ASSESSING THE CULTURAL FACTORS IMPEDING WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: A CASE FOR THARAKA SOUTH SUB-COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Culture, as embedded in the concept of norms has a bearing on leadership. It may develop implicit and explicit biases, negative perceptions and stereotypic social values about women's abilities, management performance and leadership attitude. Gender inequality in leadership and management positions is an issue of concern across the world. The study sought to investigate the cultural factors impeding women accession to leadership in secondary schools in Tharaka South Sub – County, Kenya. The study employed cross sectional survey design utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods. Data was collected from school principals, women teachers, heads of departments, Boards of Management members, Parents Teachers' Association members, Education trade unionists and religious leaders. Sampling was done through purposive and simple random techniques. Questionnaires, interview guide and focus group discussion guides were used to collect data. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS. 22) as well as NVIVO (V.8) for quantitative and qualitative data analysis respectively. From the study, cultural factors impeding women accession to leadership of mixed public secondary schools included cultural biases, stereotyping, scrutiny, domestic responsibilities of women, culture of harassment and masculine mystique.

Keywords: Gender, leadership, culture, management, inequality.

INTRODUCTION

Culture is the totality of socially transmitted behaviour patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought (Beattie, 2013). These patterns, traits, and products are the expression of a particular period, class, community, or population. It is a cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving. As an expression of the society, culture influences our understanding of the concept of leadership.

As a concept relevant for success, leadership is broadly defined as the act and the ability to provide guidance to a group of people (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2013). While every society or group of people require good leaders, it is not obvious that good leaders are allowed to exercise their leadership skills (Northouse, 2015). For a long time, leadership has been a dictate of the societal structures. With such, men and women have not been given equal opportunities for leadership (Kornhauser, 2013). Worth noting is that recent studies reveal significant differences in leadership styles among male and female leaders and that female leaders exercised transformational leadership styles (Mberia & Midigo, 2016)

Women face impediments to their leadership quests and some of these are related to the cultural belief systems. According to Koenig, Mitchell, Eagly & Ristikari (2016) , cultural stereotypes relegates women to subordinate positions where they are viewed as possessing less leadership qualities as compared to their male counterparts. Further, women's domestic responsibilities reduce their opportunities to take positions with management responsibilities as they are responsible for the majority of child-care and household chores (Perrakis & Martinez, 2012).These domestic expectations hold back their progress as they are perceived as being unsuitable for administrative positions. Women are also faced with biases in leadership. They are likely to be viewed negatively when adopting masculine leadership characteristics (Heilman & Parks-Stamm, 2007). When women do remain feminine but perform a male role, they are perceived as too emotional and lack assertiveness (Eagly & Carli, 2007). This means that women leaders face a compromise between being liked and perceived competence. Scrutiny as a barrier to women leadership refers to the act of carefully examining women leaders especially in a critical way. As such, their visibility is heightened due to their scarcity at more senior positions. When women become one of the few that have reached the top, they will be watched closer, and subjected to greater scrutiny resulting in risk aversion (Oakley, 2000). According to Ibarra & Petriglieri (2016), women leaders have to be judged both as a good woman and a good leader. While clothing and appearance generally matter more for women than for men, studies have found that it's actually a disadvantage for a woman to be physically attractive when applying for a managerial job (Wolf, 2013). The other barrier to women's accession to leadership positions is the basic masculine culture that is pervasive in the education sector (Morley & Crossouard, 2015). There seems to be a belief that the only good things are manly while the despicable are feminine. This can only mean that to possess feminine characteristics is directly opposed to success in management. It would therefore be difficult to expect young men and women to respect, follow and look up to female leaders, when from the very beginning of their careers, they have been trained to despise all things that are feminine. It is the apparent collective forces at work in the society that demand women's marginalization.

In Kenya's education sector, women constitute a large majority share of the teaching profession, but are largely underrepresented in educational administration (Davis, 2012). The assertion created here is that despite of the many strategies that have been put into place, women teach and men manage. It has been observed that there are equally as many women teachers as men teachers in Tharaka South Sub County (48.04% and 51.96%, sub county teachers return). However, what is striking is that out of 17 mixed secondary schools, only one is administered   by a woman principal. While this is the case, female students in these schools are in dire need for mentors. This raises the question whether women do not have what it takes to be in leadership or what the issues is that hinders them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women continue to struggle to reach parity in the workplace, constantly hitting their heads on the glass ceiling (Jones & Palmer, 2011). Mate (2013) noted that in as much as the working environment for women in general and in management and senior management roles has changed, there is still evidence of discriminations still existing in their workplaces. Women who perform well in their roles of management find it difficult to negotiate moves in commercial functions. In business women in these positions of leadership negotiate moves in commercial or entrepreneurial functions (Mapolisa & Madziyire, 2012). They are often looked down upon by the society because the society expects them to be good wives, bearing

children and taking care of them. Several factors have been found to militate against women's ascension to leadership.

Leadership as influenced by the society is defined in terms of existing ideologies, customs and practices. Culturally, men and women are assigned roles by the society and these assigned roles influence societal perceptions of leadership (Gaus, 2011). The existence and persistence of stereotypical cultural practices, socialization and biases against women explain the poor representation of women in senior management roles (Shah & Shah, 2012). Domestic responsibilities reduce the opportunities for women to take positions with management responsibilities (Perrakis & Martinez, 2012). Moorosi (2010) found out that women's preference for management positions was narrowed by family responsibilities and that they could not seek promotion early in their careers because they had family commitments. Uneven work-family responsibilities create pressure for working women. They find it difficult to balance their personal and professional lives and therefore are reluctant to take on work responsibilities (Coleman, 2011).

Women leaders are viewed negatively when adopting masculine leadership characteristics (Heilman & Parks-Stamm, 2007). When women do remain feminine but perform male roles, they are perceived as too emotional and lack assertiveness (Eagly & Carli, 2007). This means that women leaders face a compromise between being liked and perceived competence. Wajcman (2013) notes that biases as a barrier to women leadership are no longer based on direct and overt hostility towards women. Instead, they are caused by deep-seated, possibly unconscious, biases about what it takes to perform at the top of financial firms: biases that disproportionally disadvantage women. These barriers are more subtle and therefore harder to identify and tackle than the overt misogyny of the past.

The other barrier to women leadership has been referred to as Scrutiny. This is described as the act of carefully examining women leaders especially in a critical way which heightens their visibility due to their scarcity at more senior positions (Oakley, 2000). According to Ibarra & Petrieglieri (2016), women leaders have to be judged both as a good woman and a good leader. Throughout the world, women become increasingly scarce in the upper tiers of organizations (Heilman, 2012). This has been shown to heighten the visibility and scrutiny of those near the top, who may become risk-averse and overly focused on details and lose their sense of purpose (Ibarra, Ely & Kolb, 2013). In other instances where performance feedback, are conducted, women find obstacles that emanates from the scrutinies they undergo. During such exercises, stereotypes color evaluators' perceptions, subjecting women to double binds and double standards. Research has amply demonstrated that accomplished, high-potential women who are evaluated as competent managers often fail the likability test, whereas competence and likability tend to go hand in hand for similarly accomplished men (Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted cross sectional survey design and used mixed methods of data collection and analyses. The target population included all principals, all women teachers, all heads of department (teachers), all education officers, and all chairpersons of school Board of Management (BOM), all chairpersons of Parents Teachers Association (PTA), all religious leaders and all education trade unionists. Both simple and stratified random sampling was used to come up with the sample population. A sample of 106 respondents was arrived participated in the study. Data was collected by use of questionnaires and interview guides.

To ensure content and construct validity, the researcher worked closely with a team of experts / professionals in areas of educational management and planning to examine the items and to validate their relevance. Before going to the field, the researcher shared the study tools with three experts in the field of education and incorporated their opinion. Catechizing was also used to enhance the accuracy of the instruments. A pilot study was conducted in two schools in the study area to help identify items in the research instruments that could have been ambiguous or badly worded for correction. Data collection tools were distributed by the researcher personally. Data were analysed using SPSS (V.22) for quantitative data and NVIVO (V.8) for qualitative data. Results are presented in tables, charts and verbatim.

RESULTS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION
Demographics

About 29.0% of the women teachers were aged between 35-39 years, 23% were aged between 25-29 years while 11% were aged 40-44 years and 6% of them were aged 45-49 years. Majority of heads of departments, 50% between the age 40-44 years old and those who were 35-39 years old constituted 11 %. A small number, 7% were between 45-49 years of age. Most principals, 43% were between the ages of 35 and 38 years old, 21% were between the ages 39 and 42. Fourteen percent were below 35 years old and 43 and 46 years old for both. A small number, 7% were 47 years old and above.

The results also indicates that 50% of the education officers were between the ages 39 and 42 years old, 30% were between the ages 43 and 46 years old and the other 20% were of ages 47 and above years old. This finding may be possibly explained by the fact that education officers are promoted from their former positions of school heads and deputies. The other category was that of education officers, 30% of ages 43 and 46 and 20% of ages above 47 years. The result further indicates that a majority of the other educational stakeholders, 80% were 45 years and above. The trade unionists were of ages 47 years and above. This shows that as teachers mature in age, they move to other positions perceived to be more prestigious compared to classroom teaching.

TABLE 1. AGE OF RESPONDENTS

Age	Women Teachers		HOD		Principals		Education officers		Educational stakeholders		BOM and PTA	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
25-29	8	23	1	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
30-34	5	14	8	29	3	23	-	-	-	-	-	-
35-39	10	29	3	11	5	38	-	-	1	20	1	8
40-44	8	11	14	50	2	15	5	50	-		3	23
45-49	4	6	2	7	1	8	3	30	2	40	5	38
50 +	-	-	-	-	2	15	2	20	2	40	4	31
Total	35	100	28	100	13	100	10	100	5	100	13	100

Table II shows that a majority of male HODs (57%) had attained a bachelor's degree while 43% of the female too had a bachelor's degree, 43% of the male HODs had a masters' degree and 57% of the female HODs had a masters' degree. Only 2 male principals had attained a bachelor degree and 40% of them had a masters' degree while 60% of the female principals had attained a masters' degree. Results from the Education officers indicated 6(60%) of them had a bachelor's degree and 40% of them had attained a masters' degree. Among the women

teachers 20 (57.0%) of them had attained a bachelor's degree and 15 (43%) had a master's degree.

Table 2. Levels of Education

Respondents	Levels of education	Male		Female		Total	
		F	**%**	**F**	**%**	**F**	**%**
Principals	Bachelor's degree	9	64	0	0	2	100
	Masters' degree	2	14	3	22	5	100
	Total	12	70	3	30	7	100
Education officers	Bachelor's degree	6	60	0	0	6	60
	Masters' degree	4	40	0	0	4	40
	Total	10	50	0	0	10	100
Women Teachers	Bachelor's degree	0	0	20	57	20	57
	Master's Degree	0	0	15	43	15	43
	Total			**35**	**100**	**35**	**100**

Cultural factors impeding women leadership

Culturally, men and women are assigned roles by the society. It is worth noting that some of these assigned roles may influence societal perceptions of leadership (Gaus, 2011). Furthermore, the existence and persistence of stereotypical cultural practices, socialization and biases against women explain the poor representation of women in senior management roles (Shah & Shah, 2012). The responses on cultural beliefs about women leadership are shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3. CULTURAL BELIEFS ABOUT WOMEN LEADERSHIP SCHOOL

Responses from women teachers	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Women are inferior to men	0(0.0%)	7(20.0%)	9(25.7%)	19(54.3%)
Women are not supposed to be highly educated	0(0.0%)	5(14.3%)	8(22.9%)	22(62.9%)
Women do not have what it takes to be leaders	0(0.0%)	9(25.7%)	11(31.4%)	15(42.9)
The place of a woman is not in the public domain	2(5.7%)	10(28.6%)	9(25.7%)	14(40.0%)
Women should not be entrusted with wealth	1(2.9%)	9(25.7%)	4(11.4%)	21(60.0%)
Women should not give instructions to men	3(8.6%)	6(17.1%)	7(20.0%)	19(54.3%)
Women should not address men in public forums	4(11.4%)	8(22.9%)	11(31.4%)	12(34.3%)
Responses from Principals, trade unionists and education officers				
Women are inferior to men	3(11.5%)	11(42.3%)	8(30.8%)	4(15.4%)
Women are not supposed to be highly educated	5(19.2%)	10(38.5%)	5(19.2%)	6(23.1%)
Women do not have what it takes to be leaders	7(26.9%)	9(34.6%)	7(26.9%)	3(11.5%)
The place of a woman is not in the public domain	5(19.2%)	10(38.5%)	4(15.4%)	7(26.9%)
Women should not be entrusted with wealth	1(3.8%)	13(50.0%)	4(15.4%)	8(30.8%)
Women should not give instructions to men	3(11.5%)	14(53.8%)	8(30.8%)	1(3.8%)
Women should not address men in public forums	4(15.4%)	12(46.2%)	2(7.7%)	8(30.8%)

From the women teacher's questionnaire, (54.3%) disagreed that women were inferior to men, with 25.7 % indicating a neutral response to the statement. In comparison with the Principals, trade unionists and education officers, 42.3% agreed that women were inferior to men. This finding indicates that while women teachers believed that they were not inferior to men, the principals, education officers and the trade unionists, who were mostly men, still believed in the traditional roles delineating women to inferior positions in the society. This finding could be explained by an understanding that women teachers may have developed high self-esteem from their educational process and that the responses obtained from the principals, education officers and the trade unionists mirrored the societal beliefs about women. According to a study conducted by Moraga & Anzaldúa (2015), most African women grow up knowing that they are inferior to men and that by so, it is the woman who cooks, and generally sees to it that the house is clean and well kept, and that everything is in its proper place even though the scholar reinstates that in the search for ways of promoting women's emancipation in Africa, the importance of competent women in policy-making positions at all levels cannot be over emphasized. This however was not represented in the responses from the female teachers. It is therefore possible to conclude that the responses of the female teachers represented the ideal situations while that of the principals, education officers and the trade unionists represented the actual cultural belief about the position of women in the society.

On responses regarding whether women are supposed to be highly education from the cultural belief perspective, 62.9% of the female teachers disagreed with the statement while only 14.3% agreed. The responses from the principals, education officers and the trade unionists however indicated that, 38.5% agreed with the statement that women should not be highly educated. Those who disagreed were only 23.1%. Further, about 40.0% of the women teachers, 34.6% of the education officers, principals and the trade unionist indicated that women are not expected to be leaders. These findings lead to an understanding that women teachers value education for women and view them to possess what it takes to be leaders while the principals, education officers and the trade unionist view women from the cultural lenses role of home making and not leadership. A study conducted by Coleman & Glover (2010), indicated that women's domestic roles reduce their opportunities to undertake other responsibilities. Based on their cultural role expectations therefore, they are not expected to be highly educated since this will mean forfeiting their roles as nurturers. It is these cultural role expectations that inform societal beliefs about women leadership.

The study also investigated the cultural beliefs of the participants regarding power distance between men and women. While 54.3% of the women teachers disagreed with the statement that women should not give instructions to men, a majority of the principals, education officers and the trade unionists, 53.8% agreed. Further, 34.3 % of the female teachers disagreed with the statement that women should not address men in public forums, while 46.2% of the principals, education officers and the trade unionists agreed that women should not address men in public forums. These findings indicate that there exists power differences culturally put in place in the study area and perpetuated by the men. If women are not expected to instruct or address men in public forums, then it follows that they cannot be seen as leaders as they cannot lead effectively. Kamau (2010) argues that traditionally the role of a woman was home making and as such are not expected to have capacity to address or instruct men as this will be viewed as insubordination by the men. Similarly, Odhiambo (2010) argues that role expectations make men to view women as incapable of leadership and thus should not instruct or address men in public forums. Further, the cultural belief systems relegating women to none leadership positions are also propagated by men through scrutiny.

According to Oakley (2000), when women become one of the few that have reached the top, they will be watched more closely, keenly and subjected to greater scrutiny resulting in risk aversion. Women through these lenses therefore are not expected to be leaders.

On economic power of women teachers, about half of the principals, education officers and the trade unionists, 50.0%, agreed with the statement that women should not be entrusted with wealth. This was in contrast to the responses received from the women teachers where 60.0% disagreed with the statement that women should not be entrusted with wealth. As a school leader, one is expected to be entrusted with management of financial resources. This finding therefore indicates that the principals, education officers and the trade unionists do not trust women with financial management in their schools. Since leadership is culturally viewed as masculine, responsibilities in leadership are also likely to be masculinized (Morley & Crossouard, 2015).Such responsibilities including financial management skills are thus not expected to be possessed by women. From the focus group discussions and the key informant interviews, it emerged that culturally, women were not expected to appear in the limelight of leadership . In an interview with a female PTA member, it emerged that,

> *Women around this place cannot take up leadership roles with ease...they are called names, branded and even thought to be experiencing gender identity crisis...(5th March 2015)*

The findings from the focus group discussions and the key informant interviews complement the earlier findings from the principals, education officers and the trade unionists that the place of women is not in leadership but in such roles are parenting and caring. The results concur with those of Onsongo (2011), who noted that women identities and roles are not associated with well-paid employment and public management. Further, the Role Congruity theory posits that women are accorded a lower status than men at the family level and as such, women are expected to display feminine attributes, such as being considerate and gentle. These attributes contrast with the masculine attributes traditionally ascribed to leaders, such as ambition and aggressiveness. The theory concludes that incongruity between the roles assigned to men and women and leadership roles produces a prejudice towards women in form of negative assessment as potential leaders (Eagly & Diekman, 2005). It is therefore possible to conclude that women in the study area experience role incongruity in leadership.

Apart from the cultural belief systems on leadership, woman's ambitions as influenced by culture also affect their quest for leadership (Mann, 2009). Ambitions for leadership influence an individuals' strategic positioning for leadership. Table 4 below represents the responses on women and leadership ambitions.

Table 4. Women and leadership ambitions

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Women teachers	9(65.7%)	2(11.4%)	2(17.2%)	1(5.7%)
HODs	0(0.0%)	6(86.2%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)
Principals	20(56.0%)	8(23.1%)	0(0.0%)	7(20.9%)
Education officers	0(0.0%)	2(74.1%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)
BOM& PTA	5(48.7%)	3(33.9%)	1(5.6%)	1(11.8%)
Religious leaders	8(30.2%)	14(48.4%)	0(0.0%)	6(21.4%)
Trade Unionists	0(0.0%)	2(77.0%)	0(0.0%)	1(33.0%)

About 65.7% of the women teachers strongly agreed that culturally women were not supposed to be ambitious while 11.4% of them agreed that women were not supposed to be ambitious and 5.7% of them disagreed that women were not supposed to be ambitious. The results of the women teachers agree with those of HOD's where 86.2% agreed that culturally women were not supposed to be ambitious. This was also true of   principals and Education officers. This demonstrates that women teachers, the principals and the education officers were in agreement that traditionally women were not supposed to be ambitious. This view is supported by a study conducted by Jeon, (2004) which listed factors delimiting women leadership as including lack of motivation and ambition. Considering that women are not expected to be aggressive as per their upbringing, it is possible that they view ambition as aggressiveness and this informed their responses. The PTA and BOM members also agreed that women traditionally were not supposed to be ambitious hence for a long getting woman to the Board of Management in schools had been a difficult process.

The education officers and the other education stakeholders noted that among the Tharaka Community, women were not expected to take up roles of administration since the society could not condone them addressing men during parents meetings. Consequently, it has taken quite some time for women to be accepted to leadership positions by the community. They also noted that this could be one of the reasons barring women from school leadership in the area. In a key informant interview with a member of the PTA, it emerged that

> *When a woman is too aggressive so as to be seen competing with men for leadership…one wonders where the husband is. Such a woman should spend more time taking care of her family and let her husband be the   leader (5th March 2015)*

The results agree with Gaus (2011) who argues that women are looked down upon by society because the society expects too much from them. Worth noting here is that while the limelight appears to be elongated on men in leadership, there appears to be a conspiracy that swiftly relegates women leaders to the background. As theorized by Greyvenstein & Van der Westhuizen (1991) the principle of "tokenism" is one way through which pressure is put on women is isolation, where women managers are always made to be at fault – if they are strong they are regarded as aggressive, if tough are seen to be less feminine, if they are jovial are permissive and if they cry, they are thought to be emotional. In often times, they are deleteriously branded and disregarded (Torchia, Calabrò & Huse, 2011).

CONCLUSION

This paper shows that cultural issues are barriers to women's accession to leadership positions in mixed secondary schools. These cultural factors include the domestic responsibilities assigned to women, gender biases against women, scrutiny from the society and the culture of harassment and masculine mystique. The paper also shows that both men and women are culturally inclined to oppose women leadership in the area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the cultural issues impeding accession of women to leadership positions, leaders should proactively advocate for and on behalf of women for their promotion into leadership positions. The cultural impediments to women leadership could be addressed through

participatory intensive dialogues with the community members. The researcher also recommends further studies in women leadership with an ethnographic methodological focus.

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