

**CAREER PATHS
OF LAY CATHOLIC PRIMARY WOMEN PRINCIPALS
IN A RURAL DIOCESE:
*A Voice for Catholic Women***

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by
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the career paths of lay Catholic women primary principals in a rural Catholic diocese in NSW. The study was undertaken for three main reasons. Firstly, there has been little research in this area. Secondly, the reasons for the higher percentage of women principals in Catholic primary schools than in state and independent schools in Australia is a phenomenon worth investigating. Finally, existing research suggests that women have a different perception of career from that held by men and this was considered worthy of attention.

The case study approach adopted allowed these areas to be investigated and also provided an opportunity for Catholic women principals involved in the study to contribute to the debate on women in educational management. The career paths, the support mechanisms and barriers to career advancement encountered by these principals were examined. To ensure that women were placed at the centre of the discourse, a feminist approach to the study was employed.

As part of the case study, a descriptive survey was conducted with all fourteen lay primary women principals in the rural Catholic diocese under examination and semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used as a follow-up with six of these principals.

The findings suggest that these women experienced many of the same barriers as those outlined in the literature for women in educational administration generally. In addition, they faced many extra obstacles which were inherent in the position of Catholic principal in a rural town or village. The structures for

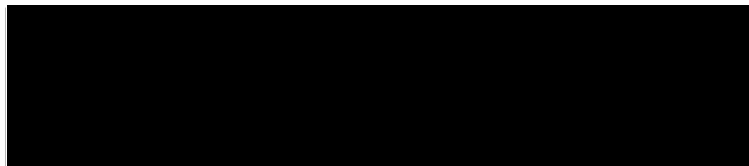
selection and appointment within the diocese were found to work in their favour as all had achieved success and fulfilment in promotion to the principalship. Despite their success, however, many professec no further career ambitions in education, a reflection of both the difficulties that the majority had experienced in balancing their roles as homemaker and Catholic principal and their concept of career which differed from that found in the literature for men.

Implications of these findings point to the need for continuing programmes to attract capable women to teaching and administration. The structural barriers for women inherent in the attainment of a promotions position and the demands of the Catholic school principalship in particular must be addressed to retain capable and qualified women in educational administration in Catholic schools. Finally, it is proposed that paradigms of management which include women's experience need to be promoted and selection panels for principals need training to eliminate the barriers which can discriminate against women candidates for promotion.

DECLARATION

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the author.

Signature

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis was produced as a result of the cooperation of a number of people. I should particularly like to acknowledge the special contribution of the participants in the study, who were willing to give their time and ideas. The assistance of my supervisor, Dr K. Harman, who has been generous with her time and expertise, has been invaluable. As always, Tony has been of special support through his patience and encouragement.

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