

‘OPERATING IN MEN’S SHOES’: CHALLENGES FACED BY FEMALE MANAGERS IN THE BANKING SECTOR OF ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

The under-representation of women in management positions is symptomatic of every known existing organization, and this is a matter of concern, at least when considered in the context of the equal opportunities discourse. Historically, females and males have had different jobs and experiences in almost every society. Everywhere in the world, the workplace is segregated by sex. Gender occupational segregation is one reason why women are not found in significant numbers at the apex of organizations. Notwithstanding the fact that women are making substantial progress within the ranks of management, they are still largely prevented from accessing power and influence at the highest levels. Women are affectionately referred to as the life-blood of any organization and, at the same time, are also known as the ‘Subordinate Sector’. It is difficult to envisage a society or organization without them. On the basis of their contradictory status, the researcher undertook an investigation to investigate the challenges faced by female managers in the banking sector of Zimbabwe. The research explored and established that women managers are sometimes held back in terms of exercise of authority, performance, and career progress as a result of a multiplicity of factors. The persistence of male chauvinism, informed by masculinity and traditional notions of patriarchal system, has been established as the chief culprit that undermines the effectiveness and efficiency of female managers. Finally, this article has shown that, despite the various efforts to promote and empower women, gender equality remains elusive, complex, misunderstood, and fiercely resisted, particularly by men. The feminist strand of liberalism was employed as the main analytical tool. This framework was more useful because it looks for explanations of gender inequalities in the socio-cultural menu. Liberal feminists contend that women suffer discrimination and marginalization due to their biological make-up. They are concerned with sexism and discrimination against women in the workplace. Against this background, the theory, therefore, agitates for the deconstruction of the status-quo that privileges men and recognizes women as human beings equal to men. The abolition of privileges or prejudices against women on the basis of their biological reproductive organ is central to the women’s struggle, in general, and feminists, in particular. The researcher utilized focus group discussions and in-depth interviews in order to elicit and generate qualitative information.

Keywords: Gender; Patriarchy; Marginalization; Occupational Segregation; Feminism; Masculinity

BACKGROUND

For a long time, women had to contend with a plethora of challenges in the execution of their duties. The patriarchal nature of the majority societies militates against women to ascend organizational hierarchy. Most organizations are systematically organized for male supremacy; hence, they are not gender neutral. Women find themselves playing second fiddle to men

because the core values of patriarchy are male domination and control of the perceived weak groups, which are women. Female subjugation and marginalization has been reinforced and perpetuated through the process of gender socialization resulting in women domestication. Premised on androcentricism, women's domestic role is perceived as antithetical to public sphere activities informed by the process of socialization which in turn "elbowed" women out of the educational, political, and macro-economic spheres. Women's participation in the mainstream economy was confined largely to agricultural production as laborers. They were thus excluded from the full entitlements that patriarchy dutifully extended and delivered to men. They also remained furthest from citizenry, which is equally critical to one's ability to access and exercise citizenship rights. This translates women into a property-less, right-less and privatized status (McFadden, 1995).

Sexist and supremacist practices grounded in masculinity, which informs organizational practice, attracted criticism from feminists who rejected the lingering belief that women must retain custodianship of backwardness. They challenged patriarchy and sought to expose it for what it stood for. These dissenting voices agitated for the empowerment of women and the consequent emancipation from the bondage of patriarchal exploitation and domination. This effectively led to the crafting and implementation of some emancipatory and empowering initiatives, such as Affirmative Action programs in the education sector, particularly at tertiary level. Equal opportunities in employment and other pieces of legislation, which prohibited sex-based discrimination, were enacted by the Zimbabwe government. Through these noble initiatives, women gained some form of autonomy and, today, they enter the world of work as equal human beings to men. They also enter the realm of management which, was formally a preserve of men.

While the presence of women in management ushered in some feelings of hope and recognition of women's capabilities and acceptance of women leadership in society, collective assumptions and male customs, such as aggressiveness, domination, discrimination, and selfishness, which seem to inform and dictate practice in management, implied that 'women operate in men's shoes' since the aforesaid customs and practices are not part of this practice of incorporating women in management with patriarchal core values seems to have made life difficult for females in management. Owing to the fact that male chauvinism resists adamantly, the autonomous status of women in relation to career progress, managerial women are likely to face a multiplicity of challenges which might include resistance, strained social relations, devaluation of assertive female behavior, sexual harassment, career stagnation, and isolation. Female managers might have to work twice as hard as their male counterparts and contend with glass ceiling. This concept of 'glass ceiling' refers to the various barriers that prevent qualified women from advancing upward in their organizations into management positions. For the few lucky ones who successfully forced their way into management positions, they might also be discriminated against. Against the background, this study sought to investigate the challenges faced by women in management in the banking sector in Zimbabwe.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Socially and culturally, women and men have tended to assume different roles, duties, and identities in their respective organizations and they often encounter different challenges. Despite having entered the workforce with credentials and expectations similar to those of men, women encounter many obstacles as organizations reflect diverse and gendered realities

of life. Their marginal status has led to the endemic problems of their roles in organizations being constrained and strangled by gender role stereotyping. The persistent stereotyping that associates management with maleness contributes to the resistance of female leadership, discrimination, and a host of other challenges. Women in management positions are therefore held back in terms of exercise of duty and performance. Their career progress is consequently hindered as they usually hit a metaphorical “glass ceiling” which prevents them from proceeding to senior management. Hence, they remained invisible in the upper echelons of organizations. The exclusion of women from upper echelons of banking institutions meant that men continue to behave with impunity and putting paid to the claim that women are as competent as men. Although researchers have concentrated on gender issues, per se, in organizations, very little, if at all, has been done on the experiences of females at the top echelons of organizations. In dealing justly and comprehensively with women’s experiences in an organization, more research needs to be done on what women have experienced and what they are experiencing, highlighting their frustrations, challenges, trials, and tribulations. The study investigated challenges faced by female managers in the banking sector in Zimbabwe. Central to the study was the need to investigate the extent to which gender impacts on the performance of managers. The impact of practices, that is, formal and informal rules and regulations, on managerial women was also examined.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

The study objectives were as follows:

- 1.) To investigate and document the challenges faced by female bank managers in Zimbabwe;
- 2.) To examine the extent to which the challenges impinge on female managers’ performances and career progresses;
and
- 3.) To assess the perceptions and attitudes of subordinates towards female managers.

JUSTIFICATION OF STUDY

Current studies, as well as policy pronouncements by various organizations, show that women have been subordinated everywhere. This appears to confirm the prevailing view that males tend to control dominant and influential positions in the structures of many organizations. While various endeavors and mechanisms have been implemented by many African governments to reduce gender disparities, changes in gender roles and relations remain a cause for concern, particularly for the disciples of the ‘equal opportunity discourse’. A lot of literature on the gendered nature of organizations focuses on the entry of women in organizations. No attempt has been however made to disaggregate information to avoid wholesale generalizations. This study attempts to fill this knowledge gap by specifically looking into the challenges faced by women in the banking sector in Zimbabwe. This is an issue, which the relevant authorities need to address, to ensure that organizations become zones of democracy. More significantly, hopefully this research will necessitate societal restructuring at all levels.

THEORETICAL/CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study is informed by the liberal strand of feminism. This theoretical framework, in collaboration with other strands of feminism, has given rise to a large body of knowledge, which attempts to explain gender inequalities and the subjugation of women. Liberal feminists tend to focus their energies on establishing and protecting equal opportunities for women through

legislation and other democratic means. This theory seeks to achieve the emancipation and empowerment of women through the existing system of bringing about reforms in a gradual way. It is both a theory and a movement which challenges all forms of prejudice in the contexts of patriarchy and capitalism. It agitates and advocates for the recognition of women as humans equal to men and the consequent abolition of privileges and prejudices that follow the possession of any biological reproductive organ (Oakley, 1981). Korda (1974) posits that most men believe and perceive women as mainly concerned with things that are not serious, characterized by a propensity to emotional response rather than thought. Women are also considered to be weak and having limited ambitions. The consequence is that women are elbowed out of decision-making and are “naturally” subordinated to men. The unshackling of women from male domination, as well as restoring their full humanity account for feminist’s preoccupation to fight gender discrimination. There is need for gender equity in economic, social, and political development as pointed out by feminist liberal theory.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employed the qualitative research methodology which, according to Haralambos and Holborn (2000), is interpretive in nature and produces data expressed in words. Respondents who had real experiences as female managers, in as far as genderized organizations are concerned, were used to contextualize the concepts in this research. Focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were used as data collection tools. Five focus group discussions, each made up of five female managers, were conducted specifically to investigate the challenges that faced the managers. Focus group discussions were also employed to assess the perceptions and attitudes of subordinates towards females in management positions. The first focus group discussion was made up of customer service managers, the second comprised of finance and investment managers, the third was composed of operation managers, the fourth by customer relationship managers, while the last, but not least, was constituted by branch managers. The research also employed in-depth interviews to examine the extent to which the challenges facing the female managers impinged on their performance and career progress. Five subordinates, both female and male, and, under the supervision of each and every female manager who participated in the focus discussions, were interviewed. Female managers who participated in this study were later invited to attend a research dissemination workshop. The aim of the workshop was to verify the research results as well as to continue engaging the stakeholders on how best the research results can be used in the efforts of emancipating and empowering women. As expected, the female managers positively deliberated and suggested ways and means to improve the research results. These women who attended the workshop managed to suggest a clear way forward on how the research results can be operationalized in both the central and local governments’ policy environment. Five banks were used as case studies and were as followed: Standard Chartered Bank; Barclays Bank; CBZ; Metropolitan; and Kingdom. All of these banks that were used are based in Harare, Zimbabwe. The study also utilized in-depth interviewing of appropriate official manning the banks. The officials were interviewed individually to complement findings from focus group discussions.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this section, empirical discussion on the challenges faced by female managers in the banking sector is presented.

Views about ‘genderized’ nature of management positions

The majority of the women interviewed highlighted that organizations are not gender neutral. They contended that there was a general disregard for and resistance of female managers in their organizations. One female manager had this to say:

“Though people are gradually realizing that women and men should be given equal opportunities, they accept that and respect male authority easily and constantly”.

Stereotyping was implicated as a major culprit in instances where female authority was demeaned and devalued. There was a general feeling that female managers are there, not by merit, but through unorthodox and other underhand dealings, which include the exchange of sexual favors aided by pro-women policies, such as affirmative action. Another female manager reported that her subordinates regarded her as someone who canvassed for her managerial position. This resulted in her receiving minimum co-operation from her unit as well as resistance if not abuse. She further elaborated that more often than not, female managers are constantly shouted at by their male colleagues for trying to subvert the ‘natural order’.

The majority of women interviewed also pointed out that management is so demanding, that the pressure of work sometimes “dominos” and affects their family and social life. The pressure was attributed to the fact that female managers, generally, have to prove their competence. This meant that they have to work twice as hard as their male counterparts. These women noted that while they work hard to prove themselves, their male counterparts could afford shoddy work but still maintain their positions. The concept of ‘double shift’, which entails women in management positions engaging in full-time paid work outside their homes and taking care of domestic duties put more pressure on these women. The numerous domestic chores that include general housekeeping issues and child care will interfere with management duties for attention. Female managers, as a result, are negatively affected by the double shifts resulting in low performance.

Women in senior management find their work so demanding, particularly towards strategic meetings. They pointed out that they sometimes found it difficult to balance their time between work and family. In the end, they relinquished spending time with children. This was so stressful for these women, since they still have to be mothers but could not provide motherly love. A lady heading the clearing department of one bank said her major challenge was of working into the night. According to her, the nature of her work isolated her from her family and friends, it also absorbed her ‘me time’. In this context, ‘me time’ refers to time for social issues. Owing to this, she felt her work was a necessary drudgery. Sometimes she felt like a prisoner of the corporate world.

The majority of women in senior management lamented how the pressure of work negatively affected their social life. Being a manager has meant that one has to work late into the night and travel constantly, which caused friction in one’s marriage. Husbands usually gave their wives ultimatums, such as choosing between a job and a marriage. These women’s kith and kin

also look up to them, especially if one is the eldest in the family and has a decent or more paying job. Women in management positions, at times, bear the brunt of being left by their husbands, who would cohabit with other women. The pressure applied on women in management from various quarters usually results in divorce. These women find themselves between a rock and a hard place, that is, choosing between a husband and a job. Most of the women interviewed indicated that they could not quit their jobs to please their husbands, since they had careers to nurture. Quitting a job would also enslave these women to their husbands, ultimately plunging their family and kin into abject poverty. One woman put it more aptly by saying that, “Quitting my job would have been my own undoing”.

This ordeal has since been contributed to the stigmatization, which one had to endure at work. The stress in the final analysis affects one’s performance. The majority of managerial women that were interviewed pointed out that they encountered marital problems at some point in their careers because the pressures of work trickled into and impinged negatively on their social life.

Participants in focus group discussions revealed that management gave women high visibility, placing them in the limelight and stripping them of their privacy almost as soon as they become managers. This puts a lot of pressure on these women to become perfectionists, while others become imposters. The challenge of being in the spotlight is that one is compelled to please those who are watching and this either decimates one’s decision-making power or devalues their assertive female behavior. The consequence is that women are taken for granted. Some women in senior management positions also experience male backlash, that is, a more aggressive form of sabotage. A senior manager with CBZ explained that the concept occurs when men who perceive their positions as being threatened by efforts to integrate women into a more senior influential position. It was said to be a protective, yet a destructive response, often directed at women’s competence, working style and knowledge designed to undermine their confidence. It was established that there is a stereotypical label that has been stuck on female managers, which suggests that female managers are easy prey of their subordinates and peers at work. The women who participated in the focus group discussions were of the view that working with people who have misconstrued perceptions or are always suspicious was so boring and had an isolated effect where the female managers would end up avoiding long conversations lest people suspect they would be up to something sinister. This was found to be very de-motivating and denigrating. There were complaints that the realm of management was highly male biased with masculine assumptions and “virtues”, such as aggressiveness, selfishness, domination, and discrimination informing the practice.

The general view in one discussion was that women in management operate in ‘men’s shoes’ because they were never socialized to be aggressive or discriminating. Instead, they learn these attributes, without much success, the moment they are co-opted in the management in order for them to function effectively in that realm. This was found to be a mammoth task, which required almost a complete overhaul of one’s personality. One lady, heading an investment unit of one bank, highlighted that in her department, consultation was highly regarded as feminine and had no place in the unit. Consultations, in this context, refer to a situation when a leader requests the views of workmates before a decision is made. Female

managers just like their male counterparts were also expected to be dictatorial and aggressive to achieve organizational imperatives since consultations were deemed to be a sign of incompetence.

Organizations were also found to be gendered and not gender neutral. This meant that the experiences of men and women in organizations are different and asymmetrical. One female manager described how her self-esteem was undermined upon realization that a male colleague was always questioning her competence. Male chauvinism was viewed as a subtle insurmountable barrier for non-implementation of proposals or suggestions by women. This resulted in the majority of cases non-promotion of women into the upper echelons of banking institutions. Most women opined that there existed a 'glass ceiling' in organizations, a level beyond which it is very difficult for women to rise. One woman could not hide her frustrations and poured out that, "There is nothing as disappointing as working so hard expecting to be promoted yet it takes a long time to be promoted".

Almost all the respondents showed concern at the pace and rate at which women were incorporated into senior management in the banking sector. There was a general feeling that women were routinely excluded from the upper echelons of banking institutions in Zimbabwe. Other women pointed out that the requirements for one to enter senior management exclude genuine female representation at that level. Men were seen as being overprotective of "their territory".

Extent to which the challenges impinge negatively on female managers' performance and career progress

Respondents pointed out that challenges faced by women in management positions incapacitate them since they were held back in terms of exercise of duty and performance. One lady, heading the finance and investment division argued that her performance was once jeopardized when she headed a team of people who were older than her and had been in the bank longer than she had been. These people felt that the job given to her was theirs, hence they developed negative attitudes towards her. They resented her and ensured that everything she suggested was not implemented. They literally sabotaged her. Work relations became so strained such that she could not meet her targets as well as those of the division.

A sizeable proportion of the women who participated in focus group discussions thought that the persistent expectation that they should prove themselves as competent managers placed unnecessary burden and pressure on managerial women. It is this pressure, which ultimately dominos into their social lives and impinges on relations. Consequently, women begin to dread promotions, in some instances, or they risked shirk responsibilities at work. Ultimately, this had negative implications on their career progress.

The majority of the women interviewed noted that the chauvinistic technique of delaying the promotion of women into senior management was most detrimental to female managers' career progress. When promotion fails to materialize, some become demotivated, while others lose hope and move out of organizations.

There was a general feeling that the expectation that women adopt or adapt to the management culture, which is basically males in orientation in terms of assumptions. Customs, such as aggressiveness, discrimination, and domination, usually put a

strain on women's personalities thus interfering with their performances. This was alleged to have rendered them "ineffective" as managers. The marginalization of women led some to feel like "the embattled minority" and the consequences can be severe, as evidenced by one senior manager who chose to leave her position with a standard bank for health reasons related to the efforts in sabotaging her. The poignant metaphor she used to illustrate the consequences was very revealing.

"I had no choice but to leave the bank in terms of personal health notwithstanding the ammunition and excuse it gives male chauvinists to turn around and say women aren't up to it. It's like they define the size of the lion and then crow when you get chewed up"

General perceptions and attitudes of subordinates, peers, superiors towards female managers

Most male subordinates believed that a woman's place is in the home or that women are ineffective as decision makers. The perceptions, coupled with stereotypes of women, suggested that women cannot lead. For example, a middle aged man, under the supervision of a female manager, holds stereotypes of women as emotional and indecisive qualities that are undesirable in the realm of management. Female managers also indicated that, at times, they were not respected or even promoted if upper management felt that employees or clients' stereotypes interfered with their effectiveness. For instance, one subordinate is reported to have said, "We won't be comfortable taking orders from a woman and in any case we won't find her a credible authority".

The dominant image of a woman in most African cultures is that of a wife and mother who is expected to be competent only in the private sphere of life. Management positions are stereotyped as a male domain and, as part of gender conformity, men are most likely to receive positive attitude than women.

However, most women contacted generally accepted that female managers are effective, just like their male counterparts. Some subordinates hailed these women's ability to effectively communicate objectives, deadlines, and any developments which pertain to the work situation. One male manager had this to say about his female counterpart. "That woman is exemplary, supportive and very responsible. I admire her and I believe that she is a strong leader who is able to influence people because she sees through their eyes and feels with them".

A male director of one commercial bank said he believed that female managers in his organization are in those positions on merit and thus deserve to be there. He said that though he was not contemptuous of female authority, he could not universalize his perceptions of female authority because men are not a homogeneous group. He was quoted as having said, "I don't dispute the fact that some of my compatriots are stereotypical when it comes to 'female authority'".

However some subordinates concurred that their female managers were tough, task oriented, and strict people who are pompous. Others said that they actually feared their bosses because they hardly smiled.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study established that women, in the realm of management in the banking sector, contend with a myriad of challenges that emanate from the work situation. The barriers to these women include gender stereotypes, responsibilities to home and family, and organizational practices. There is further evidence from a number of studies that successful managers are believed to have personality traits that are more consistent with male, rather than female stereotypes. On the basis of the responses obtained, one can make a reasonable inference that these women face challenges simply because they are female. The feminist thinking that women suffer discrimination because of their biological make up buttresses this point. Gender stereotypes are one major contributor to the perception that women are inappropriate for managerial tasks and organizational barriers, such as lack of mentoring and training militated against the women's performance.

The research also made a pertinent observation that jobs are generally seen as masculine or feminine. In this context, women's predispositions are antithetical to managerial roles since they lack the traits associated with management, that is, ambition, aggression, competitiveness, and authority. The result is that women in management are not comfortable in conventionally defined leadership roles and some men have trouble-accepting women as managers. It was noted that jobs are generally seen as masculine or feminine and that job applicants are seen as more or less suitable for different jobs, depending upon the applicant's sex. This view corroborates with the findings in this paper that jobs are pervasively segregated by sex. Liberal feminists explain this inequality in terms of differential opportunities between these sexes. This can be attributed to the patriarchal nature of society that has been transferred from wider society into organizations. O'Donnell (1993) supports this notion by arguing that the organizational culture is usually a mirror of the dominant culture in mainstream society. Because these female managers found themselves working in a masculine environment, they felt the pressure to adopt a more masculine role in an attempt to become more credible.

Most recurring challenges faced by women in management positions in the banking sector are those posed by the context within which managerial women operate. Management positions are stereotyped as a male domain and, as part of gender conformity; men are more likely to pursue managerial oriented tasks compared with their female counterparts. Most respondents pointed out that the realm of management was generally male in orientation insofar as it was premised on masculinity assumptions and customs, such as aggressiveness, selfishness, discrimination, and domination. Since these traits do not tally with female typology that generally exalts domesticity and submissiveness, the female managers can be said to be operating in men's shoes. Usually, this alien culture inherent in organizations is antagonistic to the personalities of female managers, resulting in their performances being severely compromised.

Disregard for female authority was said to be one factor that constrained female managers in terms of exercise of duty in most organizations. This is evidenced by responses such as "There is a natural disregard for 'female authority' and whereas 'male authority' is instantly respected and accepted, women struggle to have their authority accepted".

This seemingly deliberate contempt of female ability and authority throttles their performance because usually where authority is demeaned, the manager is given minimal co-operation. This also negatively affects their career progress because

of the positive correlation between performance and career progress. The demeaning of female authority generally stems from societal sex-role stereotyping. Stereotyping can be conceptualized as being synonymous with anaesthetization, which implies deadening of the women's capabilities that makes repression and manipulation by men possible. The socialization process should also be seen as the 'seed bed' of stereotyping and gender discrimination in organizations. Hence, Althusser, cited in Haralambos and Holborn (2000), is justified in his agitation for the problematization of underlying visible structures. He further notes that there is no practice, except by and in ideology, such as the 'separate spheres ideology', which domesticates women and 'publicizes' men. This was implicated as a major contributing factor to the challenges faced by female managers in the banking sector. Owing to the fact that typification is embedded on the existing knowledge in society, it is not surprising that inequality between sexes is perpetuated. Feminist epistemology, which is grounded in its clamor that all knowledge hitherto has been androcentric and male biased, seeks to decenter and deconstruct the existing knowledge because it has significantly and successfully contributed to the "otherization" of women in society. Liberal feminists argue that what is regarded as universal reality is in fact a one sided view from a male vantage point, which situates men as masters of the real world. However, they concur with Foucault (2006) who asserts that there is no one truth hence they support this theorization of deconstructing existing phalocentric knowledge systems which are contemptuous of female leadership. The continued marginalization of women does not augur well, particularly with the discourse or principles that underpin the concept of sustainable development. The concept principally agitates and advocates for incorporation of groups considered marginalized, especially women and children. Any development intervention or process that fails to integrate these marginalized groups is considered to be ill-informed and a travesty of justice. There is, therefore, greater need for the integration and promotion of women in development and other facets of life.

Other than being managers at work, women still have to be mothers and wives. They have a dual responsibility. This study found out that sometimes the pressure of work 'dominos' negatively and affects the female managers' social life. Some of these management positions require one to work late night shifts, attend lengthy meetings which extend into the early hours of the morning, and required to travel constantly. The consequences of such increased workloads and pressures strained on the social relations and, in some cases, marriages. Menon (1998) suggests that strained social relations are generally dispiriting for women, particularly those in positions of authority and higher responsibility in organizations. Taking into cognizance the fact that that management is so demanding and that it gives women high visibility, it seems it exert immense pressure on these women to be 'perfectionists'. This pressure oscillates between the world of work and the social world resulting in stressed managers, whose performance may be well below expected standards and whose aspirations are limited.

Culturally, a woman should execute her duties irrespective of her 'other' responsibilities 'elsewhere'. As a result of their dual responsibilities, women have a tendency of shirking responsibilities as a way of coping with the pressures and preserving social relations. This corroborates with what Gaidzanwa (1998) noted in her analysis of how female academics cum-administrators in the University of Zimbabwe fared as they tried to juggle their time between work and social life. The attempt by these women to juggle excessive workloads and domestic responsibilities led to misconceptions and criticism regarding their commitment to organizational goals. Gaidzanwa also noted the resentment against female university administrators in departmental, faculty and senate meetings. Resentment against female bank managers was also manifested

in the banking sector through the exclusive behavior of male colleagues. It was noted that men in management positions engaged in making a “whole new range of decisions either in the pub or during weekend activities from which females are excluded.” However, Oakley’s (1981) view contrasts with that of Gaidzanwa. She opined that women’s dual roles have nothing to do with their performance since women are well able to manage these roles. Her argument is hinged on the idea that women outperform men at the workplace because they normally work twice as hard as their male counterparts in their bid to prove themselves. Inasmuch as women are not machines, the reality is that at one point or another, they encounter strained social relations because of increased workloads. The tight grip of traditional and cultural practices of patriarchy over women needs to be reversed because it has some negative implications, such as poor performance or career stagnation. Based on the cultural limiting factors, postmodern feminists agitate for departure from traditionalism and urges societies to embrace modernity or postmodernity since “we” live in a postmodern world, a world of “avante gardism”, where diversity is celebrated.

Work exemplifies the contradictions of the paradox of gender equality. For example, the banking sector is said to have a large number of female employees, yet their participation and/or presentation in senior management is certainly not commensurate with the numerical reality. This is evidenced by the ‘womanless’ boards of these institutions. Davidson and Burke (1994) opine that organizations have a ‘glass ceiling’ level beyond which it is impossible for women to rise in the organizational hierarchy. This inequality can be attributed to male chauvinism, which places subtle, yet insuperable barriers on the career part of female managers. Successful career women are a threat to men’s power. That is why they make sure that vocal women are under ‘control’ and silenced the moment they are co-opted into top management. Men are so overprotective of their territory, which why management has literally remained male orientation. It should be noted that despite the presence of women in management, their impact in changing policy is slight because their numbers do not permit them to effect any significant change. Ford (2000) concurs with this statement as she highlights that in the Canadian House of Assembly, it is almost impossible for the culture of parliament to change because the numbers of women are so insignificant. Hence, their impact is minimal in terms of any reforms in the culture of parliament. This explains why, at this point in time, the culture of parliament remains male in orientation. This situation is similar to what is obtaining in most organizations, where women in the realm of management ‘operate in men’s shoes’. It is referred to as “men’s shoes” because the realm is an already established one that caters for aspirations of men. Women are only required to adapt to this alien culture and their insignificant numbers would not have an impact on the operation of organizations. Discrimination of the minority by the majority is therefore inevitable. That is why radical feminists advocate for an exit route out of patriarchal systems because the contribution of women is not recognized and is negligible amongst men.

Some respondents in this study were livid about the rate at which women were incorporated in the upper echelons of banking institutions. It was established that sometimes the requirements for one to assume directorship for instance, limit, if not largely preclude genuine female representation at that level. Women generally felt that they were routinely excluded from top management. This deliberation qualifies the assertion that there is a ‘glass ceiling’ for women in organizations. The ration of women to men in one institution was said to be one to nine (1:9), evidence of stark gender disparity in top management. Respondents noted that the exclusion of women from senior management has been calculated and deliberate

because organizational cultures are not unconsciously gender blind. This is sad because it is happening in post independence states. Although feminists dispute that traditional and colonial patriarchal institutions in mainstream society are still very pervasive in organizations, the rate at which women assume directorship in the banking sector is highly demoralizing, to say the least. It limits the aspirations of women who apparently feel that their potential is not fully utilized. Their ambitions then die a natural death. McFadden (1995) and other feminists are, therefore, justified in their rejection of the official orthodoxy that the liberation struggles in third world countries resulted in a general emancipation of women because the status of women has changed in theory and not in practice.

Although policies, such as affirmative action, and legislation, such as equal opportunities in employment, have been crafted with the aim of emancipating women from the subservient position, they seem to have had a minimal gain, particularly for women, because of the cultural demands on them and also because of a lack of institutional mechanisms, which ensure that these and other interventions are operationalized. Civic organizations, such as the Women's Trust, whose main thrust is to prove to society that 'women can do it' are also instrumental in unshackling women from bondage of patriarchal domination. However, while the efforts of these organizations should be commended, their expedition may not yield much benefit because the context within which these women operate undermine their performance. The women in patriarchal society operate within an alien culture since they are regarded as second class citizens. The problem of gender inequality needs to be reversed in the process of socialization, as agitated for by feminists. Assuming that one is born in a tabula rasa state and that primary socialization is the most important phase in the process of socialization, it is more meaningful to 'fill' the blank slate of an infant with ideologies of equality, rather than teach them inequality when they are young and then attempt to 'unlearn' this when they are adults. Apparently, women in management operate in "men's shoes" because of the flawed socialization process.

This study was aimed at establishing the challenges faced by female managers in the banking sector in Zimbabwe. A multiplicity of challenges, such as stereotyping, existence of a metaphorical 'glass ceiling', which prevented women from proceeding to upper echelons of organizations, loneliness, male chauvinism, tokenism, and devaluation of assertive female behavior were noted as holding managerial women back in their exercise of duty and career progression. This was seen to be highly demoralizing. Tradition and culture were said to be the 'seed bed' of all these impediments in female managers' work life. The transposition of society's 'flawed' mainstream culture, which is generally contemptuous of women into the world of work, was implicated as the main reason for sex role stereotyping therein. Departing from traditionalism and embracing modernity, as advocated for the modernization theorists, is critical if women are to enjoy their full humanity. Revamping the socialization process by way of reversing gender roles would go a long way in ensuring that equality informs practice. The reversal of gender roles is expected to deliver a level playing field, rendering the concept of managerial women operating in an alien culture obsolete.

CONCLUSION

Women are a very important component in the society. Their contribution to the society, in terms of reproducing the society, biologically and socially, as well as their contribution to the economy, directly or indirectly, should not be overlooked. This

study revealed that managerial women in the banking sector indeed contend with a host of challenges which, if not interrogated and addressed would militate against the attainment of organizational goals. Gender discrimination is a serious impediment to the career progression of women, in general, and national development, in particular. This needs to be done away with by having a high assessment of women's values and mainstreaming gender issues into organizational policies so as to reform some aspects of organizational culture. This could help the corporate culture to create conducive environments, which minimize its potential of being a performance barrier while maximizing the culture's potential of enhancing performance. The incorporation of women, in all spheres of development, is a noble idea and right step towards fulfilling the major tenets of sustainable development, especially its requirement for gender parity as espoused in the Beijing protocol of 1995. The holding, in relation to gender state that all human beings are equal, must live and be respected equally with equitable access to all resources and opportunities that society offers. This calls for the creation of equal opportunities for both women and men at all levels of decision making , more importantly in the upper echelons of organizations. This study acknowledges the state's effort to create equal opportunities in employment, through the 'harmonious' labor practices. The Labour Act, Chapter 28:01 specifically part two, section five, is clear on the protection of employees against gender discrimination. However, the objectives of this legislation may not be realized in the absence of institutional mechanisms, which ensures that it is operationalized or implemented to the minutest detail. Owing to the fact that the number of women in the policy-making echelons of banks is highly negligible and also unproportional to their presence in the sector, in general, their impact in reshaping policies is slight. Moreso, there is not enough assurance that women's issues are given the attention they deserve at the highest levels. Apparently, the ascension of women into directorships occurs at a very slow pace. This study, therefore, recommends co-opting women into top management positions of the banking institutions at an increased pace and rate.

RECOMMENDATION

This study also recommends that all female managers become or remain solvent and sovereign by maintaining their competence and professionalism in order that they deconstruct male chauvinism in organizations. Having noted that, stereotyping has been largely implicated as the prime cause of the challenges faced by female managers. This study recommends that organizations incorporate the art of appreciation and acknowledgements in their value systems so that stereotyping is done away with. It is important to understand that the experience of women in organizations situated in an unequal society have not been pleasant. This necessitates societal restructuring and, for this to be effective, meaningful, and sustainable, there is needed to go back to basics. This study recommends that the adult generation embrace a paradigm shift in the socialization of children. Rather than perpetuating inequality through the separate spheres ideology, it would be preferred if they were taught that boys and girls are equal. This is the only hope for a cultural transformation.

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