Advancing Women in Leadership Online Journal
Volume 23, Spring 2007

Testimonies of Exemplary Caribbean Women Educational Leaders
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## Abstract

This study recognizes and honors the contributions and opinions of three exemplary educational and social institutions at national levels in Trinidad and Tobago. They emerged as leaders, despite the dominant patriarchy, pervasive bureaucracy, and elitist hegemony characteristic of "developing" countries. The testimonies of these women in leadership reveal glimpses of how they evolved as community leaders and their perceptions on what is critical to educational leadership. This study uses oral history methodology to develop thick narratives and aims to share, celebrate, and value the lessons of these participant-exemplars. Findings from the study reveal leadership as an evolutionary process, nurtured by spirituality, community, and a sense of gender-equity--along with inter-relatedness--in the lives of the participants.

## Testimonies of Exemplary Caribbean Women Educational Leaders

Effective leadership is associated with valued educational policies and practices that serve as motivation to change when reform is warranted (Algozzine, Yselldyke, & Campbell, 1994; Kouzes & Posner, 2003). Such a leadership is characterized as voluntary progressive change in the beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes of its stakeholders toward the realization of a common vision. The compulsory and involuntary nature of education, the ages of clients, and the inherent power of educators make schools even more vulnerable to the influence of leadership. In the "developing world" of the Caribbean, there is a pervasive perception that educational leadership is less a process of reform and more about the control and manipulation of systems by a patriarchal bureaucracy (Morris, 1999). This is further complicated by a tendency to consolidate autocratic and transactional leadership styles, where leaders see themselves as followers of the policy makers and managers, as implementers not agents of reform. Such a response--when schools are under-financed, over-crowded with increasingly hostile and troubled students, and increasing numbers of disaffected teachers--does little to significantly address academic underachievement, teacher burn-out, and the need for authentic educational leadership (Conrad & Brown, 2003).

This is not to suggest that educational leaders do not claim an active and informed voice nor challenge the established patriarchy. The more effective educational leaders do, but they generally seek a non-confrontational stance in their interaction with the bureaucracy. They opt to present their differing

perspectives and positions not aggressively or sensationally, but as "connected knowers" (Alfred, 2003). As such, their strategy for reform is achieved through relational and community based efforts. They use their influence with the community to facilitate an education for that community's economic advancement. The purposeful, resourceful, and resilient responsiveness of these leaders to teacher, student, and community needs is critical to the well-being of the community (Nieto, 2003).

Some educational leaders in Trinidad and Tobago have successfully navigated the centralized bureaucracy and patriarchy. For the few women among them, their resilience and responsiveness to their communities have been silenced to the country and region as a whole by an under-recording of their contributions and skills (Morris, 1999; Taylor, 1997). This non-legitimization of women's roles and contributions is pervasive, despite a higher percentage of women in the teaching profession, more equitable numbers as principals, particularly at elementary and special schools, and higher levels of academic qualifications among women (Dove, 1999; Taylor, 1997).

It is in this light that this study shares the stories of three exemplars. The researchers seek to celebrate their contributions and add their voices to the discourse on educational leadership.

## Theoretical Connections

With over 75 years of research and some 350 proposed definitions, there is yet no clear unequivocal understanding or definition of leadership (Stogdill, 1950). Stogdill opts to describe leadership as a process, which influences group activities regarding goal setting achievement. Benis and Nanus (1985) refer to it as something known to exist, but indefinable. Pfeffer (1981), along with Smircich and Morgan (1982), propose a move away from leadership as a process, to a product-oriented interpretation, where the leader is an identifier of the important, a facilitator of change and consensus. DePree (1989) links leadership to communication, storytelling, and intimacy as an art-medium. Senge (1990) equates leadership with developing vision and values, servicing by modeling, and teaching through fostering learning for all. Bolman and Deal (1991) describe leadership as a relationship based on shared vision, purpose, and values; stressing commitment to passion, trust, flexibility, interpersonal skills, and understanding of followers.

Understanding the complexities of leadership is not an overnight phenomenon. It is still evolving, from the focus on personality traits in the 1930s through to the "New Paradigm" models of motivation based leadership (Bryman, 1996). The theories include the Path-goal (House, 1996; Vroom, 1964); the Charismatic (Conger & Kanungo, 1998); and the Transactional and the Transformational models (Bass, 1998; Benis & Nanus, 1997). Both the extrinsically and intrinsically driven behaviors--transactional and transformational respectively--are valued as essential to overall organizational effectiveness (Kets De Vries, 1998). To this, Fry (2003) links the importance of "spiritual leadership" where the leader and followers' need a mission and meaning in an organizational culture that allows for authenticity (Duignan & Bhindi, 1997; Pfeffer, 2002).

*Women and Leadership*

The objective of this study is to share the voices of three exemplary women and to place their experiences and perspectives center-stage. The centering of women's experiences, according to Reinharz (1992), warrants its consideration as a feminist inquiry. Feminist theorists believe that women are less valued and have less power in a male dominated world; are committed to working to empower women and improve their status; and acknowledge women's ways of knowing, experiences, and values as meaningful (Acker, 1987). Further, not only may the inquiry be "feminist," but it articulates the stories from within a Caribbean context, which is often marginalized or ignored by second wave feminists of the pre-1970s (Hernandez & Rehman, 2002). The voices of the Caribbean feminist movement resonate with, but are not synonymous with, mainstream western European, African-American, or African perspectives (Leo-Rhynie, Bailey, &

Barrow, 1997).

Caribbean women have unique issues and struggles from those of the "sisterhood" in other regions and cultures (Sutton & McKeisky, 1981). They are expected to be economically independent, and are accepted as leaders within the home and community. They have great variability of socially acceptable conjugal relations (not necessarily seeing marriage as a preferred option), and are essentially autonomous (Morse, 1991). Their autonomy has been ascribed to there being no sexual division of labor on the plantation that limited the economic participation of women and the social distance of free Whites and enslaved Blacks. This "minimized the imposition of the dominant class ideologies" and "facilitated the retention and development of distinct cultural patterns and concepts about the sex roles and attributes" of these women (Morse, 1991, p. 495).

Regarding more generic perspectives of women in leadership, Irby and Brown (1995) recognize the role of bureaucratization in limiting women's aspirations to leadership, asserting that there is a need for re-conceptualizing leadership theory to incorporate the contributions of both genders, and to limit the White male stereotype manifested in most traditional research. Helgesen (1990), Rosener (1990), and Shakeshaft (1987) similarly posit that men are perceived as exemplifying power, dominance, and control, while women are perceived as exemplifying collaboration. Such differences in leadership styles have been associated with learning experiences and positions within the society (Klenke, 1996).

Astin and Leland (1991) hold that women leaders more typically form networks with talented personnel, and highly value listening and interpersonal skills, along with collegial and consensual styles. These values are associated with Transformational Leadership styles (Bass, 1998). One orientation of administrators, mostly male, is described as generally more "aggressive, independent, self-sufficient, forceful, and dominant" (Eagly, Karau, & Johnson, 1992, p. 79). The other orientation, mostly women, is identified as more democratic, treating staff as colleagues or equals.

Partly to recognize the contributions and effectiveness of the participants, and to celebrate their contributions, this study sought answers to the following questions: (1) What do the testimonies of these women reveal about factors which contributed to their evolution as educational leaders? (2) What are some of the issues that characterize their experiences as women educational leaders?

## Method

The interviews were completed over a one year period, and comprised two guiding questions and a set of prompts, which were used sparingly to keep the inquiry focused. The guiding questions were aimed at getting participants to share their experiences as they apply to educational leadership. The questions were: (1) As a woman identified as an effective and exemplary leader, tell me about yourself and your journey as an educational leader. (2) What are the issues you identify as important to educational leadership?

An oral history approach, characteristic of qualitative methodology, was used to emphasize the depth of experiences unique to this small population (Reinharz, 1992). This approach facilitated participants to share self-determined, comprehensive stories with fewer restrictions. It also minimized intrusion on the participants' time, and afforded opportunities for discussion and exploration of concepts, views, thoughts, and memories.

*Participants*

The selection of the three participants was taken from a pool compiled from a list of educational leaders generated at a meeting in Trinidad and Tobago of 15 special and regular education school principals in 1999. These principals were invited because of their commitment to inclusive education practices and their overall

leadership roles. The primary researcher attended the meeting, but largely observed the process. The chair of the meeting conducted the list-generating activity at the request of the primary researcher. Participating principals were asked to note outstanding and exemplary educational leaders who had taught for at least five years in schools in Trinidad and Tobago. Principals were also asked to rank the list-members on the following criteria: personal knowledge of and experience with them as a means of verification; their impact upon emerging leadership; the contributions each made nationally; and whether they had previously shared their stories formally. The list was then sorted according to gender.

For purposes of this paper, the testimonies of the three of the four most highly ranked participants are being shared. Given the constraints in terms of space and scholarly writing, using a small sample of three participants afford the researchers an opportunity to share the stories and messages of these three exemplary women educational leaders, without sacrificing too much of the rich narrative gained from the oral history method.

Following the ranking of possible participants, the primary researcher contacted them by telephone, then by letter, to ascertain their willingness and readiness to be interviewed. The interviews were conducted at a location and time that was convenient to the participants.

*The Researchers*

The co-researchers are both former teachers of Trinidad and Tobago, who have been supervised by, worked, taught, led, and/or inspired by the participants who constitute this study. The primary researcher completed the interviews and the secondary researcher led the analysis and discussion for purposes of this paper. Both researchers have known the participants over the span of no less than 17 years.

*Data Collection*

Data was collected through tape-recorded interviews, during which the participants were encouraged to share their stories fully, completely, and honestly (Nielsen, 1990). Two 45-minute interviews were initially planned with each participant, but in reality the interviews were no less than a hour and a half each. Audio-recordings and transcriptions were completed by the primary researcher who made notes that provided contextual information. Narratives were developed through a process of transcribing and editing the data. For enhancing credibility, we used member-checking (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Kuzel & Like, 1991; Merriam, 1998). Copies of transcripts and first-draft of manuscripts were shared with participant-interviewees for feedback and to accommodate any amendments that they might wish to make. One participant expressed concern about confidentiality and made suggestions to facilitate her anonymity. The two most senior participants declared that they had no problem with even using their real names. Initial pseudonyms were determined in collaboration with the participant-interviewee. Signed consent forms were received from all participants.

*Data Analysis*

The constant comparison method described by Glaser and Strauss (1967, as cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was used for data analysis. This method combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of themes or constructs observed. The narratives are coded, classified, systematically and continuously compared across categories, and common themes and relationships between constructs and interviews are determined. Data analysis included seven phases: (1) initial review of all narratives, including reflective and field notes; (2) corrective feedback from the participants; (3) grouping of answers to the guiding questions; (4) noting the common and different perspectives of each interview as narrative on central issues; (5) coding the transcripts to reflect the major emerging constructs and themes; and (6) review of narrative, constantly identifying and establishing or sometimes changing links between constructs.

During the seventh phase, the common and unique constructs and themes were identified and analyzed for messages pertaining to the purpose of the study and seeking links to the research field.

Celebrating Their Voices: The Participants

*Participant # 1: Regine, Fearless on the Frontline*

Regine is a former head of special education services and a pioneer in a myriad of philanthropic efforts. She pioneered and/or served at executive positions in an extensive range of associations involved in social welfare, childcare, and education issues at home and in the Caribbean region. Regine has been honored with an honorary doctorate and is profiled in Caribbean and World editions of Who's Who publications. She has also been honored by the President's (U.S.) Committee on Mental Retardation; a Caribbean Award for work in Mental Retardation; the National Public Service Medal of Merit (Gold) for Community Services; the Principal of the year Award; Individual of the Year Award; and the Woman of Caribbean Award.

*Experiencing Leadership*

*Early connection*. Regine attributes much of her leadership style to her parents, her upbringing, and being the only surviving twin and sister "growing up in a family dominated by boys. I also felt equal to them in that we all were expected to do well."

*Paths to leadership*. Although married and the mother of four children, Regine was able to address her professional development.

I entered the work force upon passing the Public Service Examination and was appointed to a position in Social Work in 1953, after completion of the Certificate in Social Work. Later I was awarded a Colonial scholarship to study in London, England.

Her involvement in working with children at the psychiatric hospital influenced her so much that she changed her plan of studies to Special Education, more specifically, the "Education of the Mentally Handicapped as it was then called." She met some resistance to her proposed change but persisted and eventually the Colonial Office granted her leave and paid for her studies. "When I graduated, I did so well [that] they recommended that I do a tour on the continent [to observe service delivery models]."

Regine continued her studies, achieving certificates in Residential Care of Children, Social Policy and Administration, and the Master of Business Administration. On her return to Trinidad, but before she could make a commitment to complete doctoral studies, she had a traumatic experience paralyzing her for two and a half years. "Eventually, after much prayer and care, I not only walked again, but also regained my hearing and vision, and my hair grew back." Perceiving this phenomenon of healing to be "a miracle of faith," Regine increased her philanthropic efforts. She journeyed from volunteer to principal of a hospital based special education facility; to Director of the Center for Child Care and Education, under the Ministry of Health; and then to head the Division for Special Education Services in the Ministry of Education.

*As a woman in leadership*. Regine claims a late awakening to appreciating the role and responsibilities of women as leaders. She does not recall any significant experience where she felt threatened or intimidated because of gender.

I celebrated their [men] involvement with me. I considered them my main supporters. I understand a lot of their feelings. Too often we women subvert male leadership and men in general, rather than enjoy the reciprocal dimension of male/female relationships.

*Of models and mentors*. Regine identifies the importance of mentors and models to her success. They came

in either gender, but she identifies her mother for special mention. "My mother went to a university at aged 60 and she was a person who always did things [with us]. She kept us going."

*Challenges*. Regine accepts that she had many challenges with the "bureaucracy." One of her most critical challenges was non-payment of salary on her return to Trinidad "because they didn't know what [position] to place me in." It was one thing getting a position and remuneration, but she faced the invisible barrier of being an educator within the health sector. "It was very difficult to convince the bureaucracy that persons with disabilities were entitled to education, particularly those perceived as having "mental problems," which in those days included both emotional and intellectual difficulties. A significant challenge for Regine was that of getting the established special education service accepted as "part of the Ministry of Education and attracting teachers to be part of it." Eventually, she had to choose whether to complete her Ph.D. or take responsibility for the development of special education services in Trinidad and Tobago. She remained working with the Ministry of Education developing policies and practices for special education services in Trinidad and Tobago and the broader Caribbean region.

*Leadership as "taking care of."* Regine recognizes her leadership as taking care of her community, which she links to experiences, as well as her philosophy of service. For Regine, the driving force, the core to her leadership is her caring:

I cannot serve if I cannot care and I cannot care if I do not feel. I must feel. I must care. Caring is not something you could buy. It is related to your notion of what is spiritual . . . what connects you to the other side.

She describes herself as "firmly grounded" and "deeply spiritual." She sees God reflected in everyone.

*On caring*. She hypothesizes that caring is perceived as a feminine attribute related to careers, such as teaching and nursing, which offer non-competitive salaries:

"This has always been so. You associate nurturing with children and women. A man who is seen as caring runs the risk of being perceived as effeminate. That's a no-no with Caribbean men." Regine believes in the use of mentors and exemplars and the recruiting of more male teachers that will help to resolve that situation. "We need to encourage young men to get into the classroom. We have to...help them to see that it's important for them to be leaders and teachers."

*Perspectives on Leadership and Women*

*Leadership*. Regine conceptualizes that leadership is the acceptance of a responsibility for a cause that transcends ordinary love; it must be a "higher calling" that motivates you to bridge a gap between a need and a resource.

*On leadership and gender.* Regine does not identify any special attributes of her leadership being due to the fact that she is a woman, and rejects any construct of "feminism," which suggests denigrating men.

We never talk about the women who violate men. In the discourse with men for equity...we have tried to take away [their] family headship.

Equality does not mean that since you work for the same or more salary you [can] put him out of the house...or talk to him any way you want.

Speaking from the perspective of a Caribbean woman who has been on the front lines as academic and social liberator, Regine shares her perspectives on feminism. She celebrates the power of "femininity as feminism." "A man would respect me as a woman and I would respect him as a man. I would be able to

enjoy him doing the things I believe a man should do." Expressing concern about what she perceives to be an evolving clash between men and women, she adds, "The generations after us must not see us as women who feel that we are stronger than men and we don't need them. We need each other." Recognizing the increasing number of women in the profession and their eventual assumptions of leadership, Regine warns that being in a position of--or having qualifications in--leadership is not synonymous with effective leadership. "We have to be continually reviewing, determining what it is that makes people want to follow."

*Participant #2: Shantalle-Charisma in Action*

Shantalle holds an earned Ph.D. in Teaching and Learning, and has taught at elementary, secondary, special, and teacher education sectors of the education system. She has developed and directed courses at undergraduate and graduate levels, served as leader of the national special education association, and also served on various policy making projects with the teachers' association and with the Ministry of Education. She was honored nationally for outstanding service as a teacher.

*Experiencing Leadership*

*Early connections*. Shantalle accepts the label of educational leader gracefully. She asserts that her leadership skills began in her early childhood when she was looked upon to be the spokesperson for her siblings. Her experiences of "playing concert" also contributed to that confidence. She recalled being told that even at six-years-old she was a very eager learner and performer of songs and poems for all who would lend an ear.

At age eight, Shantalle's father migrated to England and "never came back...my mother would die soon afterwards." Shantalle began living with her grandmother.

At 11-years-old I had to write the national examination to go to High School. I had to fill out the parental consent forms and put in the choices of school I wanted. My grandmother, who did not read or write, worked very hard and left home very early. I [took] care of my grandmother's home and did all the chores, which included cooking.

Shantalle also attributes her effectiveness as a leader to the lessons learned through an early upbringing in the church and the "tough love" and care of her grandmother:

[She] lived for her church. We would go to church all the time. I mean all the time. I went to a convent [her high school] more church! What stayed with me, however, was the ability to pray and [my] faith.

She [my grandmother] was a vendor in the market. She was so strict, almost to the point of sometimes sounding tyrannical. I remember distinctly when I was going to write the National Examination. I went to get her good wishes. She looked straight at me and told me: "Child, you better pass that exam if you don't want to sell in the market for the rest of your life." I placed seventh in the whole island.

*Pathways to leadership*. By age 18, Shantalle was a mother and wife. She described those as tough years, blessed with its triumphs. By age 30, she had four children, and was in her second marriage. She speaks fondly of those "challenging but empowering years." "I think if I want to look at a personal triumph, it would be the bringing up of my four children." Shantalle acknowledges other dimensions to her success: being a life long learner, her desire to do better and to be self-sufficient, the role of models and mentors in her professional life, and her personality. "I am sociable, committed to my tasks...more people than task oriented, decisive, and not afraid of risk-taking."

During a period of fifteen years, she journeyed from assistant teacher to teacher-candidate at Teachers College to teaching in elementary, special, and secondary schools. She was awarded a government

scholarship to complete a Masters degree in education. Half way through this she was granted a second scholarship to pursue a Masters degree in special education. "This I took up without hesitating since this was my first love." On completion of studies, she was appointed to one of two Teachers Colleges in Trinidad. Five years later, she earned funding to complete her doctoral degree in Teaching and Learning.

*Developing styles*. In terms of her leadership style, Shantalle describes herself as being "transactional and collaborative," having "a big heart" full of love for her charges and colleagues, and always ready to lend an ear. She shared that she has always been very assertive professionally, sometimes to the point of aggressiveness.

I never had the time to develop fears, at least not for any length of time. I was just out there doing what had to be done. I see myself as charismatic in my approach to people with whom I work. You see I am a sweet talker. I think I can get anything that I want because of who I am and how I set about getting it.

*On models and mentors*. Shantalle acknowledges that there was never a shortage of models or mentors in her life.

The persons who have helped me were mainly women, but there were men too . . . who were willing to listen and help me. Caring may not be significant only to women.

I found myself in close association with teachers, leaders, and policy makers who had the vision and foresight for a better education system and I learned from the best. I listened and watched. I respected the "elders" in the education community and I am referring to leadership and initiative not age.

*As a woman and educational leader*. Shantalle acknowledges many times of struggle, risk-taking, and challenges "that may have hindered many, but with the help of friends I was able to succeed and reach to my present position."

There were times when I felt that I was unfairly treated by the policy makers in education, who used my experience and expertise, but gave others the job, stating that I was young and that my time will come. I never waited, however, I moved along trying to make changes wherever I could.

Shantalle shares how being a woman contributed to her evolution as a leader. She concluded that her gender sometimes handicapped her growth.

You see, I am considered by many men to be a sensual, attractive woman. I also look younger than my age. This has served to keep me down in certain positions. Of course I fought back. Once I was told in an interview, "You are young, your turn would come" in a condescending manner. This was said among other women, who I suppose, had to wait their turn.

Another event is that I was once asked for a date with a top Ministry official. I had to tell him that I never slept with anyone to get to where I was, and that I was not going to start now.

Shantalle recognized the role men have played in her life, "Positively and negatively they did contribute."

I may not have been very successful in my marriages, but I have been taught great, very strong lessons. I think sometimes that my strength frightens men away. I probably did not give the men in my life [struggling with her feelings] the chance to grow and develop along with me.

*Perspectives on Leadership*

Shantalle shares her perspectives on a number of issues that she considers as most important to educational

leadership.

*The leader as follower* . She reminds us that leaders are placed in positions of power by others.

We often trick ourselves into believing we hold the power. We need to value our followers and recognize that our position is really linked to their value of us. What is important though is that there will always be need for leaders.

*On gender and uniqueness*. Shantalle notes the many contributions of women in and to educational leadership, and the lack of formal recognition accorded them.

Few women have been respected for their contributions, and those that have been somehow always follow the patriarchal model. A common ground can also be sought in the styles of both men and women. I feel women can bring a different dimension to a leadership role. I am talking about ruling with sensitivity, with different moral standings. Many women bring a softer side to leadership; they bring caring and nurturing with them.

*On feminism* . Shantalle admits to having had a problem with the notion of feminism, despite her readiness to identify with it: "I used to think that it was when you wanted to be like a man. I am wiser now, so my view of feminism is that it is the development of women's issues from the perspective of women." Shantalle asserts that there is a unique role and perspective of the Caribbean woman.

I also believe that . . . feminism may be a bit different. Our relationship with our men and sons are not necessarily the same as in the US or Europe. We need to explore this more. I think in the Caribbean, rich or poor, educated or not . . . we were always feminists.

*The Sacred Task*

Shantalle offered some advice to future educational leaders. She argued for such persons to recognize the position they hold as developers of the next generation. She characterized such leadership as being "an almost sacred task."

Dare to care for your followers. Let your caring be authentic and visible. Show you believe in them. Include reflective practice and social action as elements in training programs. Encourage them to see themselves as change agents in the cause for social justice.

### *Participant # 3: Daphne, Preparing others for the Front Line*

Daphne holds a B.A. (Honors), an M.A., and the Trinidad and Tobago Medal of Merit (Gold) for Public Service. She was born in the 1930s in northern Trinidad. She is a woman who has given her life's service to the educational community nationally and regionally. She started as an elementary school teacher at her alma mater. Daphne earned two scholarships to the regional university and completed studies in French and Spanish. After graduating, she was appointed as a lecturer at the Teachers College. On the retirement of the principal of the Teachers College, and the rapid promotion of the next senior educator at the College to the Ministry of Education's Central Office, Daphne assumed the position of principal to the only residential Teachers College as lecturer, Dean, and principal. She continues her contribution to the community through her involvement in the church and as a connoisseur of the local culture.

*Experiencing Leadership*

*Early connection*. Daphne identifies her mother as her first leader and mentor, who ensured that from an early age that she had a "very responsible" childhood, being initially one girl among five boys. "I got

preferential treatment, which means I got many more 'don'ts' than 'do's.' [When] my sisters were born . . . I was already a teenager. I was godmother to them in more senses than one." Whereas her brothers were sent to school regardless of the circumstances, she was kept home from school at times to stay with her grandmother, who had been recovering from a stroke.

The fact [is] that I was . . . to apply myself to my schoolwork; to be useful; and to be obedient. I think many of these things helped me to advance; [having] the large family too, helped me to be able to deal with people.

Daphne remembers "starting to cook before I could even manage the weight of the pot." "My mother believed in the power of food, of eating and drinking and dining." Household work took up most of her time, and because her mother and grandmother frowned at prolonged leisure, "play time" was a luxury. She was particularly grateful when there were adult visitors to the home. These "go outside and play" opportunities allowed her some creativity.

*Paths to Leadership*

For Daphne, her paths to leadership involved a complex mixture of readiness skills being developed from elementary to university education. These included her propensity for reading, punctuality, responsibility, and personal discipline, particularly being punctual.

*Primary education*. Thanks to the tutoring of her mother, she was an avid reader: "By age five I could read anything." Her primary education extended beyond academics.

On the staff, I was fortunate to have a lady teacher. [She] was among one of the first women into pan and folk music. She was a pianist, pannist, and the first woman to start a panside. Although I could not join the steelband, nor could I participate, as an onlooker, I imbibed this atmosphere.

Many of her stories centered on punishment; not that she was particularly troublesome, but because the emphasis was on discipline.

We never got up late . . . but here are some of the things we had to do before going to school: We had to fetch water from a standpipe; We would have to sweep up the whole yard, and in those days the yard had trees; We would [also] have to look after the chickens. I remember reaching to school late and finding the gates either closed or the head teacher waiting to give you "hot bakes and chocolate"[corporal punishments].

For her, punctuality extended to the home situation.

You were supposed to be home at a certain time. They had their little jobs lined up. Yet you would find things to distract you on the way: a mango tree or you might see a caterpillar.

*Secondary education*. This reinforced her leadership potential through a broad curriculum, with its focus on the history of the school, culture, and a sense of responsibility for persons and things. She continues with a description of experiences that made her proud to be a student at that secondary school.

The school had a sense of its history. Every year you would observe who founded the school, and why. Then there was the religious and moral education, because all the children were not Anglicans by any chance, but we all had prayers every morning.

*Early Professional Life*

On graduating from high school, Daphne was recruited to teach Spanish. "I told them that I had never taught

at that level before [but I did not refuse]. You never refuse."

*Of Models and Mentors*

Daphne acclaims the role of mentors of either gender in her professional evolution. She singles out three male mentors and one female colleague for very special mention. There was Mr. McK, her former teacher, teaching colleague, supervisor, and advisor. "He had a system where every Friday afternoon he [would] have the staff socializing. Every staff member had to deliver the goods on one particular afternoon--a question of eats and drinks, laughter and chitchat." She describes Father C, a parish priest, as her second primary mentor; a compassionate man who laughed easily. "Once you had faith in young people, they could blossom and develop. He saw my potential and had a considerable effect on me, and by extension, my relationship with protégées."

*Challenges*

For her, the challenges she faced were personal. Her most significant was feeling unable to or uncomfortable with efforts to engage in "small talk."

I was not the kind of person who could [just] relax and lime [to socialize for the fun of it] like some people can. One might say I was a workaholic. In modern day leadership, you have to learn to relax and socialize.

*Leadership as "Caring for"*

Daphne described of her commitment to a leadership that she was sincere, responsive, and caring, which was shaped by her teachers and schooling.

Caring is a gift of love which I received from teachers and mentors alike. I was truly cared for, and I cared and still care for my students and protégés . . . one of the things that drew people to me was simplicity. In my particular circumstance, not only was I approachable, I was accessible.

For Daphne, her successes and accomplishments correlated with the lifestyles and readiness of her followers. Among her primary achievements was the culture of the residential teachers college she nurtured. "Residential training made them [the student teachers] blossom, and even those who have left teaching have carried that spirit into their various walks of life."

*Perspectives on Leadership and Women*

*Leadership*. For education to empower, change, and motivate others, Daphne insists it requires a leadership that cares. Leadership then for her is a matter of service and commitment to the community. This must not be left to chance, but must be addressed in educational leadership and teacher preparation programs. She recommends a residency requirement combined with community service.

One of the most touching moments was when I used to take students to the prisons. It was a rough audience but it was amazing how the students were willing to go. We would go every year and put on a concert, and get the inmates to join in.

*Teacher education and caring leadership*. According to Daphne, there are some essential elements to any successful teacher/leadership effort, such as the following: (a) a vision of what teacher training is; (b) high self-esteem; and (c) consideration, concern, and respect for the students.

*Concerns with the low status of teaching*. She contends that the status of teaching is not only shaped by the policy makers, but by the quality of teachers recruited and their preparation, which in turn determines how

teachers are valued by the community.

I don't think that people nowadays project teaching as a favorable profession as they used to. When I was a child, I longed to be a teacher; I looked up to my teachers. Nowadays, children don't hear their parents and their elders celebrating teachers.

*On Leadership and Gender*

Daphne shares her perspective on how men and women in leadership may be related to societal expectations and gender roles. "People have a feeling that men are heady, more intellectual in their leadership, whereas women are more emotional and what one might call affected, both effective and affectionate." She warns, however, that we must be cautious about the assumption of men being less responsive. "There are . . . men who respond to people and their need . . . caring men. Some give the impression that they couldn't care less . . . although probably deep down inside they probably do [care]." Daphne recognizes that women are gaining more positions of leadership despite the pervasive notion that they are the weaker sex. She identifies the broad experiences and academic curricula made available to women over the years as the catalysts.

Schools gave boys mainly an academic education, [where they] were taught and still are taught to develop physically, [and be involved] in sports, [and] outdoor games, mainly. Women, [however], got a broader secondary education than boys, [which extended to] the home, too.

Daphne speaks about the need for clear roles for women in leadership.

Women, who are in leadership positions, have a very difficult role to make the men realize that even though they are there in positions of leadership they are not there to dominate; they are there to complement.

*Feminism and Femininity*

Daphne identifies herself as a feminist, but offered some clarification:

A feminist is concerned not just about women, but about children and men. I know the word has certain unpleasant connotations, but I think a feminist is one who brings out the best in womanhood.

She suggests that women should revisit their interpretation and definition of feminism to be an assertion of love for themselves, which is not synonymous with excluding or denigrating men.

## Discussion

The narratives of Regine, Shantalle, and Daphne show a path to leadership through individualized journeys and experiences from family, schooling, and early professional development. Four common themes emerge from the analysis of the narratives. These include, (a) the development of leadership characteristics among these women as an evolutionary process, involving a consistent environment and the presence of an orientation toward achievement; (b) a sense of community and of experiences that include caring and being cared for; (c) regard for equity, inter-relatedness, and gender; and (d) approaches to responsibilities that reflect an recognition of a higher order and interconnectedness between leader and follower.

*Leadership as Developmental*

The participants, Regine, Shantalle, and Daphne, characterize leadership as an evolutionary and social process involving preparation, appreciation for followers and the community, and an approach to responsibilities that reflect moral awareness. Both participants construct leadership in a way that incorporated their journeys through childhood with their personalities, needs, and relationships with

followers and mentors who all celebrated academic achievement and service to the family and community.

Although not limited to these characteristics, their evolution as leaders is intricately intertwined with their sense of purpose as learners and leaders. Their uniqueness in personality needs and styles are evident. Also, they both addressed and attempted to change organizational constraints through networking, flexibility, intimacy, being personable, and personal growth associated with transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Conger, 1992).

Regine, Shantalle, and Daphne reveal the lessons they learned from models and mentors, particularly their mothers, and in Shantalle's case, her grandmother. Shantalle shared her tendency to run away, even as a child, to visit her grandmother and hear stories, which revealed an early readiness to build relationships and connect with her culture and meaning. For Regine, even while in her fifties, her mother was actively engaged in her academic life as model and encourager. Daphne's mother was also active in shaping and nurturing her. Both mothers helped shaped their daughters to be independently minded women. The character of their mother figures lends evidence to the theoretical position of Whitfield (1990) on the importance of a consistent environment for emergent leaders when they are young, especially one with a clear understanding of what is, or is not, acceptable. The mothers of the participants also share a value for education, as noted in studies about the role of mothers by Cantor and Barney (1992). With only one of the mother figures of the participants being educated, educational attainment of the mothers does not, however, feature prominently, as in the findings of Shakeshaft (1987). The narratives challenge findings by Cantor and Barney (1992) that successful female leaders tend to grow up in two parent families. Instead, the experiences of our participants endorse the findings of Clay (1997) that single mothers constitute powerful motivating influences over their daughters.

Through appropriate models and mentors of all genders, Regine, Shantalle, and Daphne gained the support, encouragement, friendship, sponsorship, career guidance, and information that facilitated their successes as educational leaders (Morrison, White & van Velsor, 1987). Though the roles of mentors were valued, regardless of their gender, it is evident in the narratives that for these participants, women and mother figures were their primary mentors.

*Sense of Community*

The participants recognize and pay tribute to the communities that nurtured them. Daphne's community was the residential facility where she taught, administered, and led. Her concept of communal responsibility extended to her church. In that learning community, she was often referred to as "Ma" and "Tantie," an indication that her protégés cherish her nurturing leadership. Shantalle's "community" appears to have emerged wherever she was located. She fostered community. She gave her best efforts to the cause at home, the various schools and associations she served in, or the teacher's college. Regine invested considerable time with philanthropic efforts and remains involved in a broad assortment of social and professional agencies, serving in most of them as an executive officer. For her, the community extended from her family to the nation and the region's underprivileged women and children in particular.

Regine, Shantalle, and Daphne characterize a leadership where followers are valued. Shantalle urge a deeper respect and value for the follower and recognition that many followers eventually become your leaders. Through a readiness to listen to the opinions and feelings of their followers and to be accessible and accommodative of divergent views and needs, collaboration and community are identified as important elements in the leadership style and constructs of these women educational leaders. They epitomize a regard for leaders and followers, regardless of gender; one that nourishes the sense of community. These women educational leaders characterized interdependence, and created and maintained positive relationships with their communities (Cantor & Barney, 1992), while nurturing an ethic of care (Gilligan, 1993; Marshall, Patterson, Rogers, & Steele, 1996; Pazey 1995).

Each participant recognizes the contributions of women in leadership, with concerns for equity and equality. Sharing perspectives that women have made and continue to make unique contributions to leadership, primarily due to socialized roles and expectations, each participant argued for greater collaboration between men and women leaders, and recognition that equity and equality are cross-gender issues (Taylor, 1997).

All three participants acknowledge that they faced challenges being a woman in educational leadership but, excluding Shantalle, they downplayed the existence, entrenchment, or patriarchy of a male hegemony. Regine and Daphne recognize aspects of their style as being representative of their experiences in dealing with their brothers, who set the standard and provided many opportunities for experience in negotiation and problem solving. None of the participants took positions on the worthiness of women mentors as opposed to men mentors. For Regine, the key to working with men was her forthrightness; for Shantalle--offering conflicted positions at times--it was charisma and style, laced with assertiveness but resilience. She refused to be blocked and found ways to navigate around the "glass ceiling." Daphne's challenge laid perhaps her sense of stewardship that did not allow much socializing with male colleagues or followers. Her successes, the key to successful relationships with men, were her refusal to recognize flexibility, readiness to network, and orientation to service.

## Moral and Spiritual Awareness

Regine gives no detail about the role of the church and early education in her evolution as a leader. Whereas the narrative speaks more about religion than her moral awareness, she does afford a framework of self-descriptors as being "firmly grounded" and "deeply spiritual." She notes that for her "sharing is loving," and that it is the purpose of life. She expressed a concern too for a heritage of values and standards that were not just materialistic or competitive, but mindful of a higher order to which we are accountable: "God did not make Eve and Eva."

Shantalle and Daphne remember their mother-figures as very religious persons. Shantalle saw herself as being prepared for faith and character through her grandmother's commitment to church. For Shantalle, the church was ever present, from primary school to the secondary [convent] school. Church-going was a major aspect of her weekends, often being taken, despite her protestations, by her grandmother, who she describes as a "strong Christian." Indeed, she asserted that she has had "enough religion to last a lifetime." Shantalle describes herself as having a "strong faith" that "someone out there loves me." She refers to leadership as being an "almost sacred task," and in discussing her perspectives on the ethic of care, she recognizes the uniqueness of individuals as part of the wider community.

Daphne benefited through her mother being Methodist by upbringing and philosophy, but Anglican [Episcopalian] in practice. She recalled the beauty of her mother singing hymns all day over the washtub. She places great emphasis on mutual respect for all and service to the community of followers and leaders alike. She speaks of Jesus as a model of a caring leader, noting that sensitivity, responsibility, and responsiveness are all aspects of caring leadership.

These indicators--the participants' value of service and attitude toward the community of individuals and a higher calling--illustrate moral awareness and spirituality, which is considered fundamental to transformational, caring, authentic leadership (Burns, 1978; Duignan & Bhindi, 1997; Gilligan, 1993). Morality is not analogous with religion, but is more akin to spirituality and a non-partisan sensitivity to deep and enduring meaning and interconnectedness to something greater than the self (Duignan & Bhindi, 1997). Spirituality attests to a readiness to goodness, through helping others and concern for relationships and communication (Gilligan, 1982).

The participants shared concerns about the apparent decline of caring and spirituality in the contemporary world, and the tendency by some to see caring as a feminine attribute typified in nursing an infant and special education, and associated with non-competitive salaries.

## Summary

The canvasses of our three exemplars portray women who express their feelings, live life to the fullest, care deeply for people, and who, in turn, are people for whom others care deeply. This study recognizes and documents the contributions and roles of these three women educational leaders. Further, the study shares the experiences and perspectives of these exemplars with regard to establishing and maintaining community connectedness; a critical bridge that keeps relationships alive and well within educational communities.

In directing focus on the lives of these women educational leaders, we have sought to place them center stage. This centering of their experiences, perceptions, and sharing of their voices gives a formal recognition and legitimization of their service to the community. As researchers, it is our hope that this in turn would facilitate the further celebration of voices of other caring and authentic leaders in education. The "voices" of the participants serve as models and sources of encouragement to educational leaders, inclusive of administrators and teacher practitioners. Serving as exemplars, the participants remind and coach us that leadership is a responsibility to followers; that caring is evolutionary; and that it is nurtured by one's sense of community, authenticity, and spirituality. The sense of community embraces elements of inter-relatedness and equity, and warrants an appreciation for collaborative practice in addressing common goals and needs.

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