GENDER TRANSFORMATION EXPERIENCES
AMONG WOMEN IN THE WESTERN CAPE TVET SECTOR:
A NARRATIVE RESPONSE

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THE STORYLINE

- Background and key question
- A conceptual roadmap
- Methodology
- Plot structure
- Constructed narrative
- The storied stories
- The end(ing)
- Limitations and delimitations
- Significance
BACKGROUND AND KEY QUESTION (Dlamini 2013; DHET 2017)

“I’m not the woman president of Harvard, I’m the president of Harvard.”
(Drew Gilpin Faust, President, Harvard University, 2016)

- The cause of women in leadership – global significance
- Introduction of gender quotas appear to be inadequate
- Statistics / census data still indicate underrepresentation
- Scholarly attention / women leaders’ life stories are limited
- 15 out of a possible 50 TVET college CEOs are women
- DHET - gender discrimination should be eliminated
- Sample – ten women (black, coloured, Indian and white)
  - 3 principals, 5 vice-principals, 1 campus manager, 1 academic head
- What prevents women in TVET from reaching top positions?
METHODOLOGY (Creswell 2007; Saldana 2013)

- Interpretive narrative approach
- Unstructured interviews
- Different perspectives led to a narrative construction
- Theming data according to the roadmap
- Plot structure (characters, setting, problem, actions, and resolutions)
- The two sets of data were merged yielding the analytical framework in the next slide
PLOT STRUCTURE (Saldana 2013; Maritz 2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLOT STRUCTURE</th>
<th>Characters</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Resolution</th>
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ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK: Gendered experiences of women in leadership
(RQ 1: Respondents’ experiences as leaders)

- Gender transformation formally started with the passing of the FET Colleges Amendment Act No 3 of 2012
- Formalised by the White Paper in 2013
  - Each college had to design a gender equity plan
  - Each college had to renew the plan annually and
  - submit the plan to their respective college councils for approval
- This background provided the context for the constructed narrative / story
STORY – CHARACTERS A (Hall 1997; Auster 2001)

- Demographic influences moulded personalities

  - “My father groomed me to take a lead in the house; to always make sure that I take decisions, ‘cause I was the boy in the house, but I was in the body of a girl [R1].”

  - “I realised from a young age that I had something that the other children didn’t have. And that gave me the extra confidence [R4].”

  - “I married and divorced twice. Raised three children on my own. I had to stick it out for myself [R5].”
Intricate balance in professional careers and family roles

“My successes came at the expense of my family. It’s hard work and sacrifices. I mean, how can you leave two toddlers with a dad and a nanny for so many months [R2].”

Work/family conflict adversely affected most of the respondents’ health – resulted in burn-out or hospitalisation

“Yes. Hundred times! Aag, as jy ‘n week in die hospitaal is op ‘n drip [Oh, if you are in hospital on a drip for a week] […], my stress attacks me physically [R2].”

“When you’re supposed to go off on sick leave, you’re still on it, until you reach a point by the end of the year where you’re just so tired, you’re just not functioning [R10].”
(RQ 2: How gender transformation affected respondents (if at all))

- Apartheid’s years affected women’s salaries; they had to resign when they fell pregnant; married women were not allowed permanent posts
  - “Promotion was only available when somebody dies [R4].”
  - “I had to wait for fifty years [R9].”
  - “I had to hide my engagement ring in the cubby-hole [R3].”
- All respondents alluded to men-to-women, and women-to-women discrimination, called the PHD (pull-him/her down) syndrome
  - “male chauvinist” [R5]; “treat women like dirt” [R9]; “you live invisible” [R8].
  - “I decided to quit because of this rude, aggressive woman that needed to assert herself [R9].” “I’m tired of being hurt [R1].”
- R3, R7 and R10 were quite guarded during interviews; did not describe gender-related incidents – ‘halo effect’; ‘likeable answers’
STORY – ACTION D (Acker 2012)

- Career paths with three different phases – gendered experiences and sexism emerged during all three phases
  - Learning leadership / 1st phase:
    - “I was the only woman lecturer on an engineering campus. Rude remarks surfaced almost every day [R5].”
    - “They only listened when I started swearing at them [R9].”
  - Acquiring leadership / 2nd phase:
    - “During my interview, the board asked me if I could handle the male staff [R7]!”
    - “If I could only crack it [the glass ceiling], so that the next person can go through, it will be fine [R6].”
  - Performing leadership / 3rd phase:
    - “Really, the men visibly switch off [R8].”
    - “When the principals meet with the regional office and a senior woman official at DHET makes a proposal, they grind her. “I find that men do not listen very well [R6].”
(RQ 3a: Strategies adopted to deal with gender-related issues)

- Work pressures – workload not restructured according to roles
- No evidence of support structures was provided e.g.
  - Family-friendly policies, flexi-time, childcare facilities on site, safety measures reducing potential sources of stress like hijacking after late meetings
- No protective strategies in place to address subtle discrimination
  - Respondents battled to provide strategies:
    - “I made peace [R1]”; “my ‘mother-hen’ tactic failed; I decided to shut up and apply the silent strategy [R4]; I surrendered to protect myself [R9].”
- Mentoring as development strategy – informally; ad hoc basis only
- No training programmes / study material in place addressing men-to-women and women-to-women discrimination
- Limited peer and supervisor support came to the fore
- No evidence of networking with business leaders emerged
(RQ 3b: Initiatives adopted to deal with gender-related issues)

• Leadership approaches and management styles that popped up
  • Authoritarian management style
  • Contingent management style
  • Autocratic leadership style
  • Mothering leadership style
  • Transactional leadership style
    • “da’ gaat hulle weer lank aan” [that got them going again for a long time]
  • Transformational leadership style
Gender transformation in the Western Cape TVET sector: A narrative response

- Gender transformation outcomes i.t.o. career progression
  - older respondents
    - progressive gender transformation late in their careers
  - younger respondents (all women of colour)
    - progressed quickly
- Gender transformation outcomes i.t.o. gender discrimination
  - subtle men- and women-to-women discrimination unresolved
  - gender stereotyping and other gender-related challenges still prevail
    - “I can’t do it anymore [R5]!”
Gender transformation in the Western Cape TVET sector: A narrative response

- Legislation failed to equip respondents with strategies
  - respondents provided insufficient evidence of coping mechanisms
- “hard work” to “prove” themselves was given as a strategy against gender discrimination – this resulted in health problems
- Competent, potential women leaders quit, thus aggravating the dearth of women among the pool of aspiring college principals
- “Narrative smoothing” could have occurred – untold stories
- This story does not have a “Hollywood plot” where all is well in the end
THE END(ING)

• This story was an exploration of gender transformation experiences of ten TVET women leaders in the Western Cape, interpreted via a conceptual roadmap;
• re-storied within the bounds of a specific plot structure
  • (characters, setting, problem, actions, and resolutions) and
• illustrated in an aligned analytical framework.
• The results show that:
  • underrepresentation still exists
  • gender transformation endeavours do not seem to permeate the education sector adequately
  • some progress has been made regarding gender equity
  • gender stereotyping and discrimination still prevail
LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

• This paper is merely a point of departure in addressing all-inclusive gender transformation. However:
  • limited sample size was available, thus
  • no differentiation was made between senior/top women leaders, i.e. vice-/principals, campus/academic/portfolio/senior managers
• Boundaries that were set for the study included
  • no interpretation – other than gender – in terms of diversity or intersectionality
  • a sample restricted to TVET women leaders in the Western Cape
  • no identification of mechanisms that create gender discrimination / offer alternatives to inform, sensitise, and transform society
  • no allusion to the role of male leaders and partners who have empowered women
SIGNIFICANCE

• This paper expands the limited literature on women leaders’ life stories

• For policy developers
  • strategies and initiatives might promote interest in formulating interventions to inform, sensitise, empower and/or transform men and women leaders at key stages of their career pathways

• For advisory boards
  • guidelines might assist in capacitating current and potential leaders through an all-inclusive gender transformation strategy

• The broader significance of this paper
  • still a great deal to be done - many untold stories and much scope for further research
  • point of departure in addressing all-inclusive gender transformation to the advantage of women and men in TVET college leadership
Questions?

THANK YOU


DHET see Department of Higher Education and Training.


RSA see Republic of South Africa.


