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**THE CONFIDENCE FACTOR IN WOMEN ADVANCEMENT IN LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

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**Abstract**

There is near male monopoly and a consequential masculine hegemony at the front-line positions of leadership and management in Zambian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The scenario is a wide gender gap with a critically underrepresented women minority. This phenomenological study on the life experiences of eight purposively selected Zambian women professors was undertaken to promote a deeper understanding of the critical success factors in the advancement of women. The data analysis and findings from the 'conversational interviews' of the major work highlighted several traditional and other conventional factors as well as an emergent concept of self confidence. Among others, the women employed heightened self confidence in facing sex-typed cultural assumptions and expectations regarding leadership potential and effectiveness. However, from their personal traits, *self-confidence* emerged as the one other vital wing on which women would soar into top decision-making and policy implementation positions in HEIs.

*Keywords*

Higher Education Institutions, Leadership, Management, Women, Self-confidence

**1.0 Introduction**

Leadership and management at the top or near the top positions in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Zambia reflect a near male monopoly and an almost masculine hegemony (Njobvu & Yang, 2014; White et al., 2012). This situation has resulted into a marginalized women minority that is grossly underrepresented in decision-making and policy implementation positions (Conrad, et al., 2010; Trinidad & Normore, 2005). Moreover, the women numbers have remained uncharacteristically low relative to men in spite of anticipated numerical boosts from several interventions (Macwan'gi et al., 2007). And for the few women who have achieved professorship

and top notch positions, it has usually been against the frictions and vitriolic odds of the inhibitive gender-biases of patriarchal culture and institutions.

The scarcity of women in senior academic leadership has been attributed to several reasons emanating from the diverse forms of gender-discrimination arising from a male-dominated culture including the 'glass ceiling', 'labyrinth' and indeed the 'pipeline' theories where women are victims (Eagly et al, 2009; Arfken et al., 2004; Oakley, 2000). Indeed, the persistent pattern demands answers to questions about the existent main causes for the gender divide and how it is being bridged in a principally gender-biased and blind environment. To promote a deeper understanding of the situation so as to advance talented women into those positions, a major phenomenological study on eight Zambian women professors was undertaken. The findings on their life experiences regarding the main factors that propelled them to the top of academic leadership and administration in HEIs were significant revelations for this paper. Through 'conversational interviews' with these senior women faculty leaders, data was collected which upon content analysis produced significant themes that were identified as critical factors to the continuing progress of women into influential organizational positions. The summarized themes were listed as specialized higher academic qualifications and training, mentorship, hard work and *self-confidence* (assuredness) emerged as the critical factors to propelling women to the top of academic leadership and administration posts. *Self-confidence* incidentally emerged as the one other vital personal attribute seen as a critical wing on which women will soar into decision-making and policy implementation positions in HEIs. As such women must possess self-confidence in addition to competence if they are to progress and function in male dominated environments. Otherwise, women's full involvement and participation in leadership and management as humanely equals to men in academe remains a far cry as the number of prospective eligible women remains small and is only very slowly rising.

## **2.0 Background and context of the situation**

Although academia is ordinarily associated with high academic prowess or intellectual talent more than anything else, it is basically ruled by the principle of sexism (Patton, 2004). The numbers bias in representation of men and women in senior ranks bear undeniable evidence to the existence of patriarchy.

Women and their contributions are hugely underrepresented and undervalued. They are acutely outnumbered and gravely marginalized in the uppermost decision-making and policy positions of most organizations including HEIs (Lie & Malik, 2014; Eagly & Carli, 2007 and Sawyerr, 2004). In the case of Zambia, this gender biased situation speaks volumes particularly about what the culture values as important and worthy. This state of affairs has raised questions and answers are sought about how to fully integrate woman so that they can fully and effectively participate in HEIs leadership and management (Macwang'i et al., 2007). Although not numerous, there is a substantial number of women who meet the prerequisite qualifications and experience to get into these coveted positions but due to several reasons do not just seem to manage.

It is not uncommon that women in HEIs workplace have for years worked very hard and diligently, and 'played by the book'. The women have earnestly believed that "their natural talents and enough hard work would be recognized and rewarded" with promotions to senior posts as a natural progression course (Kay & Shipman, 2014:1; Stone 2007; Caplan, 1993). Sadly, these expectations have only been far sparsely achieved with deep questions remaining as to what really leads one to the 'lofty' echelons and what could be holding most women back.

Granted, women's education and leadership has greatly progressed in the 'developed' countries while making some headway in the 'developing' nations (Hoyle & Megarry, 2012; Obama, 2009; Crewe & Harrison, 1998; Delors, 1998). Women are increasingly earning more higher education level qualifications; college and graduate degrees. Their numbers in the workforce are also increasing, and the gender gap in middle management is narrowing (Okin, 2013; Krook, 2009; Inglehart & Norris, 2003). Further, there is empirical evidence in global studies, for example Goldman Sachs and Columbia University showing that "companies employing women in large numbers outperform their competitors on every measure of profitability" (Kay & Shipman, 2014:1). These findings extraordinarily demonstrate the huge advantages gained by valuing and recognizing women's competences in organizational leadership and management. It also makes a good case to society and the world at large that cultural values must shift towards accommodating and promoting the involvement of an equal number of women representation in all policy and decision making positions leading to a more diverse and inclusive workplace.

In spite of all the evidence, accomplishments and credentials, and industrious work ethics of women, it seems so hard for women to earn ascendance and ultimately gender parity in the most senior institutional positions. Instead, it is more of their men counterparts who have continued to get promoted and even faster (Ibarra et al, 2010). As generally established, at the top leadership bracket women are nearly absent, they are a minority and their numbers are barely increasing (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Appelbaum et al, 2003). In Zambia, for example, with half a century of university education, it is cynical that there are only eight women professors. While university has been open to both men and women, and for both education and employment purposes, women's career trajectories are still remarkably off and different from that of men; promotion to senior ranks in universities is rare and very slow. Could self-confidence have role in this situation?

### **3.0 Self-confidence in perspective**

It was rather incidental in the first instance that self-confidence became prominent in the findings of the major study and has led to this article. Thus, in the following section is a succinct exposition of the subject in context.

#### **3.1 Women and self-confidence in career and professional advancement.**

The concept and nature of confidence, ordinarily, is quite complex and elusive. According to Schunk; "self-confidence is an individual's belief that he or she has the ability to produce results, accomplish goals, or perform tasks competently" (1991:4). White (2009, April) augments the complexity by outlining three crucial elements of self-confidence: "belief in positive achievements, persistence, and self-awareness." The beliefs and elements are all in an individuals' personality. And as such, the centrality of confidence in the many positive changes unfolding for women advancement could easily be overlooked as it gets overshadowed by the more overt influences. Yet, self-confidence is a critical prerequisite to promoting more autonomous and resilient practice in women that is necessary for career and professional progress (Lester, J. 2010).

In the interviews the women alluded to self-confidence, in various terminologies, as a fundamental personal trait crucial to the attainment of professorship. Ordinarily, this elite group of senior and influential Zambian women would be assumed to simply brim with confidence. Nonetheless, the study findings revealed mixed narratives to the extent that "the power centers ...

are zones of female self-doubt...” (Kay & Shipman, 2014:2). This finding ignited an important instructive lesson regarding evidence that confidence in women could in fact not be a common commodity; there may be shortage of it and that could be contributing to holding back women from the pinnacle of HEIs leadership and management. Although Longwe (2000) argues to the contrary, it is plausible that confidence is one critical bridging-link in advancing women into senior academic and institutional leadership positions.

The thrust of this paper analyzes shortage of self confidence in women and how this corroborates the theory of the confidence gap that separates the sexes in leadership and management (Kay& Shipman, 2014; Dugan, 2006; Oakley, 2000; Ragins, et al., 1998). In comparison to men, women generally exhibit low levels of confidence (Chusmir, & Koberg, 1991; McCarty, 1986). Low levels of confidence in women generally manifest in reduced interest to apply for promotion as the women often consider themselves not really ready or worthy for promotions, they presume and predict negatively that they will do worse on assessments, and they generally underestimate their abilities and a high propensity to quit in the face of any slight challenge (Niederle, et al., 2013; Chesterman & Ross-Smith, 2006; Niederle & Vesterlund, 2005; Acker, & Feuerverger, 1996). The explanation for this observation is attributed to both the biological and nurturing factors.

### ***3.2 Tracing the genesis of Women’s confidence deficiency***

There is no doubting the fact that women in the workplace are as competent and hardworking as men. Indeed, in early life, females are way ahead of their male counterparts and in school they manage to outpace men (Carter & Silva, 2010). But in later life women fail to keep up and in large numbers fall off pace. This behavioral trend is explained by the functionality of both nature and nurture.

There is increasing evidence that an individual’s confidence level is influenced by genetic factors and as much by the brain but not their sex (Moore, et al, 1991; Eysenck, 1990). Although human males and females possess the general basic brain structure, there are some points of structural and functional differences (Davidson, 2012) that may cause “unique patterns of thinking and behavior, and that could thereby affect confidence” (Kay & Shipman, 2014:10). These findings are from relatively new research areas which could be contradictory and hence less agreeable. The amygdalae, the brain’s primitive fear centers seem to explain the differential responses to threats or risk exposures between men and women (Eliot, 2012; Henrich, et al, 2010; Brizendine, 2007). It is larger in men than in women, adapting them better than women in dealing with threats or risks. The anterior cingulate cortex, on the other hand helps human beings to recognize errors and weigh options. In women, it is shown to have more activity compared to men and is attributed to be the reason for contemplated decision making and holding them back from progress (Platt & Huettel, 2008).

In addition, the hormones testosterone and estrogen differently influence the cognitive and behavioral functions of males and females resulting into the many basic and obvious, especially physical differences between men and women (Cahill, 2006; Zitzmann, & Nieschlag, 2001). The two hormones also influence delicate personality dynamics. More importantly, estrogen’s action on women’s brains is responsible for the development of social skills and influences bonding and

connection (Brizendine, 2007). On the ‘down side,’ its effects seem to discourage conflict and risk taking, and is therefore viewed to limit self confidence in women.

### **3.3 Cultural socialization and the nurturing self –confidence**

Individuals are known to acquire confidence through training, practice and experience (D.Hall-Ellis, 2014; Schunk, 1991). However, the particular ways in which females and males are nurtured and socialized significantly contributes to the ‘confidence gap’ between the sexes (Betz & Hackett 1981). The differences also arise from gendered cultural socialization influences and result into weakened drives for autonomous motivation for achievement in females (Noe, 1988; Rosaldo, 1974). Practices and training in the formative years are especially crucial in shaping the fundamental later-life dispositions. Early life experiences that instill fear of criticism, or where other people’s opinions make one feel insecure, or form standards for behavior and action make the ‘subject’ assume they are not as good as others, thereby weakening their overall view of self worth (Hackett & Betz, 1981). Self-doubt sets in because of such negative experiences as well as other unsupportive home and early school environments - overly critical insecurity sustained views lead to pessimism and inferiority feelings, all which feed low self confidence.

Children build self-esteem early by doing well at school (elementary), excelling at sports at the fields of play and the sports field (Hall-Ellis, 2014) and also through developing relationships with other children and adults in their social networks. The encouragement from family members (parents especially), teachers and friends are important in developing and reinforcing children’s self-confidence. As for the girls, just as much for boys, they learn about who they are (sense of self worth), develop abilities and become ambitions or competitive. They also develop agency and their potential expands (Schunk, 1991).

During the early school ages, girls have a head start over boys in some key areas like having “longer attention spans, more-advanced verbal and fine-motor skills, and greater social adeptness” (Kay & Shipman, 2014:12). Due largely to dominant traditional patriarchal culture, girls in Zambia are still socialized to be submissive by deferring decisions to others (male), less competitive, and striving to be good (Evans, 2014). This starts the chain reaction for female disempowerment, taking away their potential for asserting own self-worth and setting in place appraisers (men’s) for female’s approval and affirmation (Neff & Helwig, 2002). Moreover, girls are socialized to avoid taking risks and making mistakes – by striving to be perfect. The detrimental effects of this penchant have made females risk averse, avoid challenges, fear of failure and lack perseverance, all of which if properly handled are essential in building self-confidence (Taylor, 2013).

At another level, active participation in sporting activities has been shown to be vitally relevant to building confidence in children (Zimmerman, 2011; Petitpas et al, 2005). Nevertheless, fewer girls than boys participate in team sports like athletics, and their number drops even drastically during adolescence. This appreciable loss of self-esteem around teenage in girls bear the hall marks of biased cultural socialization that impede females (Heilman, 1998; Horney, 1935).

Progressively along life, most girls tend to lose self-confidence through several factors amongst which are cultural influences. They refrain from competing and risky situations, effectively ending any hope for remedy and thereby perpetuating their disadvantaged position (Reis, 2005). In later adult life, however, success depends upon how much confidence and courage a woman has in facing up to the diverse challenges and failures. Failure at such challenges further erodes women’s confidence levels (Dweck, 2006).

Conversely, several studies have repeatedly shown that self-confidence can be consciously acquired through learning, training and practice (Kirby, 2004; Zimmerman, 2000; Schunk, 1991). Therefore, when women “acquire the proper knowledge” and “successfully implement the newly acquired skills”, they “develop optimistic attitudes gain increased self-confidence...” (Paraskeva et al, 2008). With high self-confidence levels, women possess heightened drive for competition; seek higher achievements like status positions which can be instrumental in narrowing the confidence gap and in the long run closing it gender confidence gap and gender leadership gap (Lundberg, 2008; Kirby, 2004).

### **3.4 Low confidence levels and Women (female) familiar habits**

Low confidence levels in women can be devastating to their career and professional advancement prospects especially in competitive and male dominated environments. This symptomatic problem is deep rooted and it informs and forms a number of familiar habits in women’s lives. For example, failure in many women is mostly wrongly ascribed to self also known as self attribution while credit for success is attributed to luck, other circumstances or people (Kloosterman, 1988; Rosenthal, 1995). Such a predisposition precipitates self-undervaluing and fear (of self hurting and failure) which renders women reluctant to try out new higher challenges in life and career.

Studies (for example by Gasser & Shaffer, 2014; Marbley et al, 2011) have linked the shortage in women’s self-assurance to the practice of perfectionism. The studies claim that perfectionism predominantly affects women throughout most of their lives (Chrisler, 2008; Dunn et al, 2006); women usually undertake some activity only when they are totally convinced they are doing the right thing. They rarely take jobs related with risks, preferring to hold back until all is perfect and they are perfectly qualified and ready (Austin, 2001). Perfectionism traps women into fixation on their performance at home, at school, at work and other similar activities and only reluctantly do they venture out into new horizons.

## **4.0 Framing the study**

This paper was born out of a major research work (Njobvu & Yang, 2014) which was framed within the combined feminine approaches of Butler’s gender (1988) and the intersectionality frameworks. The gendered identity that resulted from sustained acts and produced beliefs about certain characteristics interacted with the personal, professional and organizational factors in the lives of the selected individual women of the select group. The women’s lived experiences and interactions informed the data that was obtained and later analyzed for this study. Additionally and equally, intensive and comprehensive pertinent literature review informed the discourse.

### **4.1 Research method**

This narrative study was centered on exploring the life experiences of senior women academic, leaders and managers at any of the three public universities of Zambia. Through combined approaches, the feminist perspective of gender and intersectionality framework and use of ‘conversational interviews and descriptions of life experiences (Kamau, 2009 & Van Manen, 1990 cited in Njobvu & Yang, 2014) data on women’s experiences at work and outside of work was collected. Women’s identities at the personal, professional and organizational levels intersected with gender to express self-confidence. In the light of rigorous reviewed literature, plausible inferences and conclusions have been drawn.

This paper focuses on how the women professors described their self-confidence in the narration of their life experiences with regards to career advancement and rise to leadership or management in universities. I attempted to describe, analyze and interpret the data on the narratives in order to offer deeper understanding of the place and role of self-assuredness in the experiences of Zambian women in achieving seniority in light of gender, leadership and management.

#### **4.2 Participants, Data collection and Analysis**

Eight senior women academics, purposively selected - at the rank of professor, with primary appointments at any of the three Zambian public universities participated in in-depth conversational interviews in July, 2014, where they narrated how some significant work and out of work life experiences impacted their career projectiles and consequential rise to senior positions in leadership and management. The mostly audio-recorded 'conversational interviews' (Kamau, 2009:55) were later transcribed, and then thematic-content data analyzed, allowing for manipulation of the texts resulting into themes and the concept of self-confidence.

The data analysis looked at patterns from the intersections of the personal, professional and organizational factors with the women's gender identity (Mishler, 2009; Kohler Riessman, 2000; Van Manen, 1990). Moreover, through repeated selective reading of the interview transcriptions and listening to the recordings, I managed to segregate the data into main thematic statements and the emergent concept of self-confidence.

This study involved only a very small section of the general Zambian women populace and an almost exclusive group of women academics whose experiences cannot form grounds for generalization of the findings. There could have been some distortions in the narratives owing to my position as a male researcher. Nonetheless, I strongly believe this paper calls for constructive attention and an earnest search for solutions towards improving females' experiences in the realm of self-confidence and the quest to have women rise to senior academic and management positions in Zambia's higher education. I hope to draw critical attention to both the major positive and negative narratives on self-confidence in the life of successful women. It is important to locate and situate self-confidence in these women achievers as references for aspirant females.

#### **4.3 Findings and Discussion**

From the data analysis, six main themes and the concept of self-confidence emerged from the participants' narratives. The major themes included the women's determination and self agency, faith, familial support and mentors. The women's identities often overlapped with their personal, professional and organizational factors both at the workplace and outside the workplace. In addition, the women's narratives demonstrate the important role of self-confidence in fighting societal constructs and expectations that block their progress. The recurring narratives highlight supportive early life parental role, acquisition of higher educational qualifications and special skills and achievement of high rank status as fundamental in fostering the positive development and exhibition of an individual woman's positive self-worth outlook. The women demonstrated how self-confidence was paramount in challenging obstructive forces at the professional and organizational levels they faced like subtle discrimination, unprofessional practices, difficulties in finding meaningful mentorship, accessing sponsorship or funding for higher qualifications and research studies, and 'unconscious and unintentional' biases.

The use of a combined framework, feminist and intersectionality approach facilitated the capture of the narratives about the critical role of self confidence. The section below presents a detailed discussion on the findings using the narratives from the interviews to elucidate the women's experiences.

#### **4.5 The usual suspects for lack of senior women in HEIs leadership and management**

Several research works including (Njobvu & Yang, 2014; Johnson, 2014; Kamau, 2009; Kiamba, 2006; Moghadam, 2005) have highlighted some important primary factors and their offshoots responsible for impacting women's progress in HEIs leadership and administration. Among the several factors, decisions about family and children have tended to affect women's priorities, in effect slowing down their progress (Stern, & Bruschiweiler-Stern, 1998). Other researchers have emphasized gender biased cultural and institutional barriers to female success (Norris & Inglehart, 2001; Rosser, 2004). All these explanations are true, but seem inadequate to explain the persistent lack of success at breaking the grip of the near monopoly of men at the top rung of leadership in universities. There must be more and one basic missing link in the whole milieu could be due to the shortage of the personal attribute of confidence in women.

#### **4.6 Women's narratives of self-confidence**

The interviews brought out a prominence of self-confident but as well shades of self doubt narratives. The well accomplished and intelligent women professors had to consciously demonstrate self-confidence asserted their abilities and appropriated their positions in carrying out their responsibilities. There was emphasis on self-worth, placing value on oneself as a human being and not necessarily as a woman. One of the respondents, Professor Lunka affirmed: *"Oh yes, assertive is the word and self esteem and love for yourself...you must have self esteem, you must know you are a human being...there is nothing that is different about a man that a woman does not have..."* In assertiveness one is utilizing possible means to being more able to defy the pressure and dominance of excessively dominant people, practices and procedures. Hence, an assertive person tries to exert some control in situations that are important to them as exemplified by another respondent, Professor Helinga: *"It was just logic...that it does not make sense to be saying that because I am a woman, I cannot have some things...so why would you want to give me different treating because I am a woman."*

##### **4.6.1 Women's self-confidence in career progression**

Appropriation of self-confidence is seen as the force behind women's determination and resilience in vying for positions and requesting for promotions. Professor Lunka avows *"...even where it is tough you just assert yourself and say I will try...you will get there."* For others like professor Helinga self-assuredness empowered them against daunting challenges like facing an all-'white'-twelve-men interview panel for a very senior post which 'normally' would be intimidating but *"...when you have walked the walk that I walked in my childhood, you really become bold."* A high sense of self-worth galvanized the steel resolve of professor Alucho: *"...from a very early age I believed in myself that I needed to do what it takes and also to do what I like..."* The crux of the matter is that these women operate in hostile male dominated environments requiring a strong sense of self-confidence without which they would suffer unjustifiable biasness, marginalization and exclusion. Professor Enate clarifies *"because, you'll find that ...the environment is just that of men, from a woman's...from our side and we know that the environment has very few females."* The

reality of unfriendly forces at professional level in trying to impose traditional male superiority is elucidated by Professor Lunka's account: "After he left my whole promotion was blocked ...but I kept on applying and reapplying...and I was patient."

The women experienced several difficulty situations that could have discouraged them, doubting their abilities and competences but a high level of self-confidence helped them persevere and led to the attainment of goals.

#### **4.6.2 Women's self-confidence in challenging and changing institutional injustices**

The few women professors must be seen as pioneers in academic leadership and management who mastered self-worth and needed a lot of courage to challenge, surmount and change the organizational status quo. Professor Helinga encountered two instances earlier on in her career where she influenced change by challenging the legality and logic of some traditional organizational practices and procedures. She employed, 'reverse psychology and nonviolent communication' to highlight the unfairness of expecting and treating two people of different genders to perform the same work or function under different employment terms. She relates 'I argued my way out – because all the forms say "...and his wife" and so we can't change the form to include husband? So, basically I was the reason they changed the form to include buying a ticket for a husband accompanying the wife who goes out for studies.' And upon her return from studies abroad, the institution had to amend its rules regarding offering accommodation only to married men and not to married women; at her challenge, the institution agreed and started offering housing to married women employees. "If no one fights for these rights, it's never going to happen. So I had to challenge the status quo..." insists Professor Helinga.

Attainment of higher academic qualifications, acquisition of unique expertise and relevant experience, and achievement of higher statues add to the 'self-worth' of the women and thus increase the levels of self-assuredness that gave impetus and courage to face up to the challenges. These women gained respect and carried authority in their 'voices' so much so that they were heard and effected change.

#### **4.7 Effects of low Self-confidence on Women**

In gauging self-confidence levels, a response like "well, you just manage, sometimes by chance and..." by Professor Enate to the question of how she managed against all odds to attain the ranks of associate professor and Deputy Vice Chancellor at the university would surely rate low. The short sentence implies self-doubt, the very contrast of self-confidence. The attribution of success to luck, other things and effects other than self implies more self-doubt than the conventional self-under evaluation Zambian women have been socialized to do.

On the other hand, Professor Ansikwe's comment: "so, if you know that you are not in their good books...don't even try because it [application] won't even pass the unit where you work; it won't go anywhere", is quite pessimistic and reveals compelling low levels of self-confidence of an individual.

In this paper, it matters a lot that there are some studies holding the evidence linking low levels of confidence to the failure or lack of women's meaningful progress into top organizational posts. The work of Kay and Shipman (2014) cite the 'shortage of female confidence' documented in a survey of the 2011 British managers by the Institute of Leadership and Management where 50% of the female respondents expressed self-doubt about their job performance and careers in contrast

to less than 33% of the male respondents. Indeed, low confidence levels affect both males and females but are more prevalent in women.

In this study, professor Mashingo confirms the assertion in the lamentation: *“You see, just at the point of application, one faces psychological harassment in the way that their application is treated, scrutinized...and when you have applied twice and you are not successful, you tend to be discouraged.”* In support, professor Enate adds: *“...just try and you lose nothing, just try. Because you know we are...as women and we don’t want to fail.”*

Other studies by Kloosterman (1988) and Bloomfield et al (2007, June) promote the positive relationship of success with confidence much as it does with competence. Even though women have made great progress in educational attainments, they still remain grossly underrepresented in senior positions of institutional leadership (Macha & Bauer, 2010; Strachan, 2009). The documented gap in the confidence levels of prospective senior women academics and institutional leaders can be incapacitating and a huge draw back against any real gains in their numbers. For instance, the confidence deficiency undermines women’s ability to negotiate for better commensurate salaries and appropriate working conditions (Ely et al., 2011).

Several researches (Larkin, & Pines, 2011; Ehrlinger & Dunning, 2003; Melamed, 1995) have also attributed low self-confidence to the self-preconceived and gross underestimation of women’s competences. Doubts about their abilities to perform and achieve have caused decreased interest in women to apply for promotion until they feel really sure that they meet all the job requirements. Further, such uncertainty result into fear of failure which weakens their resolve to achieve and as such holds them back even when they are qualified.

Women with low confidence manifest a problem with self-perception. They have usually tended to underestimate both their abilities and subsequently their work performance (Pajares & Miller, 1994). Etzkowitz et al, (2000; 16) explains that”... the experience of separateness and stigma makes more understandable the tendencies for self-blame, lack of self-confidence, fear of risk-taking and ...” Generally, societal attitudes and treatments of women make them believe they are not worthy a high-status job or think they are inadequately competent in the area and so tend to opt out or settle for less competitive but comfortable fields or posts.

Although lack of self-confidence does not necessarily imply lack of ability, it can limit the opportunities available to women. For such women pessimism resulting from focusing too much on the unrealistic expectations or standards of others, especially parents and society or the men at the workplace kills off any attempts to challenge for available opportunities.

#### **4.8 The effects of Over-confidence in Women**

It is important to understand the invaluable role confidence and even overconfidence plays in a person’s life in terms of achievements. Professor Lunka, Helinga and Alucho were more magnanimous in facing up to the challenges along their way. The summary by professor Lunka well captures their stand; *“The women have just taken up centre stage of being...assertive...and saying there is no position [specifically] for a man ...because these are positions you apply for...”* A positive self-outlook is an empowerment tool that enables women to out-step both self and others imposed boundaries and expectations. Moreover, positive self-regard naturally flows from

accumulating successes over time and so the 'go-get' attitudes learned from self-control and at also from failure ensure growth of self-confidence and the fighting spirit.

According to Gervais et al (2003; 1) "overconfident and optimistic managers hesitate less before making their decisions." The study by Torabi (2011) found that "some individuals (especially men) are overconfident about their decision-making abilities, which can manifest in investing excessively..." The study further indicates that "men would trade more actively than women because of their greater overconfidence in trading ability..." (ibid). This demonstrates that confidence is positively related to competence as the power behind decision making. Moreover, "moderate levels of overconfidence and optimism tend to align these decisions with the interests of shareholders, increase firm value, and reduce the need for option compensation" (Gervais et al, 2003; 1). On the contrary, the "less confident leaders and managers, however, turn out to be risk averse and hesitant in making critical decisions" (Torabi, 2011). Confidence in an individual drives decision making and taking appropriate action and is therefore just as important as competence. Therefore, it could be that for many decades women must have misconstrued the cardinal role confidence plays alongside competence in their pursuit of self-actualization. While achieving high competence levels might have been the focus, confidence may have been neglected. Low confidence levels are disempowering, fertile grounds for self-doubt and a blue print for being risk averse.

Women have suffered huge consequences because of the shortage of confidence. Their lives and career progress are heavily encumbered at several points from various fronts particularly in upper echelons of leadership and management of organizations where several factors challenge their self-esteem. Ironically, when women develop, garner enough confidence and behave assertively, a whole new set of other unique repercussions roll into motion. Research shows that assertive women are regarded by men and society at large as aggressive (Eagly, 2013; Eagly & Steffen, 1986). Culturally, women are expected to be less aggressive and so hence assertiveness earns criticism. This has usually been the response of men in cultures with dominating masculine societal power and control structures. Women positivity is seen as an affront to their domination as the traditionalists try to maintain the status quo. Consequently, assertive women have paid "heavier social and even professional penalties" (Kay & Shipman, 2014: 14). For these successful women, although attitudes are changing, society still doubts not only their competence but even their very character. Their leadership authority is doubted and most of the times undermined. Owing to these and other related negative evaluations, women in general tend to down play and underestimate their abilities, coming out always modest about their competencies.

It is clear from the interviews that some of the women were certainly less than self-assured. Since confidence underlies the expression of thoughts into judgments and activity, it is therefore a major driving factor for the notion of action in women. The equation gets balanced in a woman when confidence, the belief in one's ability to succeed, stimulates action. In turn, taking action bolsters one's belief in one's ability to succeed. In this virtuous cycle, therefore, confidence accumulates on repeated cycles—through hard work, through success, and even through failure. This is a clear measure of how confidence can be self-perpetuating through training and practice. On the converse, low confidence results into inaction. In most cases, women lacking in confidence hesitate in taking decisive action because of self-doubt and by so doing impede progress.

### Conclusion

The observations in this paper highlight that one of the key elements for a successful woman leader is self confidence. Having a strong sense of self-confidence means one believe in their innate abilities and talents. The tremendous power found in self-confidence increases the potential for success. Furthermore, self-confidence is fundamental for growth in leadership, for it allows one to make the tough decisions that people expect from a strong leader.

When and where confidence lacks, women are held back women and where it abounds greater success and progress is attained. Therefore, more women need to develop and become more confident in order to surmount challenges against them. Women should hold both competence and confidence in a see-saw like manner during the course of their lives in order to sufficiently respond to career and professional demands. The low levels of self-confidence at personal levels underlie holding back of women and therefore contribute to the persistent under-representation of women in leadership roles.

The concept of self-assuredness is an important area for further consideration: factors responsible and effective ways for the development and growth of the personal characteristic of self-confidence in women/females; and assessing the impact of confidence in leadership roles and early detection and determinants of self-confidence. These issue here to recognize the reversal role of self-doubt in diminishing the expectation of access to leadership roles and the likelihood of success in such roles when self-confidence level are high enough as demonstrated by the senior women academics.

*Table 1: Professional data of the women participants*

Name (Alias)	Official Status	Age band at Appointment	Qualification at Application
Lunka	Associate Professor	40–49 years	Doctorate
Helinga	Full Professor	40–49 years	Doctorate
Alucho	Associate Professor	40–49 years	Post Doctorate
Mashingo	Associate Professor	50–59 years	Post Doctorate
Muma	Associate Professor	50–59 years	Doctorate
Eenate	Associate Professor	40–49 years	Doctorate
Ansikwe	Associate Professor	50–59 years	Doctorate
Macha	Associate Professor	50–59years	Doctorate

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