Possible barriers to the advancement of women to leadership positions in the education profession

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In a previous article we discussed, in detail, the problem of this study, its aim, methods used, its limitations, and the first five of twelve barriers that were perceived to be obstacles to the advancement of women to leadership positions in the education profession, in particular, and the workplace, in general. To avoid repetition, the issues already discussed can be read as background information in the previous article. This article is devoted to the discussion of the last seven barriers that were also identified as constituting some of the hurdles women have to overcome before they are promoted to senior positions in the field of education.

The disadvantages women are subjected to appear not to have anything to do with the requirements for positions of leadership, except only to perpetuate a false perception that women lack the personality and the experience needed when faced with tough situations. Challenging situations demand unwavering decisions and actions taken by any person possessing qualities such as determination, fairness, confidence, honesty, assertiveness, discipline, steadfastness, decisiveness and aggressiveness. In putting the problems faced by women into perspective, Wisker (1996:90) pertinently argues that "women are under-represented in higher and middle management positions in higher education, even in the current post-feminist climate when many people claim there is no need to assert that equality must continue to be striven for." The rest of this article focuses on the following barriers which represent faulty perceptions of the true positions regarding women:

1. Poor self-image: which is a factor attributed more to women than to men;
2. Lack of assertiveness: as a habit associated with women than men;
3. Less career orientation: as a sign of less interest in women as leaders;
4. Less confidence: as an argument that women, unlike men, generally lack the will to achieve;
5. Poor performance: a myth used as an excuse for employing less women in demanding occupations;
6. Discrimination: as a sign of low interest in the recruitment of women into leadership positions; and
7. Demotion: as a form of punishment thought to suit women better as they are perceived to be lazy and arrogant.

In South Africa, the problem of very few women in leadership positions came more to the foreground after the advent of the new political dispensation. It surfaced more and more as the country's political landscape became gradually normalised. As the problem grew and became more and more conspicuous, an attempt to deal with it in the form of a Commission for Gender Equality was undertaken. This approach should be seen as constituting only one of the ways, at present , through which this problem is being officially tackled. With regard to the previous era, apartheid education was one of the hottest issues that preoccupied most of our attention, and this happened to the neglect of such important issues as gender equality.

Some of the burning issues around apartheid education were equal education for all, compulsory education for all, the extension of distance education to include teacher education, the introduction of new models for the greater management of education for the purposes of institutional autonomy, the provision of more school buildings, the provision of learning materials, the unacceptably high drop-out rates, the poorly managed teacher education sector together with a technikon education and university education that lacked articulation, plus a host of other issues unrelated to the issue of equal opportunity for women as leaders in the work place or the education profession. In putting this matter into perspective, Smyth (1993:73) points out that "we now have fewer women heads of educational institutions than we had in the first two decades of this century".

Consequently, Tsoka's study should be seen as one of the trailblazers in South Africa, because even now it is still alleged that "society has different rules for women and men" (Ramagoshi, 2001:18). Unfairness still takes place despite the view that, "social equality is one feasible organising principle for shaping the quality of life and circumstances of living of individuals and groups in society, as well as for structuring all human relations." (Gil, 1990:xviii). The argument of this article is that, women who aspire to become leaders should be given equal treatment. This means that their applications for any promotion, should receive equal attention and consideration, that is, this should be done without discrimination based on unrelated issues. Alternatively, let women who aspire to become leaders be assessed in the same manner as their men counterpart. In other words, equal treatment forms the main objective that this article wishes to enhance if not achieve. Having stated the above views, this article will start by discussing poor self-image as a possible barrier against women advancement to leadership positions.

Poor self-image as a barrier to women advancement to positions of leadership in the education profession

The term self has two distinct meanings, namely, the self as an object and the self as a process. The self as an object has to "do with people's attitudes about themselves, their picture of the way they look and act, the impact they make on others, their traits and abilities, their foibles and weaknesses" (Morgan, King & Robinson, 1981:531). The same authors again point out clearly that "the second set of meanings relates to the psychological processes which are the executive functions, the processes by which the individual manages and copes, thinks, remembers, perceives and plans" (Morgan *et al.*, 1981:531). The forgoing descriptions regarding what the concept self is, are in short, attempting to explain how in the course of time, a person comes to perceive himself or herself. Fairly, these descriptions seem to represent a perfect explanation of how a person's self-concept is constituted or comes into being. Conversely, they explain clearly that a person's self-concept is a direct consequence of the developmental processes and experiences she or he had encountered, or was exposed to, or had interacted with, or was associated with as the person was engaged in trying to forge relationships with the various elements that constitutes the environment in which the person is living.

In a similar vein, the type of education a person receives determines to a very large extent whether the person's self-image will be positive or negative. However, it is also quite important to note that, education whether informal, non-formal or formal is a product of the prevailing cultural traditions, customs, stereotypes, prejudices and biases of that specific society. In other words, through education a person is made to acquire his or her culture, while at the same time his or her self-image is also being determined, shaped and developed. Like education which is a life-long process, the processes of determining, shaping and developing a person's sense of identity and self-image starts from birth and only stops after death. A good self-image engenders a positive attitude that is very essential to living an independent, productive and responsible life. Consequently, the role of a good edu-

cation should be to equip the individual with the knowledge and skills that will empower him or her to be able to achieve a positive self-image.

Since education is but one form of conditioning, it poses no difficulty therefore, "to understand why women tolerate social relations which subordinate their interests to those of men" (Grogan in Ouston, 1993:28). To crown it all, it is also logical to argue that, the poor self-image the women have of themselves is not something they were born with, but on the contrary, it is a point-of-view they were culturally educated to respect and uphold. In other words, good leadership as a skill, is not a gender specific attribute, but it is a developed capacity. Unfortunately for the women, education which is expected to play a liberating role, has taught them to accept and practise what society expects of them at the expense of what they aspire. Of interest here is the fact that, sometimes instead of liberating, education can also condition the mind to perceive issues in a particular way, a way that may even be oppressive and degrading to one's dignity. In this context, the role of a conservative education is to impart the accepted, practised and cherished culture to the new generation despite its oppressive tendencies. Thus, "a woman behaves in a certain way because she is brought up to believe that society expects her to behave that way. That does not in anyway imply that she is weaker or inferior than men" (Llewellyn-Jones, 1990:15).

All societies are expected to socialise their youth into the existing cultural life. Again, new members from a foreign culture are also expected to conduct themselves in accordance with their new cultural demands, otherwise, the possibility of their being rejected, isolated, hated or ostracised is always present. Man, as we know, is a gregarious being that is born into a family, and thrives better when living in a community with others through such important institutions as the marriage, family, friendship, kinship, clan, tribe, community and the nation. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the continued existence of these socially significant institutions is contigent on the strict observation of the principles of mutual respect, trust, loyalty, honesty, understanding and love by the individuals who constitute them. In this context, this article, argues that, women as members of our democratic society also deserve equal treatment because the constitution unequivocally stresses that "everyone has the right to fair labour practices" (Act 108 of, 1996 of the Constitution). Therefore, not men only should be promoted to leadership positions, but women also need to be lifted out of their traumatic situation through appointment to senior ranks.

Ideally, a situation were women are treated equally like everyone else is truly uplifting, positive, morally relieving and spiritually enhancing, cleansing and liberating. It is not only desirable, but it is also welcome; the more so that in South Africa women especially, constitute the largest part of the society. In giving women equal treatment, society will also be honouring the imperatives embodied in the principle of social justice whose injunctions are that; "every individual or social group has equal intrinsic value, hence, is entitled to equal labour, civil, social, educational and economic rights, liberties and treatment under equal constraints" (Gil, 1992:xviii). Thus, women as equal members of our society and also as mothers of the nation, deserve to be given chance and scope to become leaders too, especially, in the field of education where they excel in the art of guiding, leading, assisting and nurturing the youth to become what they could and ought to become if properly educated.

To crown it all, Cambell (1992:15) also points out that "largely because of their role as mothers women have become the guarantors of a deeper humanity, carrying a sense of community, of belonging, of selflessness and care." Adding indirectly to this, Llewellyn-Jones (1992:5) argues that "not only does a woman's psychological make up differ from a man's, although exactly how much this is due to the prevailing cultural attitudes is not clear, but quite obviously a woman is anatomically different." Literally, this means that women have a different but specific role to play in the field of leadership, and more specifically in the education profession where they belong by nature,

since they are child raisers.

In summing up, the problem of women under-represented in leadership positions seem to be an international one, because Khan in Tichy (1996:6) reveals the fact that "every country for which data are available, the proportion of women in paid employment is smaller than the proportion of men." Research studies by Ouston (1993:2) indicates that "just under half of the primary schools in England and Wales have a woman headteacher. In secondary schools around one in six schools has a woman head." On the other hand, in the Gauteng Province, Tsoka (1999:48) discovered that "7.8% of men and 3.3% of women are in top management positions, clearly indicating that male respondents are twice the number of female respondents in top management positions." Gqubule (2001:18) avers by stating that "white males, who account for 13% of the work force, made up 50% of management positions, the labour department says." In another study by Shakeshaft in Ouston (1993:47) it was observed that "while women are the majority of teachers in most of the classrooms in the United States, they do not hold the majority of the positions of formal leadership." This article wishes to point out that this problem is universal in nature and should not be seen as only a South African one, as Tsoka (1999) also points this out in her study. To sum up, the following are attributes associated with the poor self-image of the women, and they centres around the following perceptions:

• that women lack role-models and peers in leadership positions;
• that women's careers in their majority are of an unplanned nature thus contributing negatively to their self-image; and that
• women and men have different career paths.

To remedy this problem Tsoka (1999:69) recommends that "society should regard the work of female managers just as valuable as that of male managers." Finally, Ouston (1993:16) also advises that "getting women into top jobs demands strategic planning, for it does not just happen through goodwill or good intentions." In other words, more than one approach is needed to reduce or arrest the existing inequalities in leadership positions in the education profession. Furthermore, it has become not only imperative, but really pressing to deliberately create more suitable role-models in leadership positions for the women to emulate than is the case at present. In this respect, Tsoka (1999:104) recommends that "training centres should be established with a bias towards empowering more women in managerial position." Interestingly, in Sudan a special University has been established to cater only for women. Zimbabwe too, has decided to establish a University as from 2002 that will be dedicated only to the upliftment of women. In other words, the issue of women empowerment is taken seriously in certain countries. This should be seen as a good example to emulate.

In the final analysis, what also needs to be done is to redefine and renegotiate the role and function of women with regard to how they can positively contribute to society's prosperity through positions of leadership in the education profession. This demands for intervention in the form of mentoring, workshops, seminars and in-service training that are geared specifically at empowering women, and especially those that have the potential to make it to the top as leaders in the field of education. Directly put, "equal education opportunities, including equal education standards, should be available to all" (Education Renewal Strategy, 1992:15). Hence, this article advocates for a positive attitude towards women who aspire to become leaders. In other words, women who want to become leaders should be encouraged, motivated and supported, rather than held back only because of negative perceptions. In short, this article pleads for a change of mindset in this regard. The next barrier is that of lack of assertiveness.

Lack of assertiveness as a barrier to women advancement to positions of leadership in the education profession

In the words of Grogan (1996:25) "women must make their demands and their claim along with others; make them powerfully and passionately. Only then can discrimination and stereotyping be effectively eliminated." In another vein, Ouston (1993:9) laments the fact that

"women have difficulty in developing an authoritative voice, they tend to be modest about their achievements and knowledge and to only speak assertively when concerned about others." Perhaps the women's lack of assertiveness on issues affecting them is a result of their inclination to be caring, loving, tolerant, sympathetic, patient, accommodative, and passionate even when events and circumstances demand otherwise. Leadership is a taxing job, for amongst other things it demands alertness, decisiveness, curiosity, adventure, daringness and assertiveness. In support, Back and Back in Armstrong (1991:27) define assertiveness as "standing up for your own rights in such a way that you do not violate another person's rights. Expressing your needs, wants, opinions, feelings and beliefs in direct, honest and appropriate ways." It is alleged women lack this very important aspect of leadership, hence, it is regarded as one of the barriers that count against them when candidates are considered for promotions.

McCulloch (1984:14) further brings to this debate a disturbing observation which says "when the roles of women are considered in social life, they are characterised as passive and emotional." In other words, this perception boils down to the simple conclusion that women are driven by emotions and passiveness instead of such important leadership ingredients as decisiveness, honesty, steadfastness, fairness, curiosity and adventure. Women, it seems, are less curious, adventurous and inquisitive to explore new terrains. In this context, Waitley's (1996:1) description appears to suit women more, when he says "perhaps it's inherent in human nature to seek the security of living and working in a known environment, but in order to achieve success today you simply can't remain in your carefully constructed comfort zone." Meaning that, unless women are adventurous like most successful men, they cannot hope to make a meaningful dent into the leadership positions. It must be noted that it is only those who take risks in life, who stand a better chance of succeeding, because in this world one cannot achieve anything without an effort. Before listing any assumptions commonly held about why women lack assertiveness, it is also advisable to point out that, buried within such assumptions are not scientific claims, but only deep-rooted biases against women. Such biases are created mainly by powerful decision makers who happen to be male. The assumptions that regard women as lacking assertiveness are the following:

- women tend to be aggressive instead of being assertive;
- women tend to be apologetic when they are expected to be decisive;
- women become easily angry when they should be calm;
- women are inclined to wonder when they should be focussed; and
- women tend to become negative when they should be positive.

Truly, all these indicate that men and women are not the same, but exist as they do in order to complement one another in whatever they do. By complementing each other they stand a better chance of achieving more than if the opposite was the case. In the family as well, the father is perceived as the tough one while the mother as the soft one. Thus, when the going becomes tough the father is expected to take over, but when things are moderate and easy going the mother remains in-charge. The ideal situation therefore should be, where a man is made the principal, then let his deputy or vice- principal be a woman and *vice versa*. In this way, the left hand will be given a chance to wash the right hand and *vice versa*. Anyway, this example accords well with human experience as highlighted in the institution of marriage, an institution which is solely responsible for bringing about the family. To this view Graig (1994:504) instructively adds that "women respond in more detail than men, and they seemed to be more deeply involved with interpersonal relationships. Women consider reciprocity most important in their real friendships, while men tend to choose their friendship on the basis of similarity." Seen thus, a woman and a man constitute what is best described as opposite forces; forces with the potential to attract rather than repel each other.

Ideally, a situation where a man and a woman are found to be co-operating in order to achieve cherished goals is promising and encouraging indeed; and it is a situation that augurs well for our future. A situation like this appears to be crucial towards the resolution of the management problems that the new South Africa is increasingly encountering and experiencing in the education profession, and also at the place of work. Thus, extraordinary measures in the form of the equity bill had to be legislated in order to correct unfair labour practices still perpetuated against women and others that are also marginalised when it comes to the issue of accessing positions of leadership. The need to create a situation where women and men are treated equally as the constitution also demands, has in fact become overdue. Like in the family, where the role of both mother and father is very essential for the achievement of harmony and progress, the institutions of learning also need combined leadership skills of men and women to prosper and develop harmoniously.

South Africa also needs such a partnership in its institutions of learning if maximum peace, security and harmony are to eventuate like it is the situation in families where equality, fairness, co-operation and collaboration exist between males and females. To reiterate, an ideal arrangement would be, where the principal is a man the deputy principal should be a woman and *vice versa*. For this arrangement, although uncommon, seems to have merit as an approach for addressing problems South Africa is experiencing in many of its institutions of learning, especially that here leadership is still traditionally perceived "as some sort of dominance or control over subordinates ..."(Van Niekerk, 1993:153). Thus, a balanced and sound governance structure of leadership that is representative of all affected is desirable, if the potential this country is harbouring, is to be maximally unlocked for the benefit of all its inhabitants.

To sum up, with regard to the statement that says "women cannot be assertive in leadership situations that demand it." Tsoka (1999:88) discovered that "26.5% of women strongly disagree whereas 12.7% of men also disagree strongly with the statement". These statistical figures, although positive, are however, so low that they do not make a significant dent on the prevailing perception about the problem of women lacking assertiveness. Nevertheless, Ouston (1993:6) encouragingly remarks that, "research suggests that there are differences between men and women in their management style and that women have an important and different contribution to make to the management of the school." In the end, success in this regard will be achieved through positive interventions by the education authorities with the active support and encouragement of the government. This article is concerned with the lack of assistance the women are getting from those in authority and have the actual power to do so. The next barrier is about the almost non-existence of career orientation facilities for women.

Less career orientation as a barrier to women advancement to positions of leadership in the education profession

To begin with, the words of Camerer in the Citizen (2000:12) are pertinent when she says "those women who break through the glass ceiling have succeeded either because someone gave them the opportunity to test their abilities, or they were courageous, or visionary, or naive, or took a view that they will redefine who they are in society." This again indicates the degree of struggle, coupled with determined effort, dedication and courage successful women had to endure or wage before they could make it to the top positions. In the face of the many barriers women have to overcome, it must be borne in mind that, women in reality, have practically no career orientation opportunities available to them. Above all, they are also experiencing a pronounced absence or lack of appropriate role-models. Hence, Linton (1964:6) instructively agues that "babies who are not loved don't live." In other words, for women to prosper, society must do more to unshackle them from traditional beliefs, prejudices, stereotypes and biases that still regard women as inferior beings fit only to stay at home as housewives and mother.

Consequently, career orientation, as an important programme of learning is based on the full understanding that "man has no instincts, at least in the sense in which we use that term when we talk about

insect behaviour" (Lewis, 1992:41). Put more succinctly, education is the key, without it, life is dark and finally restricted. Thus, the preparation of women for meaningful and responsible participation in positions of leadership that are now offered by the new constitutional and educational order is imperative if they are expected to fulfil a constructive role in the improvement of the living standard of the nation. To this end, the words of Mbowane (2001:18) are educative when she argues that "what we should ask is were these women given the support, training and exposure they needed to do their respective jobs accordingly, or were they just pushed out to satisfy one man who did not like working under the leadership of a woman?" The real answer according to Tsoka (1999:70) is that "there is presently no institution that caters for the leadership skills women actually need to become successful leaders."

In the traditional African culture, a culture that in some parts of the country is fast disappearing, while in others, e.g. Eastern Cape, is pursued with much vigour; where there are different indigenous schools for both boys and girls. Members of each sex-group are taught separately how to conduct themselves in future when they will be expected to fulfil specific roles as either husbands or a wives. Thus "by the time children have passed a year of life, definite behavioural differences between boys and girls can be observed, due in part at least to differential handling by parents" (Blanchard & Blanchard, 1984: 155). In this context, Raum in Duminy (1966:98) pertinently points out that "indigenous education is characterised by a decided ritual orientation." In fact, in as far as African culture is concerned, it is a taboo for a woman to lead a society, and there are even supporting idioms and proverbs strictly on this specific issue. Thus, each sex-group is taught and prepared separately for its future roles in terms of the curriculum that was specifically designed for that purpose. As a consequent women were taught to submit themselves to their husbands and to men in general, while men were taught that they are heads of their families and also leaders of their societies. These different curricular programmes prove that traditional indigenous culture was more sensitive to the needs of both sexes. Hence, different institutions were established to cater for both the needs of males and females by means of orientating them in respect of the roles society expects them to fulfil in the future.

In this way, the entire members of the traditional society were educationally conditioned to accept their respective roles without hassles, thereby making it possible for society to ensure that peace and harmony are easily maintained and perpetuated. However, a careful analysis of the role women play in education today, suggests that they too, are by nature equally equipped to fulfil any of the roles that are available in the education profession. Women can even do this by occupying the very senior positions that are offered by education, because naturally they are endowed with the gift or art of assisting, guiding and nurturing the child. Therefore, stereotypes, prejudice and biases should not be used to prevent society from seeing women as being equally endowed with ability and capability to lead, plan, organise, make-decisions, control and co-ordinate resources to achieve institutional goals.

As such, negative perceptions about women should not be seen as resembling the truth but as only constituting "our constructions of the world; constructions which have become deeply embedded in our social identities and engagements" (Salmon, 1995:8). Hence, it is not surprising also, that one still finds that many orthodox churches are, generally, still in the habit of preaching the gospel that women must submit themselves to the authority of their husbands. In support, Torrington and Weightman (1989:76) and McBurney and Hough in Ouston (1993:8) also reveal that "in education women tend to get into cross curricular, pastoral and support activities rather than in straight line management jobs which lead to senior posts." In this regard, it is commonly assumed, therefore, that:
- men and women have different career paths;
- men and women differ in their perceptions regarding leadership as men always want to lead women, while women tend to enjoy

being submissive to the men; and that
- women are a weaker sex than men and as such need society's protection.

To eradicate this perception and its influence, Tsoka (1999:104) recommends that "support programmes for women in the corporate world be introduced as another positive move in the direction of improving gender-sensitivity. Such programmes should be accelerated in order to specifically empower the women to access leadership positions easily and more rapidly." In other words, a deliberate effort which aims to develop promising women to progress to positions of leadership in the education profession must be made, because nothing happens on its own in life, hence, we talk about causes and their effects. The next barrier is that of less confidence.

Less confidence as a barrier to women advancement to positions of leadership in the education profession
According to Powney and Weiner in Ouston (1993:9) "confidence is the key to becoming and remaining a manager." However, the only real way in which one could better understand how the concept confidence operates, is by observing how an individual who is convinced that he or she possesses the necessary know-how, and also believes in his or her abilities, and therefore has self-confidence, performs specific functions when called upon to do so. In support Grogan (1996:165) avers that "the behaviour of a leader does not constitute leadership until it is perceived to do so by an observer." In this respect, it could be said that, confidence is married to performance, for through performance one is able to demonstrate his or her knowledge and skills. The implication is that, action speaks louder than words. Meaning that the taste of the pudding is in the eating. In other words, confidence is manifested by the ability to perform rather than to talk. Briefly, confidence as a character, is perceived to constitute a perfect example of what a positive minded leader can accomplish through performance.

Consequently, confidence is important in leadership because performance is based on it. Confidence actually drives performance for where there is no confidence there is no hope, faith, positiveness, assertiveness and the will to do anything. In agreement, Murphy (1963: 9) adds by pointing that, confidence implies that "as a man thinks, feels, and believes, so is the condition of his mind, body, and circumstances." Put in another sense, performance can be likened to a barometer that indicates whether a person has the confidence to do a particular task or not. Performance can thus be used as a good yardstick to measure women's confidence and willingness to take up positions of leadership, rather than to deny them on the basis of their gender. Through confidence driven performances, society can succeed in demystifying those restrictive traditional perceptions which still apply to women, despite the fact that they are based on unfounded scientific grounds. Thus, only through performance can society be in a position to debunk stereotypes, biases and prejudices that still regard women as less confident to assume leadership positions.

Commonly, performance has resulted in society rewarding those who can achieve more respect than those who cannot. On the contrary, to those who talk but fail to perform, society has only contempt for them, for they are seen like barking dogs who seldom bite. The unfortunate thing for the women is that, society has generally perceived them to be eloquent speakers, but, because they are seen as being less confident in doing, they are thus relegated to the periphery when it comes to leadership positions. In other words, confidence is the ability of a person to achieve her or his cherished goals. Simply put, confidence means that where there is a will there is a way. Not surprising therefore, women as people who are mainly perceived as having less confidence in themselves are the ones who are usually treated negatively when it comes to promotions to positions of leadership. This is unfortunate indeed, because even capable women leaders are thereby lost to the education profession.

The confidence to perform, as already pointed out, is not attributable to gender, but is based on some skills that can be acquired through learning. Thus, confidence is derived from skill and know-

ledge a person commands as a result of the education he or she has received. In this respect, performance can be used as a reasonable yardstick to gauge a person's confidence in dealing with a specific task. In other words, experience and learning plays a major role in the acquisition of confidence as a disposition. As a learned disposition, confidence is based on testable abilities that are learned. Hence, the saying that practice makes perfect. In other words, both men and women have equal potential to acquire the necessary confidence needed to perform what is required by leadership positions.

Since confidence like habit, is acquired, it means that women as well can acquire it should they be exposed to the relevant experiences in this regard. This notion, is totally opposed to the dominant perception that views women as having less confidence while "men are assumed to possess any necessary competence, until such time as they demonstrate otherwise, women are, on the contrary, needed to most positively establish the fact of their competency before this can be recognised" (Ouston, 1993:5). Assumptions of this nature, instead of ending innocently, have unfortunately developed into powerful voices that in certain societies have the ability to debar women from positions of leadership. By implication, assumptions behave like silent voices that possess the power to dictate social relationships. This is how women have been on the receiving side because it is assumed that they have less confidence. In this respect, the following assumptions are perceived to form barriers against the advancement of women to leadership positions:

- women's work is easy work;
- women fear competition; and that
- women lack vision.

These assumptions, untested as they are, form the bedrock and cornerstone upon which the perceptions that view women as less confident, are based. To restore faith and confidence in women, Tsoka (1999:70) recommends that "women should also be exposed to more meaningful tasks and furthermore, be placed in positions that demand accountability." Confidence, it should be understood, is not the thing believed in, but, it is rather the belief in one's own mind, which has the power if unhindered, to bring about the desired result. Putting confidence aside for a moment, it is interesting to note that on the contrary Brauer (2001:2) reveals that "a Worker Information Global Network Survey recently found the six highest influences on the employees' commitment to their workplace to be: satisfaction with day to day activities: care and concern for employees; work and job resources: production of the organisation; fairness at work: and trust in employees." These six influences have nothing to do with one's sexual orientation. As such should be seen as a warning to society that new ways of looking at employees have emerged to replace traditional stereotypes, biases and prejudices.

Traditional perceptions about women should be discarded if society intends to utilise all its human resources maximally. No country can hope to compete favourably in the present world climate when it still has no regard for the women. On this issue, Lewis (1992:283) warns us not to repeat the mistakes of the past, by reminding us that traditionally, "women, it was generally argued, were being treated as chattels, bought and sold like other market commodities." This is surely a kind of treatment that can make a person lose his or her confidence and self-respect, because it makes her or him to feel like an unwanted object. In other words, for society to be able to do away with lack of confidence in women, then, society must if possible, remove first its causes because the causes are the source of the way women think, and ultimately, the way they think is responsible for how they perform.

It simply means that women must be assisted to think and also see things differently than they do presently. For in helping them, the possibility is always there that they might be turned around and be able to perceive life differently. Society should accept the notion that learning is a life long project, hence, it is never too late to learn; everyone should be viewed as having potential to learn. It is the aim of this article to point out that equal opportunities for both sexes is the only

best solution to the problem of promotion. The next barrier is that of poor performance.

Poor performance as a barrier to women advancement to positions of leadership in the education profession

Performance, whether poor, average or excellent is a product of many factors. Factors like motivation, willingness, interest, confidence, discipline, tenacity and commitment can influence the level of performance greatly. For performance, to be of acceptable standard, it must satisfy specific criteria laid down before hand. Relevant criteria revolve around important factors such as proper planning, timing and preparation. The common criteria associated with good performance are preciseness, attractiveness, neatness, relevancy, legality, legitimacy, affordability and punctuality. Failure to observe such criteria might render one's performance to be judged poor and unacceptable. In other words, performance is based on some criteria to qualify as meeting acceptable standards. Put in simple language, performance is gauged against prescribed standards.

Like job-description that precedes an interview, performance criteria on desired outcomes must be laid down beforehand, otherwise employees will labour under a dark cloud. Thus, performance of whatever kind, must be guided by some criteria in order to be able to be declared very poor, poor, average, good or excellent. In this context, it can be safely argued that performance has no regard to sex but only to standards. Thus, to bring stereotypes, prejudices and biases that discriminate against women on the unfounded basis that they are poor performers is highly regrettable in terms of our present democratic standards. Putting performance into context, Barrel in the 'Mail & Guardian' (2000-04-10:24) crisply remarks that "verbal undertakings count for little, except, perhaps, where they come from plainly effective performers in the cabinet such as Kader Asmal, the Minister of Education, and Mohamed Valli Moosa, Minister of Environment Affairs and Tourism." In other words, performance is seen like a yardstick through which it is possible to rank leaders as poor, average or excellent.

Consequently, performance which as a measuring instrument is significant when it comes to classification of leaders according to rank, and not according to our unstable biases, stereotypes and prejudices. Our stereotypes, prejudice, and biases, although still remaining part and parcel of our conceptual framework, are nevertheless unreliable, because the tendency is that new stereotypes and prejudices emerge from time to time to replace the old ones. Otherwise stereotypes, biases and prejudice have the ability to dictate the direction and tone of human life like instincts do to animals. Therefore, we have good reasons to end the habit of relying on our stereotypes, prejudices and biases when it comes to promoting people to positions of leadership. It is unfortunate, that prejudices, biases and stereotypes have come to assume such profound cultural dimensions, and their effects have in particular, resulted in debarring mostly women from positions of leadership, because they are unluckily perceived to be poor performers.

Regrettably, if the prevailing attitude is taken as a barometer, women will have a slim chance of becoming leaders, because society still looks upon them as people who suffers from problems like poor self-image, less confidence, lack of assertiveness, less career oriented and lack of direction. All the poor characteristics unfortunately are mainly associated with the women folks. They are actually the right ingredients to discourage any person from doing anything good. Briefly, these are some of the accusations levelled against women when consideration for positions for leadership is made. In this regard, women are accused of poor performance because they are perceived to:

- lack proper planning;
- lack good preparation;
- lack anticipation; and to
- fail to see alternatives as open options.

Tsoka (1999:20) however, agues that despite the fact that women are said to be poor performers, "by nature, women have always been

interested in the betterment of life for all." Furthermore, Evetts, 1990, and Powney & Weiner, 1991 in Ouston (1993:25) point out that "to understand the phenomenon of leadership we need concepts that do not presume the male experience as universal and speaks to all humanity. Women need to be included as objects and subjects of study in leadership and we need to investigate how our concepts of leadership have been formed by the blinding assumptions that leader means male." For restorative measurement Tsoka (1999:104) recommends strongly that, to restore confidence in the women, then, "training centres should be established with a bias towards empowering more women in management positions." The next barrier is that of discrimination.

Discrimination as a barrier to women advancement to positions of leadership in the education profession

In the opinion of Morgan, King and Robinson (1981:467) "discrimination, refers to the behaviour of treating a person or group in an unfavourable or unfair way. Naturally, prejudice often leads to discrimination. But prejudiced people sometimes do not behave in accordance to their attitudes either because they have no opportunity to or because they are afraid to." Women, as people of the weaker sex, are often the ones most likely not to react when discriminated against for fear of being harmed or further victimised. Putting the issue of women discrimination into context, Ouston (1993:5) says that "men are still the prime barrier to women in management. Despite some progress, old fashioned sexist attitudes are still common and represent a real, not imagined, barrier to the progress of women." Discrimination that rests on any assumed differences between men and women, is both ill-grounded and immoral, since human beings by their nature are capable of learning. In other words, women as members of the human species are also endowed with the potential to learn, for through learning a man can adapt to new situations.

Grogan (1996:137) furthermore, enlightens by arguing strongly that "leadership in dynamic organisations and schools is a shared phenomenon. If we subscribe to the notion that virtually everyone has some potential for leadership, schools can be extraordinary places for expanding opportunities for leadership." This view, surely covers women as well. Equality, and not discrimination, rests on strong democratic beliefs, beliefs that are further based and supported by such compelling views, as for example, the argument that says ''there is something peculiar to human beings and common to human beings without distinction of class, race, or sex, which lies deeper than all differences" (Dowling, 1995:23).

Discrimination against women that is based on untested grounds and perceptions no doubt constitutes unfairness. Accordingly, the constitution too, states unequivocally that all South Africans must be accorded equal opportunities and scope to exercise their labour rights in an environment of equal constraints. In supporting the case of women Baxter (2001:1) says "women in many industries are demonstrating great aptitude for multi-skilling and also appear comfortable in multi-tasking scenarios where they carry out at least two activities at once." On the other angle, Tsoka (1999:103) also agrees that "women bring a gentler approach to management, and handle different tasks simultaneously, which can add great diversity and competitive value to business. Similarly, Dowling (1995:22) avers that "gender nearly always makes the difference ..." Therefore, to treat women as exceptions when it comes to leadership positions, that is, by discriminating against them, is counter-productive.

In describing the present positions occupied by women, Ouston (1993:9) vividly points out that "increasing numbers of women have been working in paid employment, but generally they are in low-status, low-paid jobs and often work part-time." In the education profession too, women are in the majority, but occupy low positions when it comes to leadership. To this end, Al-Khalifa in Ouston (1993: 12) remarks that "the management of schools is seen as demanding male, hierarchical, skills. The association of masculinity, male authority and school leadership is pervasive in life of the school." The

position is not different in South Africa because Tsoka (1999:69) in her recommendations pleads that "society should regard the work of female managers just as valuable as that of male managers." This points to the fact that, a culture of excluding women from leadership positions in the field of education has been prevailing for years. The following are the assumptions that justifies the discrimination of women concerning positions of leadership, and they are that:
• women and men have different career paths;
• women are unsuited to the demands of positions of leadership;
• women are seen as less than men and different from men; and that
• women have difficulty in developing an authoritative voice.

To reiterate, the above assumptions are based on prejudices, biases and stereotypes and not on scientifically proven grounds. Thus, it is refreshing to note the observation by Blanchard and Blanchard (1984:116) who say "the differential stability in males and females has been interpreted as a function of traditional sex-role standards to the effect that aggressive behaviour in a boy is accepted and even positively valued whereas such behaviour is discouraged in girls." The implication is that this is but one of the cultural ways in which society exercises its control on its members, but while at the same time being unaware that it is practising discrimination. Again, Tsoka (1999:35) also discovered that women are discriminated against in that "employers furthermore see women as temporary jobholders, rather than career-orientated employees. They do not afford them the necessary training, promotional scenarios, status and positions of responsibility." To add to this Gil (1990:100) observes that "one important source of discriminatory practices against women is the traditional expectation for mothers to assume primary responsibility for the care of their own children. This expectation tends to limit considerably the freedom of women to choose and enter other occupations."

In dealing with discrimination, Tsoka (1999:104) recommends that "the current domination of organisations by (Afrikaans-speaking) male managers should be balanced by promoting women to leadership positions so as to maintain equal opportunities for participation at all levels of management." To this end, Schuitema (1994:88) advises that "a relationship of power is legitimate if the aim of that relationship is the empowerment of the subordinate party in the relationship." This article argues that women are the ones who need to be empowered in order to access the positions of leadership which at the moment are dominated by men, despite the much talk about democracy every South African citizen is supposed to enjoy. The last barrier is of demotion.

Demotion as a barrier to women advancement to positions of leadership in the education profession

Demotion constitutes a negative act and as a process it is primarily associated with the negative act of reducing to a lower rank or position. In other words, an act of demotion can be seen purely as a form of punishment. In the education field, leadership is based on professional conduct and behaviour that demands high standards of commitment, loyalty, honesty, ability, competence and excellence. Although his views seems too broad, nevertheless, Van Wyk in Badenhorst (1987:153) instructively warns that "if a teacher contravenes certain provisions or neglects to perform certain duties, steps can be taken against such a teacher. In certain cases a claim for damages can be instituted. In other cases disciplinary investigations can be instituted and punitive measures imposed." This is an indication of the delicate nature of the education profession, a profession that deals mainly with inexperienced and vulnerable people called the youth. People who can easily suffer irreparable damage in their growth and development. Thus, unforeseen result could take place in which things go horribly wrong as a result of educators whose quality of performance is poor due to lack of commitment and proper orientation. Adequate and appropriate career orientation, is vital for boosting the confidence of an educator and thus ensuring good performance.

Demotion, as a form of punishment is there to deal with the incompetent, the lazy, sloppy, arrogant and the negligent, who unfor-

tunately, are also found in the field of education where women constitute the majority of the working force, but a minority when it comes to leadership positions. When well applied, demotion is a wonderful and worthwhile form of a deterrent, for the mere knowledge of its existence could have the potential to bring about order and security in education system. However, for demotion to be effective and meaningful, it must be applied within the law, and be used sparingly or as a last resort. Demotion hurts, it is painful and has damaging, discouraging, demotivating, embarrassing and negative results if not applied thoughtfully and fairly.

Factors leading to women being demoted centres mainly around their personality make up which influence them to behave and do things differently than men do. Stephan (1983:23) in this regard, reveals that "just before menstruation, most women suffer from all-consuming premenstrual syndrome: horrible nagging aches and pains, unbearable tension and short-tempered bursts of hysteria ... and some women suffer this terrible pattern for two weeks of each month." Short-tempered and hysteria has the potential to render the women inconsistent in their performance and inter-human-relationships. Stereotypes on women problems are more often responsible for blowing issues out of proportion. To deal with this problem adequately, women need to be exposed to relevant orientation programmes and also to other successful women role-models. Presently, this is not available to them, and Tsoka has alluded to this in her study.

To crown it all, Clelland in Van Velden (1984:61) adds that "women moods changes are also influenced during the first half of the menstrual cycle by oestrogen when it is high, because women feel energetic and optimistic, when oestrogen falls and progesterone increases, their moods changes, and before menstruation, women become lethargic and depressed." Again, this to an unreasonable society is a perfect evidence of lack of performance and cooperation that needs to be eliminated by means of demotion. In conclusion, Clelland in Van Velden (1984:16) succinctly describes the dilemma of women by pointing out that "many women are now caught in the trap of 'super-woman'; they have to do all the work which women previously were not expected to do, and also carve out a career for themselves." Women have too many irons in the fire thus they are bound to fail if not understood and given proper assistance. The assumptions upon which demotion against women is based are that:

- women are said to be quite moody;
- women lack commitment;
- women are more prone to stress than men; and that
- women are naturally followers not leaders.

A demoted person, for whatever reasons, generally ends up being bitter, unreasonable and destructive. To avoid demoting people from leadership positions because of lack of confidence or of being poorly oriented, Van Wyk (1983:17) is informative regarding any punitive measures when he indicates that "it is clear that teachers, just like members of other recognised professions, should be conversant with the various legal provisions and principles applying to their profession. Such knowledge and skill enables teachers to perform their professional duties more efficiently and to maintain their positions". Therefore, to avoid demotions, educators should be properly orientated, educated and trained; again, they should be constantly attend workshops and in-serviced training to keep them knowledgeable, informed, focussed, skilled, positive and up to the desired standard. Tsoka (1999:104) also recommends that "network programmes should be established and monitored to resist discriminatory behaviour against women. Questions of prejudice and stereotypes should be brought out in the open and discussed so that people are alert to their own, often subconscious, prejudices." In support, Schuitema (1994: 88) posits the view that "empowerment means enabling the one who is weak, in need and therefore taking, to become strong and capable of giving." This is how the problems of women can be resolved, namely, of lacking confidence, poor performance, lack of proper orientation and lack of assertiveness. With help women stand a chance of also developing into dynamic and vibrant leaders. Leaders who view life as

an opportunity not to amass material worth, but who see it as a chance to give in order to advance the course of nation building.

Conclusion

In conclusion, apart from the many suggestions and recommendations that were cited from Tsoka's study in the various sections of this article, a further effort will be made to systematically highlight those that were not mentioned, but are deemed important to be taken note of. For it is thought that their inclusion would assist in bringing about a better perspective into this problem. Perhaps too, they would make it possible for those concerned, to design a proper plan for the empowerment of women, so that, women too can have access to the positions of leadership and power. Briefly, it is thought that the outstanding recommendations, if included might offer a motivation to those committed to the empowerment the women. This is desirable, for it has the potential of making it easier for women to assume positions of higher rank, because at the moment, their contribution in this area is minimal. This takes place even while in reality the country is sorely in need of capable leaders in different areas including education.

Interestingly, analysed evidence from Tsoka's study also proves beyond doubt that most members of society are influenced by attitudes and actions of the people they live and work with. Again, evidence shows that prejudices, biases and stereotypes are acquired, and once internalised they form a second powerful voice after the mind in dictating our conduct. Thus, this article argues that, if the attitudes of those in direct control of the education profession can be influenced and changed to be friendly and positively disposed towards the upward mobility of women in leadership positions, then, women could play a constructive part in the improvement of education "largely because of their role as mothers women have become the guarantors of a deeper humanity, carrying a sense of community, of belonging, of selflessness and care."

Without a positive change of attitudes and mindsets, the position of women would improve at the very most, only at a snails pace. On the contrary, if women are assisted, encouraged, guided and appreciated, then they could blossom and also show vibrancy, curiosity, adventure and boldness never seen. As such, society is advised to adopt an attitude that believes in the dictum that says 'whatever a man can do a woman can also do.' Let society put this dictum to the test and see whether women will disappoint us. To recapitulate, this article mainly advocates for a change of attitudes, because doing so, will definitely boost the self-image and self-esteem of women.

Finally, it is clear from this article that, for any programme meant to assist and help empower women to succeed, there should also be a parallel programme geared at changing men's attitudes towards looking at women as inferior to them. For most men to be told to treat women as their equal is like telling them to change radically from their cultural way of living. Therefore, such a programme should also strive at preparing men for any cultural shock that they might experience as a result of either finding themselves being on an equal footing with women, or, under women as their leaders. In summing up, Tsoka (1999) apart from having made the already cited recommendations, further makes a few more very salient suggestions, proposals and recommendations. These recommendations make sense if society is willing and also serious about attending to the problems women are experiencing when applying for leadership positions in the country. The following recommendations are made in respect of programmes meant to empower women to become capable leaders in the field of work and specifically in education profession; and she recommends thus:

- that any affirmative action meant to empower women must be run by women themselves, and not by men for they portray a masculine role-image and not a female one;
- that women be involved themselves, or at least be truly consulted, in any programme/s that are designed to help empower them;
- that for relevancy's sake familiar content be made to form the core and focus of the actual issues that are involved in the

course/s meant to empower women;
- that women friendly issues should form the main basis of the content of the course/s that are meant to empower them;
- that flexible admission rules and policies be applied to allow women into such centres that are meant to empower them;
- that even part-time courses for working women be offered; and finally,
- that women-centred teaching approaches be applied so as to create an image of a female-model in the process.

In the end, the prevailing problems regarding women are of a national stature, or, an international one, therefore, no single person can succeed in solving them. Seen as such, they echo memories of the 'Bejing Conference on Women issues.' In summing up, let us learn from a famous idiom that says 'teach a man, and you teach only an individual, but teach a women, and you teach the nation.

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Social isolation : a learning obstacle in the primary school

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The teaching methodology of Outcomes-based Education is mainly based on group work. For this reason it would be extremely difficult for social isolates to benefit from Outcomes-based Education because of their inability to form relationships or work together with others in groups. In the light of this obstacle the aim of the research was to determine the relationship between social isolation and academic achievement at primary school level and to determine which factors relate to social isolation in general. A sample of 180 primary school learners from three primary schools was used in the investigation. Academic achievement, loneliness, self-esteem, psychological well-being, perceived physical ability and physical attractiveness were measured. As much as 29% of the variance in academic achievement can be explained by social isolation making it an important variable when academic achievement is predicted at primary school level. Negative correlations were found between social isolation and all the other variables, especially self-esteem (r = –0.81; p < 0.01). The implications of the findings for possible intervention are discussed.

Introduction

To become a fully developed adult one has to actualise several developmental aspects, one being the social aspect. If a child's social development is hampered, it may not only result in social isolation, but can also influence other developmental aspects. Broadly speaking, the whole self-actualisation process will be affected. According to Hancock (1986:3), "loneliness equals failure, having people around us equals success". Since social isolation hinders a person's psychological well being, learners who either form poor relationships or have difficulty in forming sound relationships with their parents, peers or teachers, will inevitably suffer developmental restraints while others progress towards adulthood normally.

Rubin, Chen and Hymel (1993:519) define social isolation as the lack of social interactive behaviour and rejection or isolation by the peer group. They draw a wider distinction between social isolates who are rejected and those who are neglected. According to them, rejected children are often characterised as aggressive, disruptive, bothersome and defiant, and are seen in a categorically negative light as misfits in the social matrix of the classroom. In contrast, the second group includes children whose isolation is not obvious. They are forgotten or ignored and have no friends, but few complaints are heard about them. These children are often referred to as withdrawn or neglected children. Lewis and Sugai (1993:61) define them as children who have a low frequency of social involvement with peers during activities when peer interaction opportunities are at their peak (for example, during recess).