

June 2014

South African Principalship, Agency & Intersectionality Theory

Michèle Schmidt

Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, mschmidt@sfu.ca

Raj Mestry

University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Follow this and additional works at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cie-eci>

Recommended Citation

Schmidt, Michèle and Mestry, Raj (2014) "South African Principalship, Agency & Intersectionality Theory," *Canadian and International Education / Education canadienne et internationale*: Vol. 43: Iss. 1, Article 6.

Available at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cie-eci/vol43/iss1/6>

This Research paper/Rapport de recherche is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in Canadian and International Education / Education canadienne et internationale by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact kmarshal@uwo.ca.

South African Female Principalship Examined Through an Intersectional Lens

Directrices d'école et Pouvoir des Femmes Sud-Africaines examinés à travers une lentille inter-sectionnelle

Michèle Schmidt, Simon Fraser University
Raj Mestry, University of Johannesburg

Abstract

Gender bias towards South African female principals remains a problem and compelling issue for research. The Constitution policy addresses gender equality, yet women still do not experience equal rights in practice. This study uses a theory of intersectionality to examine two Black South African women's experiences in their roles as principals. The paper presents a narrative analysis using an intersectional lens to examine their stories. The data collection involved semi-structured questionnaires and phone interviews. The results provide a significant contribution to the small body of literature on intersectionality theory as well as the literature around female principals in South Africa. The analysis was guided by intersections of gender, race, class, social capital, family, agency, discrimination, violence, motherhood, and policy.

Résumé

Les préjugés sexistes envers les directrices d'école Sud-Africaines demeurent un problème et une question impérieuse pour la recherche. La politique constitutionnelle aborde la question de l'égalité des sexes; toutefois dans la pratique, les femmes ne connaissent toujours pas l'égalité de droits. Cette étude utilise une théorie d'intersectionnalité pour examiner les expériences en leadership de deux femmes noires Sud-Africaines dans leurs rôles en tant de directrices de deux écoles sud-africaines. Le but de ce papier est d'examiner la manière dont ces femmes négocient les obstacles dans leur travail, ce qui peut entraver leur pouvoir en tant que leaders dans les écoles sud-africaines. Ce projet inclue des entretiens semi-structurés et les résultats offrent une significative contribution au petit noyau de recherche utilisant la théorie de l'intersectionnalité, de même qu'à la littérature sur les expériences des directrices d'école dans le rôle de chef d'établissement en Afrique du Sud. Les thèmes suivants ont émergé, démontrant ainsi les défis auxquels ces femmes ont fait face et les actions qu'elles ont posées afin de négocier ces défis : discrimination entre les sexes; stéréotypes de femmes dans des rôles de maternité ; menaces et violence ; et absence de politique visant à protéger ces femmes dans leur environnement de travail.

Keywords: intersectionality theory; principalship; gender; South Africa; agency; policy
Mots-clés: théorie de l'intersectionnalité; chef d'établissement; genre; Afrique du Sud; pouvoir; politique

*“Tsa etwa key a tshadi pele di wela leopeng” (~anonymous)
“If a leader is a woman, disaster is bound to happen.”*

Introduction

Scholars (e.g., Blackmore, Thomson, & Barty, 2006) cite examples of gender bias among female leaders in Western schools; however, in South Africa, the issue is more of a pandemic. Researchers (e.g., Mahlase, 1997) found that both South African female teachers and principals face triple oppression, namely race, class, and gender that strongly define women historically and to this day. The Constitution (South Africa, 1996) has allegedly addressed gender equality, yet women still do not experience equal rights in practice (Cotter, 2004). Despite Post-Apartheid government “gender equality” initiatives (preparation programs for women in management and

leadership positions; certification in leadership) (Department of Education [DoE], 2007; Moorosi, 2008), activists remain ambivalent about the impact of these initiatives. Motapanyane (2009) notes that any social movements involving women have resulted in more poverty and oppression for rural, inner-city, urban, and suburban women. South Africa continues to promote the state's transformation agenda with little evidence as to its effectiveness regarding neither the enhancement of gender equality nor an open plan of action to meet democratic and transformational imperatives (Naidoo, 2004).

History of South Africa Educational Leadership

Historically women have dominated the teaching profession in South Africa (DoE, 2006). However, in the principalship, current statistics (2014) from the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE), as shared by The Deputy Director General in personal conversation with one of the authors, revealed that less than 50% of principal posts are held by women (i.e., 84 women out of 201 principals).

The history of South Africa stands alone globally in its extraordinary complexity. Being mindful of the socio-political context within which female principals work is essential to understanding the conditions of their daily work-life, challenges and opportunities, and the (im)possibilities for agency. Leadership in South Africa differs dramatically and fundamentally from Western leadership models (Naidoo, 2004) by virtue of a complex and layered history. Any feminist approach employed to study these women requires one to be mindful of their unique context. Western forms of feminism do not capture unique cultures impacted by colonialism (Mestry & Schmidt, 2013).

Policy papers report a shift in feminism of leadership, yet the reality is that these developments have stalled in South Africa. Women are still denied leadership positions and face challenges when they are hired in these positions (Women's Summit, 2013). Therefore, this paper takes into consideration the intersections of oppression that confine and constrain the place of women as leaders in South African schools.

Theoretical Tools: Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality theory as a form of intellectual feminist analysis theorizes identity and oppression (Collins, 2000). Also known as interlocking systems of oppression, researchers are able to explore the ways that concepts such as gender, race, and class intersect to create inequality in the face of Africa's Black Third World women's "triple jeopardy." Originally developed in the late 1980s by legal authority Crenshaw (1989), and further developed by Collins (2000), a leading sociologist, intersectionality illustrates Black women's work as an intellectual and activist activity. The theory serves a number of purposes, most prominently, as a catalyst for change, addressing equity issues in the workplace, and promoting social justice.

In this way, intersectionality theory honors Black women's unique expertise and provides space for their voice outside of the Western mainstream. As a theory of interlocking systems of oppression, intersectionality claims that systems of race, social class, and gender shape Black women's experience (Collins, 2000). In order to understand women's different lived experiences and social realities in their posts as principals, intersectionality theory provides the flexibility to work within a matrix of domination that reflects complex layers of history and social systems of oppression (Collins, 2000). Discrimination of women within rigid hierarchical structures can be subtle and nuanced, or blatant and harsh. Within these conditions, change can occur through insider resistance.

The idea of using intersectionality as an analytical lens enables researchers to examine the situated woman in the center of domination. While located in these spaces, the interpersonal domain influences women's daily interactions with others in their personal and work relationships. Transformation occurs when Black women engage in critical reflection of their context. Collins stresses that it is a woman's responsibility to recognize their own victimization — to “see...how [their] own thoughts and actions uphold someone else's subordination” (Collins, 2000, p. 287). Structure and disciplinary domains are typically resistant to change while negotiation can occur within the domains of interpersonal relationships located in the interstices of structure. It is in these spaces where women can find cracks and fissures with which to recast and resist hegemony and thus consider individual agency (Collins, 2000).

Intersectionality is somewhat controversial presenting concerns around its robustness, ambiguity in the meaning around appropriate methodological usage, and the use of Black women as the ubiquitous intersectional subject. The goal for researchers is to look beyond these alleged limitations, and wrestle with intersectionality's theoretical, political, and methodological murkiness in order to establish a more comprehensive theory with which to address identity and oppression (Nash, 2008). Aguilar (2012) argues that these limitations are also the theory's strengths since the theory is still emerging.

The definition of agency that is used in this paper relates to the ability to conceptualize and perform an action that women consciously and responsibly reproduce as their own conditions of existence. Agency remains a complexity of performative acts emerging from layers of negotiated meaning within different contexts (Kiguwa, 2006, p.14). What Kiguwa (2006) found in the case of African women is that they are able to “subvert even dominant notions of agentic action, performing agency by appropriating positions of seeming lack of agency, and in remarkable ways consciously re/product[ing] their own conditions of being” (p. 14). For example, they are able to “co-opt, or appropriate, the archetypal image of the victim, which contextually takes the form of the powerless African woman” (Kiguwa, 2006, p. 14), or use “silence and the trope of the voiceless...African women [to] provoke an agentic position” (Clark, 2012, p. 2).

Research Methodology

A qualitative narrative research methodology brought to the forefront the experiences of two Black female principals. The study created space for their voices to be heard, and more specifically, to capture information from the women's individual and collective experiences as principals. Numerous intersectional components beyond gender, class and race emerged that include: social capital, family, discrimination, violence, motherhood, agency, and failed policy. These intersectional themes defined the women's experiences individually and collectively by locating them in their daily work lives.

Narrative Analysis

The women's narratives or “stories” helped capture the many aforementioned intersecting elements. Each woman's story is different with some overlapping similarities, yet, their stories are meant to honor their unique situations, intersectional concepts and experiences. The information they shared with us provided structure for the narratives by creating a coherent story for each woman (Ewick & Silbey, 2003). The narratives were captured using open-ended qualitative questionnaires followed by personal telephonic interviews as the main data-gathering tools.

Sample

The population was comprised of female principals in a district located in The Gauteng Province of South Africa. The province is one of nine provinces in South Africa, which is densely populated and the economic hub of the country. A purposeful sampling method was used because the district was in proximity of one of the researcher's place of employment. There were 84 female principals in the District of study at the time of this study. Of those, eight principals were selected out of a total of 17 women (represented by Black, Indian, Coloured, and White women). The criterion for selection of this paper's sample of participants was that they had five years experience as principals in urban secondary and primary schools, were of varied ethnicities, and participated in an International-Local University Leadership Intervention Program partnership at the time of the study.

Two Black women out of the total sample of eight women of varied ethnicities were selected so that their unique experiences as Black women were not clouded by the experiences of women of different ethnic, historical, political, and cultural backgrounds in the larger sample (e.g., Coloured, Indian, White).

Narrative Data Analysis

The process of going through the narratives involved coding the stories with various narrative analysis themes as well as recognizing how biography and demographics contextualized the stories. The researchers were responsible for the story structures by locating central themes, sequencing life events, and organizing the time span (Maines, 1993). Narratives are powerful social tools that transmit identities and social positions to others. They are social products that represent cultural norms and beliefs and transmit normativity, hegemony, power, oppression, and resistance. Reading the written responses as well as listening to the women's stories became important since we as researchers had to be mindful of why events that make up the narratives were told in the way they were, what was entrusted to us and shared and what was not. In this way, we could analyze the appearance of the story and locate the underlying intersections (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Gubrium and Holstein (1999) refer to analyzing the *how*, *what* and *why* as analytic bracketing. This analysis process allows the researcher to think about the stories as data. For example, in the case of the women's stories we began to ask questions such as: How is resistance a structural property? How does becoming a principal challenge the patriarchal society? How does a family and how do social networks facilitate or inhibit success? How do the principals negotiate the challenges they face in their workplace? (i.e., what forms of agency do they employ?) What are the mitigating intersectional factors? How do the participants' biographies and demographics contextualize the story? How does a woman's class impact her social capital for success?

Ethics

Lincoln and Guba's (1995) measures to ensure trustworthiness were applied throughout the analysis. Member checks ensured reliability and validity of the data collection process. Transferability was addressed through purposive sampling and through the provision of thick, detailed descriptions, which allowed the researchers to have a proper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Consent was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the participating university, where one of the researchers is employed, the Gauteng Department of Education, and the principals of the chosen schools. Participants were ensured of their anonymity

and were made aware that they could withdraw from the research at any time. No personal information was revealed and pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality.

Limitations

Neither researcher is a Black woman (one is male of Indian descent; the other is a White woman residing in Canada). Narrative analysis makes it difficult to draw conclusions across cases and cannot and should not be generalized since each story is unique.

Narratives

Beverley

The apartheid policy divided South Africa into white suburbs and black townships. The affluent white suburbs were located in one region while Black South Africans lived in poverty far from the suburbs in townships. Our two female principals live in a large Black township in South Africa.

Beverley worked at Robert Sobukwe Primary School. Although the infrastructure of the area where the school is located has improved, there are still many untarred roads, and homes without electricity and running water. Beverley is 50 years old and has been a teacher for 14 years and a principal for 15 years. Beverley obtained her three year teaching diploma at the Soweto College of Education, completed a BA degree at Johannesburg University, and subsequently received a Diploma in Computing in Education. After that, she graduated with a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) (Hons.) from Johannesburg University.

When asked to describe her family background, Beverley reports that she was born at KwaMashu Hospital in Soweto, and raised in Meadows in Soweto. This hospital is one of the largest public hospitals catering to the entire Soweto population as well as Black, Indian and Coloured communities outside Johannesburg. It is located in the south of Soweto, very close to the largest taxi rank in the country. The infrastructure of Meadows, also located in Soweto, is similar to the conditions where the school is located. When speaking about her parents she proudly described the following:

My parents were blessed with five beautiful children, two boys and three girls. I am the middle child. This then means my older brother and sister did all the chores. Our parents instilled in us the value of education. My older sister and younger brother passed on so have my parents--May their souls rest in peace. We all attended schools in the township. [My parents] instilled in us the value of education as the only treasure they can give us. We therefore did not lack anything when it came to school needs.

Her “father worked at Vaal Auto Dealers (a Toyota motor dealer) as a driver and mechanic; [her] mother was a nurse but went to industry to be a manager in a factory.” Both parents reached standard six (Grade 8).

We asked each principal why they became an educator and then principal, and to include details of their career pathway leading to the principalship. Beverley explained: “I became a teacher because of my primary teacher who was my role model, also because of the love of children seeing them progressing in life and lifting their families from poverty.” She explained that the

principalship for me was by accident. I applied because I wanted to have a feel of interviews as I had not done any. So I applied but was positioned 2; the number 1 was appointed, [but] when they submitted the results she came second as she did not have the qualifications then which was M+3 (Grade 12 matric) plus three years teacher training certificate at a Teachers College of Education.

Beverley described the demographics of her school in the following way:

The school has 528 learners mostly from [Soweto] and few from other areas [outside of Soweto] [The student population was comprised of] 258 males and 278 females ranging from 5 years to 14 years. The teaching staff was comprised of one male Head of Department (HoD), one Female HoD and, nine post level one teachers and one grade R (Reception Year) Practitioner. We also have non-teaching staff consisting of two male general workers and one female administrative clerk. Of the 528 learners, 50% of their parents are illiterate and 40% semi-literate. Though most are supportive of their learners, we still have problems in getting the others to support their learners. They do not attend meetings or come fetch their learners' end of term reports. Our belief is that a child whose parents have an interest in his/her education flourishes. All the teachers and learners in this school are Black. There are very few White, Indian or Coloured teachers teaching in the Soweto township schools, and they usually hold promotion posts such as being HoDs, Deputy Principals and Principals.

When we asked the women what expectations their parents had for their careers and what expectations they had for themselves, Beverley explained that her

parents were supportive of the choices we made with their blessings. They always encouraged us to be the best we can be as long as we are happy. I wanted the best for myself, to be educated happy and be a blessing to my parents.

Beverley felt fortunate that she was positively influenced by her parents and by her husband, about her career goal as principal. She stated: "My husband was my support base and my parents before they passed on". However, she continued by saying: "limiting my desire were my colleagues who felt I can't be a leader as I was younger than them." She added "negative influences were neighbors who saw teaching as a useless career."

When we asked the women to provide examples of successes, failures and limitations they experienced in their post as principal, Beverley's own professional values began to emerge when it became evident she was placing primacy on building relationships with her staff, developing action plans and following them, gaining support from the parent component of the School Governing Body (SGB), and having prayers in the morning as a staff before assembly. Beverley commented that she was "still struggling to get all parents involved in the school" and one of the key limitations she was working with was an inability "to get new educators as our school is growing."

We wanted to know what preconceived notions the women had before becoming principals. Beverley revealed:

When I saw our former principal not doing a lot of work, sitting in her office all day long or going to town that is what I saw myself not doing...Since I became a principal a lot of change took place [introducing new challenges such as] curriculum changes, learner rights without responsibilities, unions interfering in teacher discipline, and parents' lack of support for their schools.

Now that Beverley has been a principal for a number of years, we asked her what impact her gender and race had on her experience as a principal. She responded by saying: "As a female leader one has to work harder than your male counterpart. If you fail it is frowned upon but [if] the other [i.e., a male principal fails], it is understood." Upon hearing this, we were interested in what competencies she perceived were most critical to her survival and success as a female principal. Beverley admitted that what has helped her in the past was: "Be[ing] head-strong;

stand[ing] your ground as long as it feels right do it; be informed about the latest material; empower yourself; and read.”

We wanted to explore the women’s sense of agency and asked them what they did to build, manage, and maintain their professional networks and to stay relevant. Beverley said: “I attend workshops to empower myself, read materials that are relevant to my work, network...[and] share best practices with other schools.” In order to stay focused in her leadership role, particularly when encountering obstacles, Beverley said she “prays” and “shares with colleagues her focus on work.”

When we asked the women to describe a positive and negative experience in their roles as principal, Beverley shared feeling positive when “a former learner came to school to say thank you for the foundation laid on him.” Beverley felt most satisfied when she was “motivating learners. That it does not matter where you come from, or what your environment is like if you believe you can achieve it.” She relayed feeling frustrated with “Parents who run to the district to report minor issues that we could have solved at school.” She added:

We had visitors from Cincinnati [an area in Soweto] coming to paint, clean and do a vegetable garden. One of them lost money taken from his bag. On investigating, one learner was seen by others taking it. The others even saying that [the worker] gave him (the learner) some. I then went home with him to enquire from the granny if she has not seen him with a lot of money. Instead I was told by her that she is tired of people accusing her grandson. She will come to school to beat all those learners. I refused and told her if she does that she is setting a bad example for parents and I will not allow that. She insisted and I said she better take her child out of school. Two weeks later I received a letter from the labor office to respond to the allegations that I called her a bad mother and I shouted at her.

We also wanted to know what their proudest innovation was that they implemented in their school, to which Beverley said she had: “Done an action plan and [is] following it; building relationships with educators; empowering educators to run with projects; [and] delegating more responsibilities to HOD.” She felt most confident “When I CAME BACK FROM [visiting the International University] implementing what was taught and most was taken with open arms.”

Finally, we concluded the interview by asking Beverley what she predicted for the direction of educational leadership for women in South Africa. Beverley wearily described her role as: “Taxing, tough, tiring because you always have to prove yourself; people taking advantage of you because they think as a mother you will understand. You end up mothering everybody.” As a result of these feelings, Beverley has “taken a resolution that I either look for a better work environment or resign.” She felt unfulfilled in her role at the time of this interview and was considering “taking a different position because nobody listens to our plea. People take decisions on our behalf without coming down to those who do the spade work to ask if that would be possible.” Despite her bitterness, Beverley ended the interview by saying: “If more females can be given leadership positions this country will be a better place; females, even when they are nurturers, are strong and have the ability to multitask.”

Millie

Millie worked at Mandela Secondary School also located in the west of Soweto. This area has the same geographic features as the area where Robert Sobukwe School is located. Millie is 60 years old and has been a principal for 19 years. Millie described enrolling at the University of the North after

completing matric for a degree and postgraduate diploma in Education B.Ed. (Hons) part-time at a distance at a university in South Africa, Diploma in Education (FDE) at the Transvaal College of Education of South Africa (CESA), [and] Advance Certificate in Education (ACE) in Leadership and Management [at a Leadership and Governance Institute].

Millie was born and raised in Petersrus (now called Mokope), a town in the Limpopo Province (previously referred to as Northern Transvaal) of South Africa. This was one of the poorest provinces situated in the north of South Africa and close to Botswana and Zimbabwe in southern Africa. “My family moved to Petersrus when I was in standard 9 (Grade 11) where my father was appointed an Education Planner in then Lebong Education Department.” Millie’s “parents were teachers. My father was one of the few black educationists to start a college of education in the Limpopo Province [then Northern Transvaal]” More specifically, her “father was a teacher, principal, rector of a college, education planner and Chancellor of a University situated in the north of South Africa. My mother was a school teacher.” She continued by saying that her “father had university degrees. He studied at the University of Fort Hare in the 30s. My mother trained as a teacher at a college.”

When we asked Millie why she became an educator and then principal she explained:

From high school I had decided to be an educator. I enjoyed teaching / helping my classmates in subjects they did not understand. Biology (Life Sciences) was my favorite subject hence I specialised in the teaching of Biology. I taught for five years as a teacher, four years as a HoD, six years as deputy principal, two years as a lecturer at a teachers’ training college and nineteen years as a principal. I become a principal to make a meaningful contribution in the management and leadership of secondary schools.

The secondary school at which Millie is principal has a mission statement that reads as follows: “Education of learners in all aspects viz. intellectually, physically, aesthetically and spiritually. We nurture every potential we see in learners.” Millie stated “the gender grid balances in the sense that the ratio of male educators and female educators balances.” In this school all the educators and learners are Blacks.

When we asked the women what expectations their parents had for their careers and what expectations they had for themselves, Millie explained that she “was expected to study medicine like my eldest sister. I knew that teaching was a calling for me. I started with pre-medicine courses, which I did not enjoy for one year.” Thereafter, Millie decided for herself to “remain in education and contribute meaningfully to learners’ futures.” Her expectation for herself was as follows: “I expected to be in the administration of education at the District or Head office.”

When we asked the women to provide examples of successes, failures, and limitations they experienced in their post as principal in their career, Millie proudly explained that she was the founder of the school, and that the school recently “obtained 85% on its maiden Matric (Grade 12) Examinations (also referred to as Senior Certificate Examinations) with educators who were inexperienced in teaching grade 12.” The Matric is a national examination set by the National department of Education and is written by all learners in public schools in the country. She described feeling like a failure because she had “remained with an educator who was obstinate for fourteen years even after presenting her case for disciplinary action.” Limitations she cited were “not having resources” and being blocked by others as an administrator.

We wanted to know what preconceived notions the women had before becoming principals. Millie revealed: “I expected work to be done with precision. I was intolerant of mediocre work. I did not look at extenuating circumstances which make people not perform.”

Since being a principal, Millie experienced some reconstructions of her leadership belief system, including

accommodating [her teachers] – I support team members who need it. I help design development programs for those who are in need. I lead teams whose members have a contribution to make. I give feedback and expect feedback on a regular basis.

Now that Millie is close to retirement, we asked her what impact her gender and race had on her experience as a principal. She responded by saying:

At my first principal post, I had to endure gender discrimination. The school was previously managed by a male Afrikaner principal. Although I was a deputy who ran the school efficiently in the absence of the principal who was at a rehabilitation center, it was difficult for the staff to accept me as the newly appointed principal despite my potential. The violence that came from the black staff was mainly gender related. They referred to my management as ‘petticoat government’ [i.e., appropriation of male power]. In one incident a school boy was paid money to hurl a hand grenade [at me].

We wanted to explore the women’s sense of agency and asked them what they did to build, manage, and maintain their professional networks and in order to remain relevant. Millie stated that she was “a member of SAPA – South African Principals’ Association. We are a political organization and empower members in their areas of duty. Unions use intimidation tactics, rendering most principals ineffective. The professional network serves as an important line of support.” In order to remain focused on the job despite these damaging distractions, Millie “keep[s] abreast of all the developments by attending workshops conferences and upgrade[s her] knowledge around issues of leadership and management.”

In addition, Millie works with a:

...strong sense of justice. I believe in my abilities. I rose through the ranks of teacher, HoD, deputy principal and Principal. I moved through the positions deservedly. These days people are promoted because of certain connections. I was post level (PL1) educator for five years during the apartheid era. There were no favors.

Her goal was to “incorporate strengths of all members of the team and help change weaknesses into strength.”

When we asked Millie to describe positive and negative influences in response to her desire to be a principal, Millie said her

most positive influences were my parents, aunts and uncles as well as my primary school principal and high school principal. My education professors at the University of the North were also influential... My principal at school where I was promoted HoD [was also supportive]. My inspector also recognised my potential as a leader. From high school and primary school I was a prefect. I believed in good values and ethics.

She stated quite emphatically that she “did not associate with negative people.” Millie also shared her

positive emotions when as a principal I won cases of grievances by unions during interviews. I stood my ground not being dictated to who must be appointed in posts of deputy, HoDs and educators. I have always presented my cases successfully because they are based on principles of justice and fairness.

Conversely, she felt negative emotions when:

The strong politically motivated teacher union in the country, the South African democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), attacked the school on the eve of the national teachers strike in 2010 without any provocation. I was victimized as a female principal as well as not belonging to SADTU. While all my staff members who were in the school fled and scaled high fences, I remained in the school yard to face the rampaging mob carrying weapons. I was fighting for my principles though my life was in danger.

Finally, we concluded the interview by asking Millie what she predicted about the direction of educational leadership for women in South Africa. Millie stated: "It is tough hence it needs females who are strong willed, principals who cannot be intimidated. Once a female principal is respected, respect will be bestowed on her. Respect is earned." She continued by saying:

As a female principal one should be assertive. The perception that most female principals were done a favor to be in their positions cannot be entertained. A female principal should transcend the stereotypes of sexism. I don't see myself as a female principal but a leader and manager.

When asked if she planned on remaining in the principal role at her school she replied: "My first love is teaching. Teaching is a calling and I will serve in any sector of education if there is a need."

Discussion

This paper focused on the impact of intersecting identities of race, class and gender with further intersecting components that emerged in relation to the women's biographies and work lives. As other scholars (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989), we believe that race, class, and gender intersect within a context. In other words, we cannot, for example, completely understand the problems of racism or sexism if we consider them as separate categories since we must be able to understand race in the context of gender as well as in the personal and professional structures in which the women find themselves. By locating intersection as the center of analysis, this positioning allowed us to view the multidimensional experiences and other emerging intersecting concepts unique to each woman and their impact on their resulting worldview. This unique position informed their self-identity and their perception of opportunity as well as how they chose to engage in individual agency. Furthermore, the theory acknowledges the multiplicity of social locations, (in our case—race, class, and gender within the context of oppression and domination), and how power connects these multiple social dimensions. Intersectionality examines the ways in which different types of marginalization influence each other, and how interventions (e.g., in this case, agency or resistance) take these intersecting marginalizations into account.

Thematic Analysis

In our analysis of the two women's narratives, we were able to identify common and individual themes to which we will speak. We would like to note the commonalities between the women despite the different outcomes of their experiences. Each woman's story presents commonalities in location, post, and aspects of their education; their narratives share common information about their family values, educational background, and events related to positive influences, leadership style, agency, and experiences of discrimination. The details and results of the women's stories impacted the women differently, highlighting their individuality. Alongside the formative intersectional constructs of gender, class, and race, other important emergent intersectional themes included: social capital, family, policy, discrimination, agency, violence, and motherhood,

all of which will be discussed within a nexus of oppression and domination in the remaining section.

Themes: Class, Social Capital, Family

What was immediately striking about the two women was that they came from different class backgrounds impacting their level of capital, social networks, self-esteem, ambition, and values. As a dimension of socioeconomic status, capital accounts for the way intersections of race, class, and gender benefit networking opportunities, advancement in education, and cultural knowledge. Beverley grew up in a working-class or low middle-class home while Millie was raised in a higher middle-class home. Beverley's father was a taxi driver and mechanic and her mother, a manager in a factory. While only achieving Grade 8 schooling, Beverley's parents raised five children and sent them to school instilling in their children a value for education. On the other hand, Millie's household finances seemed better, particularly after her family moved to another township when she was in grade 11. Here her father founded a college and eventually became chancellor of a university. Her father had numerous university degrees; her mother, who also attended college, was a school teacher. Millie was expected by her parents to become a doctor like her sister. She had much confidence and high expectations of herself in her desire to become a top administrator of a school district. It is not surprising that she founded a school and became a principal as a planned career choice.

What is common between Millie and Beverley is that family circumstances played a significant role in each woman's choice to become a principal, and was an important foundation for success and/or failure in a position that, by its very nature, challenged a prevailing patriarchal society. The importance of the family circle has a long history in Africa (Collins, 1989; 2000). Both empowering and limiting, this institution shapes identities, introduces youth into society, and establishes gender roles and responsibilities (hooks, 1989). Family is the first intimate relationship a child has and is central to an individual's social well being. In this environment, individuals are exposed to power structures constructed by members of the family and society; it is here that children learn what subordinate and dominant roles look like. It is here as well that family capital and societal influences in turn can influence a child's social position as well as access to opportunities. As a socializing agent, family structures and relationships shape formats for agency (Collins, 1989; 2000).

The women's social networks of positive influences differed in that Beverley's network was quite small as she cited only her parents and husband who encouraged her to pursue her education. Millie also listed her family, but went on to include aunts, uncles, two principals (primary and high school), a school inspector, and numerous professors as important positive influences in her pursuit of the principalship. Millie's wider social network is significant since social capital refers to the benefits or limitations the women gained (or not) in the form of social networks, self-esteem, ambition, success, career advancement, agency, and the ability to negotiate challenges individually or with the help of others or despite others (Bourdieu, 1977). There are important connections among self-esteem, measures of success, and social capital related to family, relationships, and friendships (Keefe & Berndt, 1996). Therefore, Millie's level of social capital manifested quite differently from Beverley's as evidenced by her high level of self-esteem; her wide social network; her drive to attain the principalship; strong expectations by her parents to be a doctor; her refusal to be intimidated by acts of discrimination, threats, and violence; her ambition and successful founding of her own school; and her fortitude to remain a principal at the age of sixty. In contrast, Beverley displayed low confidence and low self-esteem

as she believed that she became a principal by accident; her social network was small; she felt trapped in a mothering role at her workplace; and she prayed individually and collectively with her staff daily in order to cope with the challenges of the job. Ultimately, she felt weary and worn down by her post as a principal and decided to resign.

Both women were extremely qualified as educators. Nevertheless, while Beverley described becoming a principal “by accident,” she underestimated her own qualifications and ambition despite being the best candidate in the hiring pool. She felt discriminated by colleagues who believed she was too young to be a leader and by neighbors who believed teaching was a waste of time. Cubillo and Brown (2003) found that South African women struggle with personal internal issues such as professional experiences, conflict, emotions, aspirations, ambitions, and confidence. With that said, Millie’s purposeful career planning was significant and rare, particularly in secondary schools. This ambition demonstrated her determination to shift and challenge an oppressive past of multi-layered discrimination. Millie was proud of her accomplishments as a principal and felt successful. Gupton and Slick (1996) urge women not to reinforce the glass ceiling by not believing in themselves, and their potential to do well in leadership positions. Millie strongly believed in not becoming a victim of her circumstances and that with hard work and strong values, women can and should earn respect. Beverley, on the other hand, had succumbed to negative experiences in her role as principal and planned to resign. She felt unfulfilled and alone in her role as a leader.

Themes: Policy, Violence, Discrimination, and Motherhood

The women’s narratives become social history retold through gendered intersections of gender and race, revealing the constant reality that expects black men to be principals. Gender becomes a narrative of domination that shapes the lives of our two women. Therefore, the role of principal and the school as institution are rooted in hegemony and become less able to protect the experiences of women from gender and racial marginalization, threats and violence. In this way, intersectionality is a powerful tool of analysis within a context of dominant and oppressive influence. Earlier in this paper we noted the disappointing failure of government policies to ameliorate Black women leaders’ struggles in their workplace but more importantly, to protect them from threats and violence. Intersectional policy analysis is becoming more and more urgent in the 21st global society. We must therefore remain mindful of the unintended consequences of affirmative action and its limitations. For example, we see how post-apartheid policies, practices, and social-culture fail to protect our Black female principals from victimization. For example, both Beverley and Millie described enduring gender discrimination as the principal of their schools. Millie described experiencing discrimination after replacing her male principal and being accused by the Black staff of instilling “petticoat government” in the school with an implied threat of appropriating male power. One of the incidents of violence of which Millie was victim occurred when “a school boy was paid money to hurl a hand grenade [at her].” Sadly, this was not the only incident Millie shared with us. She also recounted an attack on the school by the local teachers’ union on the eve of the National teachers’ strike. She was threatened by weapons as her staff fled the school. In the face of death, Millie stood her ground and “resisted” the mob’s threats.

Intersectionality theory allows us to see the reality of current forces of oppression and domination as found within politics, violence, and identity politics. It provides the explanatory framework (Collins, 2000) that reveals the historical intersections that make up the South African condition for women. Collins (2000) states that Black women have always resisted their

dominated constructions. Historically, and still today, Black women overtly resist, negotiate, and push against damaging patriarchal policies. Millie's agency in this situation not only had her stand her ground in the face of death, but also ensured that her staff did not suffer further by losing their salary for the day as they fled for their lives. Collins (2000) claims that staying alive is itself an act of resistance, or, in this case, agency. Clark (2012) stresses that "government [and policy are] not solely responsible and cannot possibly address the issues alone" (p. 5). There must be cultural and leadership approaches to address policy gaps and how these can be ameliorated in practice. "By viewing the stories of individual women as extensions of larger sociocultural processes embedded within a historical context, the true impact of current policies and policy processes can be revealed" (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2009, p. 3).

Beverley was fortunate in that she did not experience such overt violence in her school, although she related a story of thievery that took place in the school and expressed her frustration with the parent (granny) who challenged her authority in the situation. The student (whom Beverley expelled), was accused of stealing money from a visitor from a nearby township. Consequently, Beverley was threatened by the granny who wanted to "beat" the tattlers, and was also reprimanded by the union. While these threats were minimal compared to Millie's experiences, Beverley faced opposition from a parent (granny) who seemed to "perform" the stereotypical Black mother victim expecting Beverley, as a "mother," to overlook her grandson's poor behavior. Therefore, Beverley herself was being stereotyped as a "mother" in her own role as a principal. Beverley wearily revealed that motherhood stereotypes were often liabilities when "people take advantage of you because they think you are a mother you will understand. You end up mothering everybody." Motherhood is in fact a deeply entrenched identity construction shaping Black women's social identity and their political involvement (Mama, 1995). These constructions limit women's personal-political agency: "While limited constructions of 'motherhood' have been appropriated within various patriarchal discourses, these discourses should not themselves be seen as a definitive of women's actual identities and experiences" (Lewis, 1992, p. 13). In comparison to granny's worldview that reflected a different apartheid generation, Beverley's agentic identity stressed the importance of morals and values that demanded respect from granny and the student indicating that times have changed.

Implications

We learned that the women in this study come from different socio-economic backgrounds, which influenced their social capital and ultimately, their experiences as principals. Millie's level of social capital was evidenced by her high level of self-esteem; wide social network; drive to attain the principalship; strong expectations by her parents to be a doctor; refusal to be intimidated by acts of discrimination, threats and violence; ambition and successful founding of her own school; and fortitude to remain a principal at the age of sixty. Familial relationships and interactions shaped her social position as well as provided access to opportunities; she learned what it meant to be in a dominant role as well as how to be agentic.

In contrast, Beverley displayed a lack of confidence; low-self esteem; held a belief that she only became a principal by accident; had a small social network; felt trapped in a mothering role; prayed for strength to cope with the challenges of the job; felt weary and worn down by her post as principal; and decided to resign. This intersection of class and social capital influenced the women's benefits or limitations gained (or not) in their work through the impact of their social networks, self-esteem, ambition, success, career advancement, agency, and the ability to negotiate challenges individually or with the help of others or despite others.

In our findings we learned that the role of the principalship and the school as an institution are constructs rooted in hegemony, unable to protect the experiences of women from discrimination, threats, and violence. In this way, intersectionality is a powerful tool of analysis because it can account for various interactions of race and gender within a context of dominant and oppressive influence. The larger structures of government and policy also failed to protect the women in their work environments. Millie's more explicit experiences with violence were diffused by her agency of resistance during a raid by the teachers' union at her school. Her appointment as principal to replace a black male principal was met with a hand grenade thrown at her. Millie, however, did not waver in her determination and prided herself in having 85% of her school matriculate that year. One of Beverley's challenges was to expel a student over the protest of his granny. She demonstrated agency by not overlooking the incident nor sympathizing with another "mother's" anger despite protests and being reprimanded by the union. In fact, Beverley expressed her frustration when parents went over her head to complain about her. She particularly disliked being labeled a "mother" and nurturer with the expectation that she should overlook poor student behavior. In closing, intersectionality theory allowed us to see the reality of current forces of oppression and domination as they played out in the experiences of our two black principals.

Conclusion

These two powerful stories add to the small body of comparative literature in leadership and management that is sorely missing. Dimmock & Walker (2000) stress the importance of addressing the gap in the foundation for comparative and international leadership and management in the literature. In doing so, scholars, practitioners, and policy makers are able to keep abreast of globalization of leadership, policy, and practice. The unique stories in this paper do indeed juxtapose the silence in mainstream media. The women's stories in this paper provide examples of the challenges Black female principals encountered in South Africa. Numerous intersectional themes assisted us in analyzing their stories that highlight the patriarchal oppression and domination as the context within which they work. The women and their actions are illustrated in the face of violence and threats with examples of agency and resistance. Ultimately, in contributing to a comparative agenda of international leadership and education, the women's experiences inform policy development and processes that resist oppressive images of South African women. Solutions rooted in the community and tradition while recognizing the complexity and diversity of these communities should be co-constructed with these leaders. Through examples and stories like those in this paper, scholars can move forward from, and beyond, the legacy of policies that create harm towards those that have the potential for transformation and equity.

References

- Aguilar, D.D. (2012). Tracing the roots of intersectionality. *Monthly Review Press*, 12 (4). Retrieved April 27, 2013, <file:///Users/micheleschmidt/Desktop/agency/Delia%20D.%20Aguilar,%20%22Tracing%20the%20Roots%20of%20Intersectionality%22.html>
- Blackmore, J., Thomson, P., & Barty, K. (2006). Principal selection: Homosociability, the search for security and the production of normalized principal identities. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 34 (3), 297-315.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline Of A Theory Of Practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, M.A. (2011). Coming out narratives: Realities of intersectionality. Unpublished Ph.D dissertation.
- Clark, J. (2012). Mother power in the African context: Resisting agendas through mobilizing m/other positions.

- Radical Psychology*, 9 (2). Retrieved April 27, 2013, <http://www.radicalpsychology.org/vol9-2/clark.html>
- Coffey, A. & Atkinson, P. (1996). *Making sense of qualitative data: Complementary research strategies*. Thousand Oaks California: Sage.
- Collins, P.H. (1998). *Fighting words: Black women and the search for justice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Collins, P.H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. New York: Routledge.
- Cotter, A.M. (2004). *Gender injustice: An international comparative analysis of equality in employment*. Burlington, VA: Ashgate.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics. *Chicago Law Forum*, 139-167.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43, 1241-1299.
- Cubillo, L. & Brown, M. (2003). Women into educational leadership and management: International differences? *Journal of Educational Administration* 41, 278-91.
- Department of Education. (2006). *Statistical overview survey. Ordinary and special education in Gauteng*. Johannesburg: Gauteng Department of Education.
- Dimmock, C. & Walker, A. (2000). Developing comparative and international educational leadership and management: A cross-cultural model. *School Leadership & Management*, 20(2), 143-160.
- Ewick, P. & Silbey, S. (2003). Narrating social structure: Stories of resistance to legal authority. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 108, 1328-72
- Gubrium, J.F. & Holstein, J.A. (1999). At the border of narrative and ethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 28, 561-72.
- Gupton, S.L. & Slick, G.A. (1996). *Highly successful women administrators: The inside stories of how they got there*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Hankivsky, O. & Cormier, R. (2009). *Intersectionality: Moving women's health research and policy forward*. Vancouver: Women's Health Research Network.
- hooks, B. (1989). *Telling back: Thinking feminist, thinking back*. Boston: South End Press.
- Kiguwa, P. (2006). Narratives of gender and identity constructus. In T.Shefer, F.Boonzaier, & P. Kiguwa (Eds.), *The Gender of Psychology*. Cape Town: UCT Press.
- Lewis, D. (1992). *Theorising about gender in South Africa*. Paper presented at the Association of Political Science/ Southern African Political Science Series Conference on South Africa: Which Way Forward? Cape Town. 18-22 August
- Lincoln, Y.S. & E.G. Guba. (1995). *Naturalistic inquiry*. London: Sage.
- Mahlase, S. (1997). *The careers of women teachers under Apartheid*. Harare: SAPES Books.
- Maines, D.R. (1993). Narrative's moment and sociology's phenomena: Toward a narrative Sociology. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 34 (1) 17-38.
- Mama, A. (1995). *Beyond the Masks: Race, gender and subjectivity*. London:Routledge.
- Mestry, R. & Schmidt, M. (2012). A feminist postcolonial examination of female principals' experiences in South African secondary schools. *Gender and Education*, 24 (5), 535-551.
- Moorosi, P. (2008) Creating linkages between private and public: Challenges facing women principals in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education* 27(3), 507-521.
- Moorosi, P. (2010). South African female principals' career paths: Understanding the gender gap in secondary school management. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 38, 547.
- Motapanyane, J.M. (2009). *The politics of feminism in South Africa: Gender consciousness and political agency in the 20th century*. Unpublished dissertation, York University.
- Naidoo, J. (2004) *Educational decentralization and school governance: from policy to practice*. Unpublished dissertation, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Michèle Schmidt is an Associate Professor at Simon Fraser University, British Columbia. Her research areas are in educational leadership, intersectionality theory, emotions of teaching and leading, and gender studies.

Raj Mestry is Professor in the Department of Education Leadership and Management at the University of Johannesburg. He serves on the executive of the Education Association of South Africa and his research focus is on

social justice and equity.