leadership positions which signifies the competence of women in leadership.

Another conclusion from this study is that the obstruction of work-life balance for women in leadership has a significance impact in higher education. Women are not

recognised as the leaders by their colleagues since they have the responsibility of bearing and raising their children. The promotional criteria were found to be unfavourable for women who aspire to be in leadership. This has shown that women who are in the reproductive age who will have to take maternity leave and raise children are scored the same way as men who spend most of their time at work publishing articles. However, the results indicate that women have succeeded in holding out against the work-life balance since they are advancing to leadership positions in higher education regardless of the demands and the responsibilities of raising children. This signifies that women are successfully using the platforms of sharing knowledge and experiences to assist each other in providing professional advice and support for them to advance into leadership positions.

### **6.3 Recommendations/Implications of the study**

The following recommendations emerged based on the findings of the study:

- **Reviewing of the promotion criteria to accommodate women:** Participants reported that, in higher education institutions, the promotion criteria do not support women since they use the same standards of promotion for both men and women. Women leaders indicated that women have another responsibility in giving birth and they have to take maternity leave, while men continue publishing articles. This gives them a huge advantage in getting promotions. To this end, the institutions of higher education must consider reviewing the promotional criteria in favour of women's other responsibilities.
- **Continuing mentorship of aspiring women leaders:** Participants reported the importance of supporting other women to become better leaders. It has been suggested that mentorship assists women who wish to be in senior leadership to increase their job proficiency as they navigate their journey to leadership. Mentorship helps in promoting trustworthiness among co-workers and among superiors and subordinates. To achieve effective mentorship programmes, institutions of higher education must formalise the mentorship programme in such a way that they have to acknowledge those who mentored other people well in a form of certification. This can benefit the institutions as academics will be motivated to do their work to the best of their ability and the mentors can be inspired to continue transferring their knowledge and experiences and provide guidance to others.

### **6.3.1 Recommendations for further research**

- The research only covered the experiences of women who are in Deanship positions on the roles of social capital in ascending the ladder of senior leadership in higher education. There may also be a need to investigate the experiences of new faculty staff on the effectiveness of mentorship and the importance of professional networking for career development.
- Women leaders who participated in this study also reported that the direct and indirect bias and discrimination against gender and race still exists in higher education. There is a need to investigate this undercurrent obstruction. This would assist in understanding the reason behind the stagnant movement of women to senior leadership positions in higher education.

### **6.4 Dissemination of the research**

This research study is meant to fulfil the academic requirement for the Master of Education in Higher Education Coursework to explore women's experiences in ascending to higher education senior leadership. The findings of the study need to be disseminated. I will take the following steps to disseminate the findings:

- The participants of the study will receive copies of the research report.
- The findings will be presented at local and international conferences.
- Articles will be submitted to appropriate journals for publication.

### **6.5 Delimitation of the study**

This study was conducted in one of the public universities located in KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa. Three women who were in Deanship position in the schools or colleges within this institution participated in the study. The snowballing technique was used to select the participants of the study in different schools within the university. The participants in the research study were selected according to their formal leadership roles in the schools. The study targeted women who were in Deanship positions in their schools since there is a dearth of women in senior leadership positions. The study does not represent all the public universities in KZN as it was confined to only one university that was easily accessible during the Covid-19

outbreak. Therefore, the research findings cannot be generalised, but can still be inferred to other similar contexts.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

The purpose of the research study was to explore the role of social capital in advancing women in higher education institutions by investigating the lived experiences of women Deans in one of the comprehensive universities in KwaZulu-Natal. The study adopted the phenomenological approach methodology using three women as the participants in the study. The four research questions guided the study. The study revealed the need for further research on female leadership in higher education.

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## APPENDIX A: Gatekeepers permission



29 June 2020

Ms Snehlanhla Zungu (SN 219095947)  
School of Education  
College of Humanities  
Edgewood Campus  
UKZN  
Email: [sn4742@gmail.com](mailto:sn4742@gmail.com)

Dear Ms Zungu

### RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) towards your postgraduate studies, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

*"Imbalances of the past: Marginalisation of women in leadership roles in South African higher education."*

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by conducting interviews with female Deans and Head of Schools at UKZN. (Taking in account the regulations imposed during the lockdown ie restrictions on gatherings, travel, social distancing etc. ZOOM, Skype or telephone interviews recommended).

Please ensure that the following appears on your questionnaire/attached to your notice:

- Ethical clearance approval letter;
- Research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor;
- Consent form is attached to the notice/questionnaire and to be signed by user before he/she fills in questionnaire;
- gatekeepers approval by the Registrar.

You are not authorized to contact staff and students using 'Microsoft Outlook' address book. Identity numbers and email addresses of individuals are not a matter of public record and are protected according to Section 14 of the South African Constitution, as well as the PAIA and POPI Act. For the release of such information over to yourself for research purposes, the University of KwaZulu-Natal will need express consent from the relevant data subjects. Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely



**DR KE CLELAND: REGISTRAR (ACTING)**

Office of the Registrar  
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, South Africa  
Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 8005/2206 Email: [registrar@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:registrar@ukzn.ac.za)  
Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)

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## APPENDIX B: Participant's consent

Snehlanhla Zungu  
School of Education  
Private Bag X03  
Ashwood  
3605

Email: [sn4742@gmail.com](mailto:sn4742@gmail.com)

29 April 2022

Dear potential participant

I wish to invite you to participate in the study "Imbalances of the past: Marginalisation of women in leadership roles in South African higher education".

You will participate in sharing your experience on the career advancement to the senior leadership positions. The study will involve other 3 women who are in Deanship positions from the higher education institution located in KwaZulu- Natal. The study will be guided by the main research questions that reflect on the marginalisation of women in senior leadership positions in higher education. You will be involved in a semi- structured interview, open- ended interview, where there will be a set of questions based on a topic that will be asked as we engage in a conversation about your experiences in ascending to senior leadership position. Due to the current situation caused by the covid-19 pandemic, an interview will be conducted through a recorded zoom communication. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes. There are no risks involved in this study, however if you feel uncomfortable at any time, please inform me, the researcher.

The participation on a study is entirely voluntarily. The rationale for this study emanates from the persisting issue of the treatment of women in leadership roles in South African higher education. The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the roles of social capital in ascending women into senior leadership positions in higher education institutions. The dimension of social capital will be used to explore the experiences of women currently in Deanship positions in rising to senior leadership positions.

I believe that participating on the study will provide you with an opportunity to reflect on your experience during the study and share your experiences of ascending to a leadership position in higher education institution. Anonymity and confidentiality will be ensured as no names of persons will be revealed in the research reports that will be written and published. Data generated from the interview will be stored and given a strict confidentiality. It can only be accessed by me and my supervisor for research purposes. At the present time, I am not aware of any risks in your participation. The participation on a study is entirely voluntarily, hence, you may withdraw anytime if you no longer want to participate.

There are no immediate benefits to you from participating in this study. However, this study will be extremely helpful to me in developing a research report on this topic that I hope will provide viewpoint on women's experiences in ascending to senior leadership positions. The study hopes to explore and understand the experiences of women currently in Deanship positions in rising to leadership positions.

If you would like to receive feedback on this study, I will record your email address on a separate sheet of paper and can send you the final report from the study when it is completed sometime in the year 2022.

If you have any further questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact me via email ([sn4742@gmail.com](mailto:sn4742@gmail.com)) or telephonically [REDACTED]. Alternatively, feel free to contact my supervisor, Dr Thoko Mlisi, via email ([mlisi@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mlisi@ukzn.ac.za)). You may also contact the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION  
Research Office, Westville Campus  
Govan Mbeki Building  
Private Bag X54001  
Durban  
4000  
KwaZulu- Natal, South Africa  
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609  
Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

## CONSENT

I \_\_\_\_\_ (your name and surname) have been informed about the study entitled “Imbalances of the past: Marginalisation of women in leadership roles in South African higher education” by Snehlanhla Zungu.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

I have been informed about any available compensation or medical treatment if injury occurs to me as a result of study-related procedures.

If I have any further question/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at [sn4742@gmail.com](mailto:sn4742@gmail.com).

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researcher then I may contact:

### HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus  
Govan Mbeki Building  
Private Bag X 54001  
Durban  
4000  
KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa  
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609  
Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:

Zoom record my interview YES / NO

Video for capturing nonverbal quos YES/ NO

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Witness  
(Where applicable)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Translator (Where applicable)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX C: Ethical clearance



31 July 2021

Ms Snenhlanhla Ntomfuthi Zungu (219095947)  
School Of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Ms Zungu,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00003020/2021  
Project title: Imbalances of the past: Marginalisation of women in leadership roles in South African higher education.  
Degree: Masters

### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 30 June 2021 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted FULL APPROVAL.

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

This approval is valid until 31 July 2022.

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

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

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

Yours sincerely,

-----  
Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

### Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 Email: [hssrec@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:hssrec@ukzn.ac.za) Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

## **APPENDIX D: Data generation tool**

### **Interview Questions.**

1. How would you describe the professional journey in higher education that led you to the leadership position?
2. Did you experience any prejudice or stereotype as you ascended to Deanship position in higher education?
3. To what extent do you think this has impacted your career development?
4. Would you say your social network with the superiors have contributed to your career success? If yes, can you describe how social networking helped you to advance into Deanship positions?
5. How important it is to build your social capital in advancing to senior leadership roles?
6. What are the aspects of professional network can assist women in progressing to senior leadership positions?
7. Do you have any views about what could be done by the institutions of higher education in ensuring women build professional network to ascend to senior leadership positions?
8. Reflecting upon your career path and the choices you have made in terms of professional networking, is there anything that you would have made differently?
9. Research indicates that women are still marginalised in senior leadership positions in higher education. What do you think are the main cause?
10. What advice would you give other women who aspire to be in senior leadership positions?

11. Is there anything you feel it is important to share that I did not cover in this interview?

**Thank you for participating in the study.**

Principal Investigator: Snehlanhla Zungu

Contact Details:

████████████████████

Email: sn4742@gmail.com

Supervisor: Dr Thoko Mnisi

Email: Mnisi@ukzn.ac.za

You may also contact the Research Office through:

HSSREC Research Office,

Tel: 031 260 4557/4609

E-mail: Hssrec@ukzn.ac.za

## APPENDIX E: Sample of analysis

Participant 10:23

*social capital with peers*

I think not so much with my superiors, but with my peers because I think over time, I have established good relationship with peers. And now that I am asked to fulfil this leadership role of my peers, I can count on their trust and on their support. So, I'm very, very appreciative of the support that I get from what are now my in the university hierarchy my juniors, but who in the academic spheres are really my peers. So, I regard them as equal they even though I line manage them, when we talk about school issues, I value their opinion as peers. And so, what we have been able to achieve so far as a school has been because of the good relationships within that group not so much with the superiors.

Interviewer 11:49

*Q5* Okay. So, since now you are in a leadership position, how important do you think it is to put social capital in advancing to senior leadership roles?

Participant 12:10

*relationships*

Look, I think the strength of social capital is built on the strength of relationships. And relationships are built on trust and credibility. And so, and on integrity. And so, I think it is extremely important to pay attention to the relationships and to be trustworthy, to have integrity and to be credible, and you can never let your guard down as a leader with regards to those characteristics. Because if you break trust, then you undermine the social capital, you undermine the relationships and you undermine the social capital. And social capital as far as I can see, I'm not an expert on social capital. But as far as I can see, it's built on the strength of relationships. And, and so, a lot of what I do is trying to build relationships, trying to build connections within my school, between schools with external partners with research organizations, and make sure that those communication lines are open and that we honour the promises that we make to each other. So that they can be incremental building of relationships and incremental building of social capital in there.

*relationships*

*TRUST*

Interviewer 14:21

*Q6* So, what are the aspects of professional network can assist to maintain progressing to senior leadership positions?

Participant 14:30

Just repeat the question for me.

Interviewer 14:35

what are the aspects of professional network can assist women in progressing to senior leadership positions?

Participant 14:47

Okay, I don't know if I fully understand the question. However, I think that women have got a different approach to leadership generally. It is an approach to leadership that is based on relationships number one, that is based on not being the boss, but being more nurturing, which is non-hierarchical, which is flatter, and more inviting, so more hospitable. And I think that for myself personally, it's a bit difficult because, by nature, I'm an introvert. To engage with people, takes a lot of energy from me, really a lot of energy. And so at the end of the day, when I have been engaging with people and encouraging people to engage with each other, I am really exhausted, and I need time on my own to recover my energies. But whether you're introverted or extroverted, I think the feminine approach to leadership is..... facilitates the building of social capital. I think that has not been recognized sufficiently in the business world, nor has it been recognized sufficiently in the university and in higher education. Some women that I see in leadership positions tend to adopt a more masculine approach to leadership, which is more hierarchical. Another necessarily thinks that that's helpful. I think it's more divisive than team building. But that is my opinion. I don't know if I answered your question.

*social capital & helping women people*

Interviewer 17:45

Q 7

Yes, you did. You gave me the information I think I was looking for. So do you have any views about what could be done by the institutions of higher education in ensuring that women build a professional network to ascend to senior leadership positions?

Participant 18:07

*not at all*  
*at all*  
*at all*

So, the one thing that I think just going back to the previous question, which I think is so key, and now begins to answer this question, is that I think women have got a more cooperative style of leadership, rather than a competitive style. I think maybe I'm generalizing I'm not sure. But to help women in leadership, I think we need to develop what do we call it cooperate, cooperative circles (Laughing) where we meet, and we meet with the express intent to support each other. Now, there was once an initiative in the university, I think it's still there called Women in Leadership (WIL). And usually what happens in those meetings is that one successful woman presents to others and says, "this is my journey, this is how I did it". And it emphasizes that "I", "I", I think what we need are circles of support where.... this is a term that I picked up from somewhere, where women can flock together like you know, birds, they flock together. And when the front bird, the wild geese, they flock together and when the front runner is tired, the front runner goes to the back flies to the back and then a new person takes the lead. And so, there's never one person that is more important than the other. Everybody shares an equal role in supporting everybody else, so that everyone can succeed. And at different times will be called on to play different roles. So, for example, now, I'm playing this role of being dean. And it's not a lifetime role, it's for five years. And so, within those five years, I am playing the front runner role in the flock. But I will soon after five years have to move to the back again, and someone else will take the lead. And so, I think that's what we need as women to help each other in leadership. And maybe we can then transform the institution, not just so that women can be in leadership positions, but also so that there's a different way of being in the institution, even

*style of leadership*  
*to develop*

*or roles*

*support each other*  
*at all*  
*at all*

*at all*

What is social capital?

clarity on the question.

Interviewer 10:31

Social capital is all about networking, having connections, building connections with people who are in high position.

Participant 10:43

I can say it's important in the sense that wherever you go whatever position you're applying for, even for promotion purposes, you still need people that are going to be referring those people who are going to be assessors. And depending on the type of a person that you are, it can end up only there. But if you are also other people who are social climbers who suck on other people, that's a different story. For me, it's as simple as we are networking, you know, my work, you will provide me with the reference that is going to assure me to get the job that I want, because you believe in me. So I wouldn't say depend on people just for... be good in what you're doing and then people will do what is right. ~ networks

importance & influence on professional network.

Social climber

Interviewer 11:57

Q6

So, what are the aspects of professional network that can assist women in progressing to senior leadership positions?

Participant 12:06

First one is the one that I've just said that be good in what you are doing, if you're good in what we're doing, and give whosoever that is going to be asked to talk about you giving them no excuse to tell the world about how that's it. If you're going to just network just because one day, I want to give you my referee, or that that's not how it should be. You should just do your best as an individual, and people will notice you.

professional network

And it's the same even for the people that that are in higher position when they are training people train your people to be so good that anyone can grab them without your influence, because I think I may be wrong, but the way you phrase your questions, it sounds like you are saying that people in leadership should be influencing how their mentees get jobs. I may be wrong, but it's how you phrase it. My response is, it shouldn't be such that you get jobs because someone has influenced. Someone should mentor you so well, that even if you didn't ask them to be your referees, but to us, somebody else wasn't your supervisor wasn't your mentor, they would still give the same. So, the influence part shouldn't be I'm just pushing you because you were once my student, it should be I'm pushing you because I believe in you I have trained you have mentored you correctly. And I know you're going to make me proud when you get there not to influence even it's for you it's more like a good riddance or, hey, let's her get that job there so that she never comes to work with me, it shouldn't be like that. ~ well trained - coaching

mentorship

EFFCUB  
well trained

*influence of social capital.*

find a way to get her to talk to you, you will be amazed how much support Professor Mkhize given to us for us to be able to be where we are today.

Interviewer 22:06

*Q5*

So, how important is it to build your social capital in advancing senior leadership roles?

Participant 22:15

*peer recognition*  
It is so crucial because basically that's what you need. You need to create your own, in order to thrive in a hostile environment only your networks can assist you. I'm sure you understand how academia works, that you need peer recognition, not just from within your institution, you need peer recognition nationally from other institutions, you need peer recognition from outside of the country. So, you need those strategic networks of women who are in similar positions in others places so that you use that to meet at conferences, you use that to meet when you work on academic pieces that editing a journal, they will tell you about an important workshop for women empowerment or leadership and so on. Maybe webinars and so on. So, you need that, social capital is very necessary because you see that these are sharing platforms of experiences. If you isolate yourself and you may think that there's something wrong with you as a woman, the way you begin to expose yourself and connect yourself to other networks of women and as you listen to them sharing their experiences from one on one to another that we are dealing with the same enemy manifesting itself in different forms and so, as women we pull our strength from each other as we share our experiences and then we have that determination to fight on and not give up not allow patriarchy to destroy our careers. So yes, the social capital is very necessary, if you do not have your social networks around you, the very strong one of very influential women, strong women you will not you cannot stay in leadership as a woman at a higher level.  
*influence of social capital*  
*Platform of sharing exp.*

Interviewer 24:33

*Q6*

So, what are the aspects of professional network can assist women in progressing to senior leadership positions?

Participant 24:42

It starts with a specific person I see because they can be no professional without a person. So, you submit disturbing issues of mentorship you submit yourself to mentorship like I can't tell you see like in the system now. Do you know Professor Moletsane? She is a Pro Vice Chancellor for Socia Golshe, she's in a School of Education at the moment.

Interviewer 25:18

So, yeah.

EMERGED THEMES

THEME 1	CASES
<p>STRENGTH/COMPETENCIES OF SOCIAL CAPITAL</p> <p>bring asked for a position</p>	<p>Value of building relationships Trust, credibility, integrity ✓</p> <p>Building a network of supporters</p> <p>Platform of sharing experiences and collaborations ✓</p> <p>Identifying &amp; building network/connections TO THE INSIDER</p> <p>Women with more experienced employees</p> <p>Establish a good relationship with peers</p> <p>Women career progression</p>

THEME 2  
OF  
EFFECTIVE MENTORSHIP PROGRAMMES  
WOMEN MENTORS

- Shadow mentoring ✓
- Peer recognition / recognition of mentors
- Creating enabling environment for other women leaders

Q2

THEME 3

IMPORTANCE OF

PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS

CONCEPT

① Basic leadership training - pool of leaders

② GROWING A TIMBER OF LEADERS

③ MENTORSHIP OF

PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITIES

④ IMPORTANCE OF RELEVANT EXPERIENCE & KNOWLEDGE

⑤ Develop other leaders (groom)

⑥ Women are head-hunted for senior positions

⑦ PROFESSIONAL NETWORK ENHANCE CAREER ASPIRATION - INTRODUCE YOU TO THEIR EXISTING NETWORKS/CONTACTS

(strengthen business connections, get fresh ideas, advance your career, access new information, get career advice & support, Build confidence)

Q6

Q7

Q8

FEMININE APPROACH

① Women should cooperate - not compete

② Groom other leaders

③ FIGHT MASCULINITY, HOSTILITY

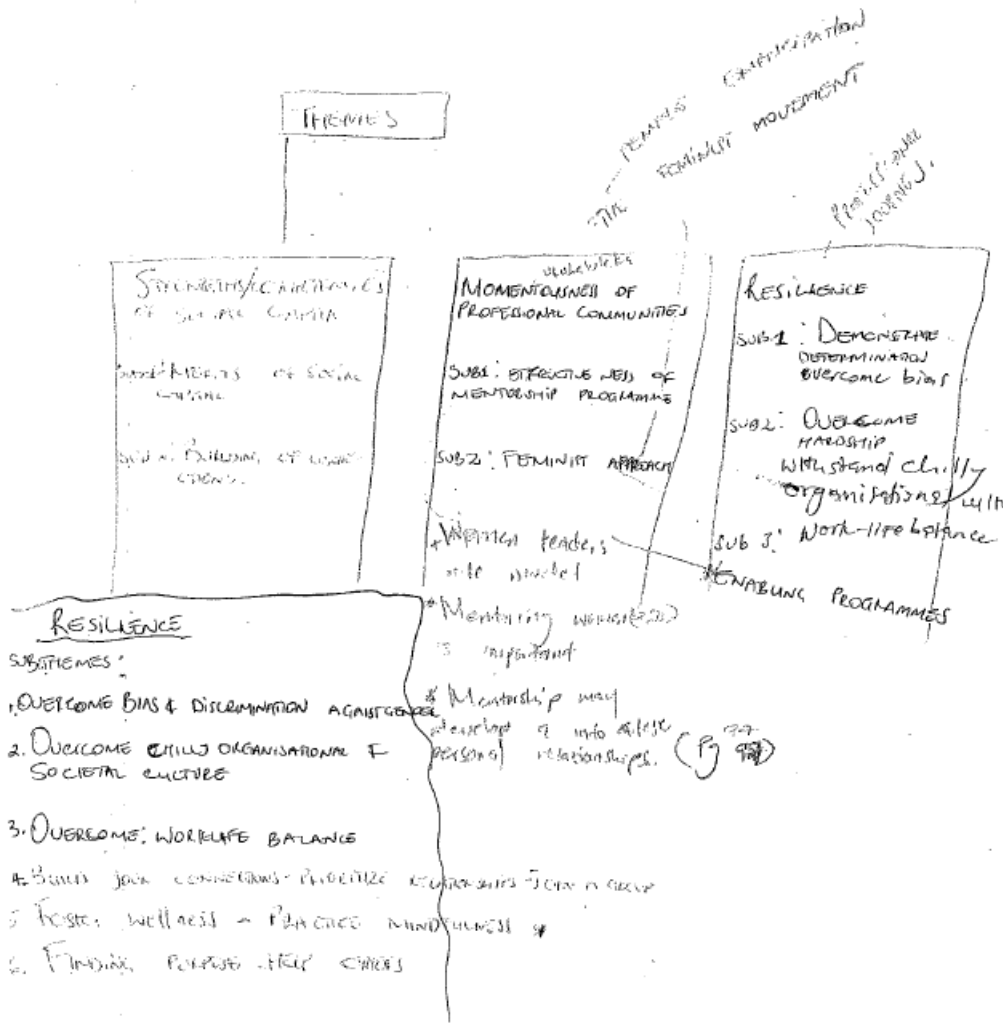
④ Or

2019/10/15  
18:57 words  
6:05

THEMES EMERGED FROM THE STUDY

1. MERITS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL IN CAREER ADVANCEMENT
2. STRENGTH/COMPETENCIES OF SOCIAL CAPITAL
3. MOMENTOUSNESS OF PROFESSIONAL CAPITAL

4



stuart.eco.utec.edu.29

## THEMES

### 1. Strengths/Competencies of social capital

sub-theme 1: Merits of social capital

sub-theme 2: Building of connections sec. Importance of chains,

### 2. Momentousness of professional communities / Professionalism of women

sub-theme 1: Effectiveness of mentorship programmes

sub-theme 2: Feminist approach

sub-theme 3: Positioning of women relative to women's career

### 3. Resilience

sub-theme 1: Demonstrate determination. <sup>resilient, male hegemon</sup> marginalisation, project identification

sub-theme 2: Overcome the hardship. <sup>resilient, male hegemon</sup> rejection, ...

collaboration, cooperation, relationships.

QUESTIONS

- ① The influence of social capital in returning to service.
- ② The ~~importance~~ <sup>ROLE</sup> of social capital in the <sup>success</sup> of women in <sup>managing</sup>.
- ③ Shadow mentoring/mentorship programmes
- ④ Creating enabling environment for other women leaders
- ⑤ Support from men/collaborators across diff teams <sup>to learn from</sup> <sup>expertise of a</sup>
- ⑥ Peer recognition / RECOGNITION OF MENTORS /
- ⑦ Platform of sharing experiences.

making with  
and experience  
employees

VALUES OF

- ① BUILDING OF NETWORK OF REFERENCES
- ② BUILDING OF RELATIONSHIPS trust, credibility, integrity
- ③ IDENTITY + BUILT NETWORK/CONNECTIONS <sup>to learn from</sup> <sup>SCANNER</sup>
- ④ ENERGY, DRINKING + ENERGY GIVING ACTIVITIES
- + STRENGTH/COMPETENCE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL.
- ⑤ SIGNIFICANT OF PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS
- ⑥ The importance of PROFESSIONAL NETWORK CONNECTIONS
- ⑦ Basic leadership training, pool of leaders, grow your own rather
- ⑧ Importance of relevant experience
- ⑨ Women are head-hunted for senior positions
- ⑩ Professional network enhance career aspiration
- ↳ introduce you to <sup>new</sup> existing networks
- ⑪ Develop other leaders (strong/masculinity, basing belief on people)

Q3.

- ① FEMININE APPROACH
- ② Women compete, not cooperate
- ③ Organisational culture, women are not recognised, male hegemony

⑤ IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORTING THE ASPIRING WOMEN LEADERS BY THE EXPERIENCED WOMEN LEADERS IN ASCENDING TO SENIOR POSITIONS

- ⑥ The importance of supporting a women colleague
- ⑦ Collaborations & communities of practice.
- ⑧ Resilience <sup>Patience, male heg, child-bearing</sup> <sup>stigmatisation, role conflict, prejudice & discrimination case</sup>
- ⑨ Role Model
- \* ⑩ Recognition of Mentors / FORMALISE MENTORSHIP

## APPENDIX F: Editor's letter

**Rod Taylor**

Language editor & proofreader  
Trading as  
Wordstar

215 Republic Road  
Randpark 2194

Telephone: 084 716 6588  
Email: wordstar@iafrica.com

4 February 2024

To whom it may concern

### Language Editing – Snenhlanhla N Zungu

I have reviewed the dissertation entitled "Women in senior leadership in higher education institutions" in terms of spelling, language and grammar and have made recommendations to the author concerning the changes necessary.



R. Taylor  
MBA BSc DTM

## APPENDIX G: Turn it in certificate.

### IMBALANCES OF THE PAST: MARGINALISATION OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION.

#### ORIGINALITY REPORT



#### PRIMARY SOURCES

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