



# **Understanding the policy implementation gap: Women leaders in higher education in South Africa**

## **CONTEXTUAL PAPER**

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**Abstract:**

Post-1994 in South Africa, the private and public sector embarked on a long-term project of transformation to redress the inequalities and injustices of the past, including the damage caused by the patriarchal and gendered foundations of the apartheid era. A crucial sector in this transformation is that of higher education, as a key player in leading societal change and thought. While extensive policies have been adopted to transform higher education, including policies aimed at increasing women's access to higher education and leadership positions within higher education, which have resulted in an incremental increase of female representation in the sector, the expected shift in gendered structures and practices has not occurred, and obstacles to access remain. This paper will query this 'implementation gap' by exploring the intersection between the formal and informal, which mirrors the space between position-based and process-based leadership. While formal policies allow access to women on paper, and while women are placed in formal positions of power, informal processes of gender stereotyping, gendered environments, and gendered perceptions of leadership often curtail women leaders' ability to influence and affect change. This gap may provide insights into how to move beyond formal policies that only make incremental steps forward until the 'glass ceiling' is reached, to robust change.

## **Introduction**

The gendered nature of academia globally and in South Africa is a well-studied phenomenon. The actual nature of this phenomenon, while broadly researched and understood, is rarely assessed alongside policy interventions meant to address the dearth of women leaders in academia. This paper will explore this intersection in order to pose questions that may lead to more robust and targeted policies in the future. It argues that the gap between policy aims and the attainment of these goals may reside in a policy ‘blind-spot’ to the informal gendered processes that interact with the formal processes policy tends to target. One of the contributing factors to this ‘blind-spot’ is a positional understanding of leadership that is prevalent in policies and academic institutions. Position-based leadership assumes that leaders exercise leadership by virtue of holding a position of power (Grint 2010). Process-based leadership, on the other hand, focuses on how leaders are able to influence followers, solve problems and affect change (Grint 2010). This article takes a process-based understanding of leadership and is therefore interested not only in understanding how many women enter positions of leadership, but whether they are able to exercise leadership in those positions. This is something that is affected by both the formal and informal processes in institutions and societies. The nexus between the formal and informal is therefore explored through a quantitative analysis of the current status of women in higher education, followed by a qualitative analysis of studies conducted in the South African higher education setting.

## **The South African socio-political context: Gender and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)**

The South African government has several policies and initiatives that seek to address gender inequalities and issues, including its constitution, the *Commission for Gender Equality Act (1996)*, the *Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (2000)*, the *Employment Equity Act (1998)*, the *National Policy Framework for Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality (2001)*, and the *National Strategic Plan on Gender-based violence and Femicide, 2020-2030*, among others. Yet, despite these policies, the gender landscape in South Africa remains filled with paradoxes.

In the 2023 Global Gender Gap index, South Africa ranked 20<sup>th</sup> in the world, and met or scored above the global average in the economy, education, health and politics sectors (World Economic Forum 2023). On the surface, South Africa appears to be doing relatively well compared to other states. However, a detailed look at the scores within these sectors reveal

contradictions. For example, South Africa ranks first in female enrolment in primary education, secondary education and tertiary education, with a female to male ratio of 1.00. It also ranks high with women in parliament and in ministerial positions (9<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> respectively). And while the ratio of female to male professional and technical workers is 1.00, ranking South Africa 1<sup>st</sup> in the world, the ratio for wage inequality is 0.549, ranking South Africa 111<sup>th</sup> in the world. The ratio of female to male legislators, senior officials and managers is similarly poor at 0.462, ranking South Africa 88<sup>th</sup> in the world (World Economic Forum 2023). These statistics seem to indicate that women are able to access education, the work force and leadership positions in society, but barriers remain once they access these spaces.

Beyond access to traditionally male spaces, broader gendered societal challenges remain. In 2023 the Afrobarometer (2023) reported that gender-based violence (GBV) was viewed as the most important women's-rights issue in South Africa (Mpako & Ndoma 2023). The statistics are staggering, with over 10 000 rapes reported, and 881 women murdered, in a span of 3 months (July – September) in 2023 (Mpako & Ndoma 2023). While the reasons for GBV in South Africa are contested, Gouws (2022) points to hypermasculinity and inequality as key drivers of GBV. At the same time, 'the majority of households in South Africa are run by single mothers,' and '65.9% of women are the main contributors to [household income]' (Coetzee & Moosa 2020: 3). It is therefore evident that women in South Africa play a crucial role in South African society and its economy, and while they are able to access certain spaces, structural barriers and in fact, structural violence<sup>1</sup>, remains an ongoing challenge.

Where does higher education fit into this challenge? Many of these contradictions are reflected within higher education in South Africa, and must be studied in its own right. In addition, higher education institutions (HEI's), as thought-leaders, spaces of social contestation and change, and a transitory and learning space for a large portion of the population, have a duty to lead the way in confronting gender-based challenges in South Africa. However, a review of the literature on gender in South African HEI's, seems to indicate that these institutions are reproducing these inequalities, rather than changing them.

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<sup>1</sup> Structural violence refers to a situation where 'violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances' (Galtung 1969: 171).

When discussing gender within the South African context, it is also imperative to understand how gender intersects with other identities, particularly race and language considering South Africa's apartheid history. Many of the above statistics and challenges are complicated when viewed from a racial perspective. The history of exclusion of black women, and privilege of white women, adds layers of complexity to these experiences that must also be addressed within the higher education sector.

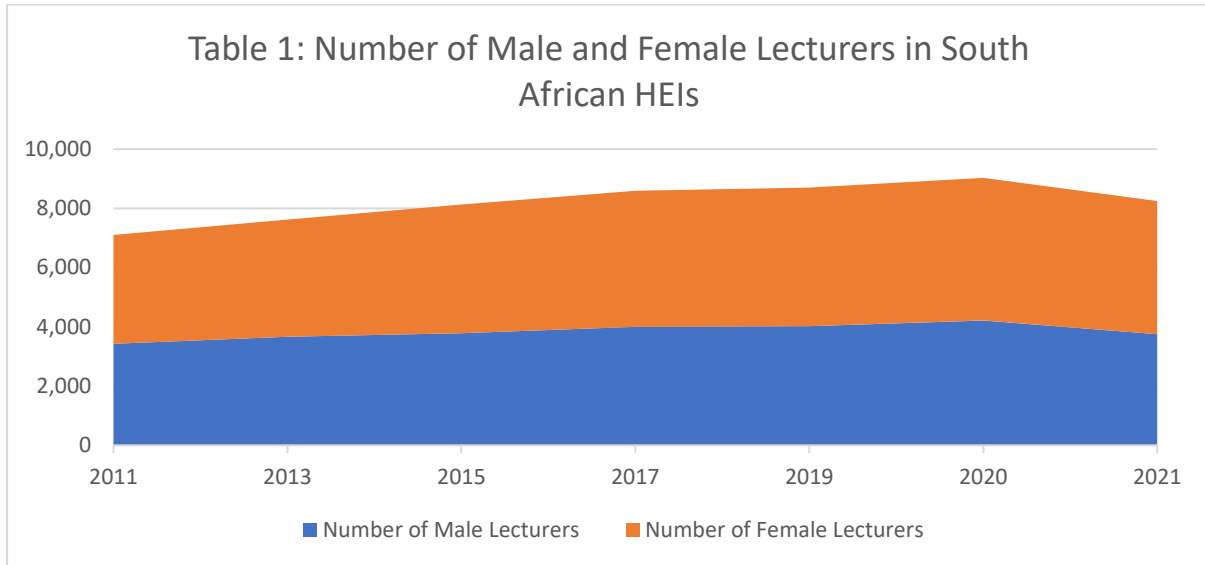
### **Women in higher education in South Africa: Is this as far as policy goes?**

Since the transition from apartheid to democratic rule, the South African government has embarked on a transformation programme and agenda in higher education. Included in this transformation process was the goal of addressing the gender gap in higher education institutions. Since then a wide range of funding and policy instruments have been developed to promote increased participation of women in academia (Mouton et al. 2022: 1; Ramohai & Marumo 2016). The *Education White Paper* (1997), *White Paper on Science and Technology* (1996), *National Plan for Higher Education* (2001), and the *White Paper on Science, Technology and Innovation* (2001), have been noted to promote and prioritise gender issues in education and HEIs (Mazibuko 2006: 108; Mouton et al. 2022: 1). Some of the mechanisms that these policies encouraged, and tasked universities with developing, were employment and enrolment equity plans and targets and funding of under-represented groups (DHET 2001). The National Research Foundation (NRF) has also prioritised the funding of women and black South Africans for post-graduate study to address past inequalities (NRF 2022).

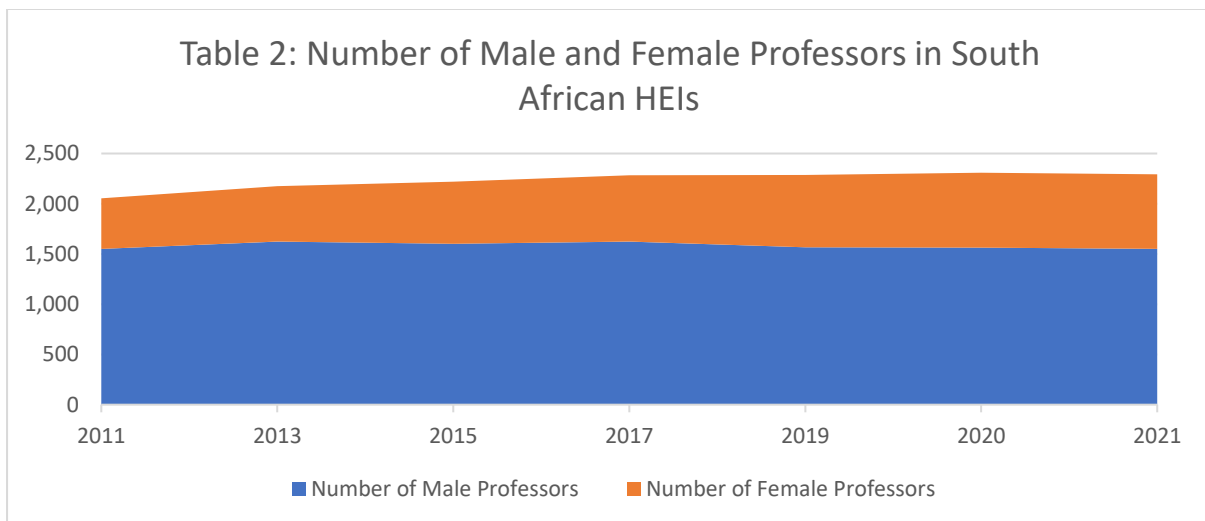
Since the introduction of these policies and initiatives, there is a general consensus amongst the literature that while there have been steady and incremental changes in increasing women's access to higher education and leadership positions, this process has been slow and impeded by the 'glass ceiling' phenomenon and the resilience of patriarchal and gendered environments (Ramohai & Marumo 2016: 138; Toni & Moodly 2019). Before delving into these issues in the next section, a birds-eye view of the current status of women in higher education is necessary.

In the last ten years, there has been an incremental increase in female lecturers and professors in South African HEIs, but the 'glass ceiling' is encountered when one compares the representativity of women in these two positions. In 2011, 51.71% of lecturers were female, which increased to 54.46% in 2021. The percentage of female professors in 2011 was 24.40%, increased to 32.39% in 2021 (see Tables 1 and 2). The proportion of females in professorial

positions is therefore far less than that of females in lectureship positions. However, there is some encouragement in the 7.99% more female professors in 2021 than 2011. Why do women struggle to move from junior positions such as lectureships to senior positions such as professorships, which is a precursor to taking up leadership positions in academia? What challenges are encountered once women do reach senior levels and are HEIs able to retain women in these positions?



Source: HEMIS data

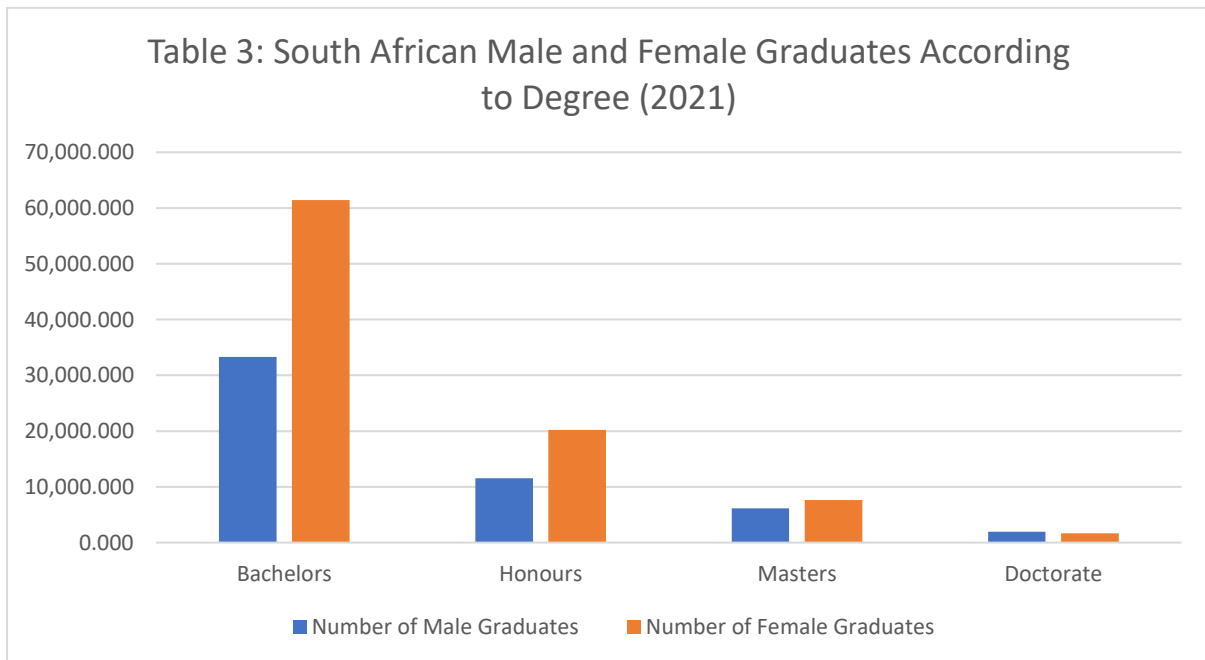


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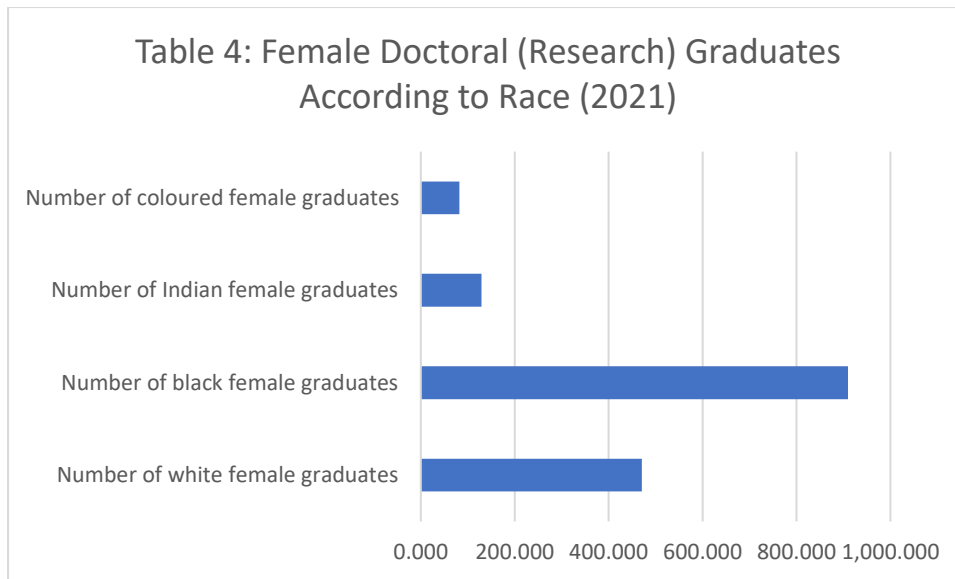
These questions are addressed in the next section, but one important indicator of this challenge is the number of female doctoral graduates, an important qualification for senior and leadership

positions. As shown in Table 3, while more women graduate at the bachelors, honours and masters level, the share of female graduates steadily decreases the higher one moves up the qualification scale. It ends with the scales tipping at the doctoral level, with more male graduates than female graduates. There has only been marginal improvement from 2012, where 42.3% of doctoral graduates were female, to 45.98% in 2021 (HEMIS 2012, 2021). What challenges prevent women from pursuing post-graduate degrees to such a degree that while they form 64.83% of bachelor’s graduates, they only form 45.98% of doctoral graduates?

In addition to attaining a doctorate, publication is important for climbing the academic ladder. For example, one study on university leadership in South Africa noted that a ‘solid academic research profile’ was one of the most valued characteristics for senior managers (White et al 2012: 300-301). Yet, in South Africa the share of scientific articles published by women in 2020 was only 36.8% (Mouton et al 2022: 1). This was a small increase from 31.1% in 2005 (Mouton et al 2022: 1). Furthermore, a review of the National Research Foundation’s 2021 A-rated researchers (the highest rating one can achieve) demonstrates that only 4 out of 27 A-rated researchers are women, and the vast majority of both male and female A-rated researchers are white (NRF 2021).



Source: HEMIS data



Source: HEMIS data

A closer look at these statistics also highlights the intersectional nature of these challenges. As Table 4 demonstrates, black females do make up the majority of female doctoral graduates at 57.14%. However, considering the white population only constitutes 7.27% of the South Africa population (Stats SA 2022: 6), white women are receiving doctorates at a proportionally larger rate of 29.58% of female graduates. This is improvement from the immediate post-apartheid era. Between 1996 and 2012, there was a 960% rise in African women who graduated with a Phd (Hlatshwayo et al. 2022: 18), and since 2012 the number of African female graduates has almost quadrupled from 239 000 to 910 003 (HEMIS 2012, 2021). The publication rate of black female authors paints a similar picture. In 2005, they formed only 4% of papers authored by South African scholars, which increased to 18% by 2020 (which remains a proportionally very small number) (Mouton et al 2022: 2). So, despite some improvement, the continued inequality of graduates and publications between races suggests that racial inequalities remain in access to post-graduate education and academia, which will invariably have implications for black women entering senior and leadership positions in HEIs.

The above challenges becomes even more evident once one reviews the most senior positions in HEIs. In 2020, there were only four female vice-chancellor's in South Africa's 26 universities (Macupe 2020). In a study on the perceptions of the characteristics of a typical VC, it was evident that the 'typical VC was a black male academic who had at least one qualification from an overseas university [...] Furthermore, most VCs were politically active in the struggle against apartheid' (White et al. 2012: 300). What prevents women, whose representation is



increasing at lower levels in academia, from pursuing or achieving these types of top positions, and why do masculine perceptions of leadership persist?

We can therefore assess that South Africa's transformation programme in HEIs has been successful to an extent in the realm of gender, but it appears to have limits. These limits include not only the figurative 'glass ceiling', but also the experiences of women in leadership positions that these statistics do not reflect. The next section will therefore seek to unpack why the glass ceiling remains, and what challenges exist for women to practice leadership even once they are in leadership positions.

### **The Implementation Gap: Navigating the formal and informal**

Why are policy efforts to transform and redress gender inequalities in HEIs in general and in HEI leadership specifically hitting a figurative wall? One answer may rest in an investigation of the informal dynamics in universities that policy often does not address. A review of the literature indicates that the barriers to women's advancement in HEI does not usually rest in formal obstacles in promotion, but in informal obstacles that impact the pipeline of women for academic leadership, hamper women's success once they do reach leadership positions, and permit gendered notions of leadership to persist. The following section will consolidate the findings of several studies on South African women in higher education, and analyse it through a positional vs. process-based understanding of leadership.

#### *The Leaky Pipeline*

In order to improve the representation of women in leadership positions, the pipeline towards these leadership positions must be favourable to women. However, the literature and the statistics provided above indicates that this is not the case. There are two key factors that create what is referred to as a 'leaky pipeline' (Moodly 2021: 190). The first is societal pressures that divert women's priorities and attentions away from their academic careers and result in alternate trajectories to leadership, and the second is the gendered environments that persist within academia, both of which influence women's pace towards and ability to reach key milestones such as completing doctoral degrees and generating publications. These are global trends, but there are also nuances to the South African context that complicate these factors.

The first factor of societal pressures is a well-studied one in South Africa and globally. These societal pressures include persistent gender roles relating to family, community and

motherhood, as well as the specific role women played in the South African liberation movement. Several authors have interviewed and studied women at various institutions in South Africa and identified family responsibilities, particularly the role mothers are expected to take in child-rearing, as a key obstacle to acquiring qualifications and career development (Moodly 2021, Moultrie & De La Rey 2003, Shober 2014, Toni & Moodly 2019: 186-187). This is compounded by the high incidence of single mothers in the South African context (Shober 2014: 325). In addition to this Shober (2014) interviewed a woman who expressed frustration with the dual roles women must fulfil by having to ‘be a tough boardroom person at the office, but the submissive wife and mother in the home,’ and another woman who ‘wondered if her submissive cultural training and lack of aggression placed her at a serious disadvantage’ (Shober 2014: 325-326). These contradictory identities that women leaders have to assume is something that will be further addressed in the section on gendered perceptions of leadership. But it can be assumed that these types of frustrations may discourage women from pursuing leadership positions.

In addition to this, the South Africa context and history resulted in many women adopting alternate trajectories towards academic leadership positions. Moultrie and De la Rey’s (2003) research on women academic leaders in South Africa point to this anomaly where many women prioritised activism and community leadership during the liberation struggle, only to find their experience was not acknowledged and valued (and sometimes de-valued) within academia, where the traditional pathway to leadership is more rigid and formal. This occurred despite the ‘informal, experiential learning’ acquired in these non-academic spaces being useful in fulfilling their leadership roles in academia (Moultrie & De la Rey 2003). On the other side of the coin, activism during the struggle was identified as an important characteristic for male VC’s (White et al. 2012: 300). These experiences indicate that women are capable of exercising leadership, if understood as a process whereby a leader is able to exercise influence. But in an academic environment, where positional leadership is valued and prioritised (Moodly 2021), women’s leadership experience is likely to be less valued in promotional considerations or when a woman is given a position of leadership.

Both these societal pressures of family responsibility and community engagement have led to alternate trajectories or career pathways being necessary for women. However, in a study on women in university leadership in the UK, Australia and South Africa, most respondents indicated that the ‘typical career path into senior management [...] reflected a trajectory

modelled on a career more typical of academic men than women' (White et al. 2012: 299). Women's pathways to leadership are therefore more complex, but policies (such as quota based policies) have been geared towards increasing women's numbers within the traditional pipeline without accounting for these complexities.

The second factor contributing to the leaky pipeline is the gendered environments within which women are required to ascend to leadership. The first, and one of the most often mentioned, characteristics of this gendered environment is the 'old boys club' phenomenon. Networking, which is important for career advancement, mentoring and decision-making is reported to occur outside of the formal institution at 'golf courses' and 'bars', spaces where women are often excluded (Moodly 2021, Mwangi 2019: 124; Shober 2014, Ramnund-Mansingh & Seedat-Khan 2020: 61-63; Toni & Moodly 2019: 186-188). Institutional cultures have also been reported to retain gender-based constructions, where gendered assumptions persist and masculine knowledge and activities are favoured (Shober 2014; Ramohai & Marumo 2016).

These findings are confirmed by a Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) report which observed the following:

Racism and sexism are experienced both blatantly and covertly, for example in how discourses relating to excellence, quality and tradition are couched, often with underpinning insinuations that people are not recruited or are not progressing in the system because they do not meet a particular standard, or that they were recruited for demographic rather than academic reasons. South Africa as a whole remains a largely patriarchal society where the responsibilities of caregiving and homemaking are disproportionately carried by females. In university settings, female academics bear the brunt of patriarchal institutional policies which do not take account of, or challenge, the broader social inequalities relating to gender identity and gender roles that still prevail in South African society. The compounding negative lived experiences of black and female academics in universities drive academics to leave the institution/find employment in a more identity-affirming environment, and the demographic status quo of institutions and/or departments is perpetuated through this kind of exclusion. (DHET 2019: 31-32)

Men are therefore advantaged both by the formal structures of the rigid academic ladder, which does not consider the alternate trajectories and breaks that women have to take due to societal pressures, as well as informal resources available to men through mentoring, networking and institutional cultures. Women, on the other hand, are disadvantaged by both the formal and informal, and their few advantages in the informal sphere (such as community leadership experience) are not permitted to translate to the formal. While policies continue to focus on the formal, advances in redressing inequality will remain incremental.

As previously mentioned, the *National Plan on Higher Education*, which sought to address both racial and gender inequalities in higher education, promoted employment equity policies and funding initiatives for underrepresented groups (DHET 2001). This, theoretically, would ensure the pipeline for women to academic leadership positions is open. However, policies that prioritise getting women into academic positions without addressing the wider, informal, but resilient gendered pressures within this pipeline will inevitably reach a cap on what they are able to achieve. The approach is also indicative of an underlying assumption of leadership that is position-based, by prioritising getting women into academic positions and leadership positions, and not their ability to succeed and affect change within the academic system.

#### *Women's experiences in leadership*

Are women able to affect change and exercise influence once they reach leadership positions in academia? What challenges do they encounter to their leadership and how are these challenges gendered? Much of the literature on women in leadership in HEIs in South Africa indicates that gendered assumptions and cultures remain, which hamper their ability to exercise leadership. If one understands leadership solely as the acquisition of a position of leadership, then these issues would not be pertinent. However, understanding leadership as a process forces one to understand the relationships that make it possible for leaders to exercise influence and affect change. With a positional understanding of leadership, the growth in female graduates, professors and academics in leadership positions would indicate transformation is occurring. But a process-based understanding paints a different picture, because a woman may find herself within a leadership position, but unable to exercise leadership. So, an understanding of the experiences of women in academic leadership is necessary to assess whether they are being given positional power only, or are given the necessary space and support to exercise leadership as a process.

The first challenge that is mentioned across various studies is the difficulty women experience in using their voice. Women report that their ideas and voices are silenced and devalued (Moultrie & De La Rey 2003, Mwangi 2019: 124; Ramohai & Marumo 2016, Shober 2014, Toni & Moodly 2019). Another challenge is that of encountering stereotypes. Such stereotypes that women have encountered, and some that were self-reported by men in interviews, include the general notion that men are better suited to leadership, the perception of women's contributions as 'nagging', the devaluing of women's expertise especially within the context of affirmative action, and the labelling of women as 'emotional' or less decisive, (Coetzee & Moosa 2020: 7-8; Mwangi 2019: 124; Moultrie & De La Rey 2003, Ramohai & Marumo 2016, Ramnund-Mansingh & Seedat-Khan 2020: 61-62; Shober 2014). This silencing and existence of stereotypes are multiplied when combined with racial identities. Many women in various studies indicated that they experienced racial stereotyping and othering on top of gendered stereotypes, and in some instances this was reported as a more prominent concern since gendered issues seemed to emerge more at higher levels (Moultrie & De La Rey 2003, Shober 2014; White et al. 2012: 302).

Finally, women also report exploitation by male colleagues (Ramohai and Marumo 2016; Shober 2014). Ramohai and Marumo's (2016) study highlighted this phenomenon, whereby women are given additional work by men, simultaneously acknowledging that the women are skilled at the work, while also devaluing the work and the women in those senior positions. The authors use the notion of 'feminisation' of roles to explain these experiences:

This could be likened to Peterson's concept of 'feminisation' of roles [...]. This refers to a process in which certain jobs or roles that women can do are regarded as feminine and therefore become undervalued, leading to a degrading of respect and prestige for such roles. The fact that men leave their duties to be done by women and do not get involved means that they regard any work that could be done by women as not prestigious enough to be done by men [...]. This could be the reason why they 'subtract' themselves because they do not want to be associated with the job and roles they feel no longer have value.

Although giving women extra work or leaving them to do tasks could sometimes be considered as empowering them [...] it is just a way of showing that the position has decreased in status and power and is therefore no longer fitting for men. [...] women

are once again juxtaposed to men and are socially constructed in a work environment to depict characteristics of valueless and weakness and as a result, they are unable to place and position themselves as powerful agents in senior positions. The only way they are constructed is as beings that will always be subordinate to men and only take over what men leave behind. In this case, it becomes apparent that the same male forces that want to put women back where the men think they belong would suppress whatever contributions they make. Therefore, when women feel that they have finally made a breakthrough into senior positions, men find ways of devaluing such positions in different ways such as leaving the paperwork to women, as seen in the findings of this study. (Ramohai and Marumo 2016: 149)

All this can lead to a situation where women ‘feel powerless in the powerful positions they occupy’ (Ramohai and Marumo 2016: 146). In other words, they are given positional power, but not the tools to actually exercise leadership. Placing women in leadership positions but hampering their ability to exercise leadership will dilute the reasons for gender equity policies. Not only do ‘“gender inequality practices” cancel out the effect of gender equity strategies’ (Herbst and Roux 2021: 166) within higher education, it also dilutes the role that these institutions can play in wider societal gender redress. In addition, these experiences of women have been noted to result in a retention problem, where women may be able to acquire leadership positions but do not remain in them due to these types of pressures (Coetzee & Moosa 2020; DHET 2019: 31-32).

#### *Gendered perceptions of leadership*

Beyond these experiences, there also appears to be resilient gendered perceptions of leadership within academia. The first is the general perception of leaders as male (White et al. 2012: 300). Additional perceptions seem to indicate that women are assumed to have more inclusive, ‘motherly’, and participative leadership styles (Moultrie & De La Rey 2003, Ramohai & Marumo 2016, Shober 2014), within institutional cultures that favour traditionally masculine leadership and positional authority (Moodly 2021). This favouring of transactional and positional authority in higher education is not unusual within the global context (White et al. 2012: 298). As a result, women in various studies on South African HEIs reported pressure to adopt these ‘masculine’ leadership styles (Hlatshwayo Et Al. 2022, Ramohai & Marumo 2016, Shober 2014, Ramnund-Mansingh & Seedat-Khan 2020: 64-65). As discussed above, this creates a tension within women’s identities where they are required to adopt dual identities. In

addition, some have argued that ‘men exaggerate these differences [between male and female cultures] to hinder the progress of women’ (Ramnund-Mansingh & Seedat-Khan 2020: 63). Navigating these contradictions and tensions adds another hurdle for women to exercise leadership as they need to simultaneously resolve their identities and leadership styles with gendered stereotypes and perceptions.

It should be noted that there is some disagreement in the literature on this favouring of masculine leadership as one study does indicate that relative to places like the UK, South African higher education does favour ‘soft’ management skills, where characteristics such as ‘people management skills’, ‘courage’, and ‘ability to balance conflicting interests’ along with other more traditionally male characteristics were identified as important in senior management (White et al. 2012: 301). In addition, another study notes that there was a ‘mixed response to feminised leadership,’ where ‘supportive’ or ‘nurturing’ female managers were sometimes valued, while other female managers were noted to lead using ‘aggressive male-type leadership’ or characterised as ‘tough, but fair’ (Ramnund-Mansingh & Seedat-Khan 2020: 63).

Nevertheless, these gendered perceptions of leadership once again result in a contradiction between the formal and informal for women leaders. Faced with gendered perceptions, or even the possibility of gendered perceptions, adds a layer of complexity that a women leader needs to consider when determining how to approach leadership styles, solving problems, and decision-making. Policies that place women in leadership positions without either equipping women with the tools to confront these challenges, and/or seeking to transform these informal processes and stereotypes, will hobble the gender transformation agenda.

Some of the literature have suggested mentoring and training programmes as a way to address some of these challenges. In Moultrie and De la Rey’s (2003: 411) study, it is interesting to note that women leaders requested training in the formal aspects of leadership, such as financial management, research, strategic planning, and understanding educational policy, more often than informal skills such as self-confidence, interpersonal skills, public speaking and assertiveness. One women was even quoted as saying financial acumen is ‘a subtle way of dividing out the real power brokers from the rest’ (Moultrie & De la Rey 2003: 414). Networking was also ranked high on the skills that should be prioritised (Moultrie & De la Rey 2003: 411), perhaps an indication of the ‘old boys club’ discussed above. These requests highlight the intersection between informal and formal skills, with women feeling they have

‘gaps’ in some of the formal skills, but also demonstrating they feel confident in the more informal skills of leadership. Are these gaps in formal, but attainable, skills used to devalue women leaders through the gendered perceptions of leadership and stereotypes?

However, Moultrie and De le Rey (2003: 416), also noted that many of the challenges women leaders faces ‘are structural, and may not necessarily be resolved through learning skills.’ Interventions should understand that the challenge facing women in academia is both formal and informal, and must be confronted as such. Other measures that have been suggested to address these structural and informal issues include ‘gender-bias awareness raising programmes,’ ‘flexible working arrangements’ and ‘parenting support structures’ (Mwagiru 2019: 124-125). In other words, initiatives must address the whole system, including the societal and institutional, and not only target women to try and increase the numbers of women leaders without changing the structures that prevent them from leading.

### **Conclusion**

It is important to reiterate that important strides have been made in increasing women’s participation in higher education, at multiple levels. However, these changes are unlikely to lead to wider societal redress if women who enter these spaces are required to adapt to patriarchal and masculine structures, or leave. These pressures exacerbate the leaky pipeline and hamper women’s ability to exercise leadership. As such, policies need to place greater focus on addressing not only the access to leadership positions for women, but the wider informal processes that challenge women’s leadership in academia.



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