Creating linkages between private and public: challenges facing woman principals in South Africa

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In trying to understand some of the gendered discourses that shape the management of schools as organisations in South Africa, I analyse woman principals' experiences as they try to navigate a balance between their home and work responsibilities. After their appointment as principals, some South African women face difficulties in striking the balance between work and family. Available literature suggests that balancing private and public life for working women with families can be taxing, especially for married women. Reasons for this include the cultural expectation, which suggests that women, regardless of whether they are in employment or not, or whether they employ a domestic helper or not, should still perform family chores in the home. The traditional stereotypes also associate school principalship with masculinity, a view that hampers women's career progression in education management. I identify some of the gendered social practices that disadvantage women and suggest that these need to be challenged in order to achieve gender equity in education management. I further suggest an urgent need for research informed by feminist theories and examine gender inequity issues in schools in South Africa within the current political, social, and cultural frameworks.

Introduction

Within the South African education system, while women have had access to employment at various levels of organisations for a long time, their participation in the management and leadership of these organisations is still a matter of concern. To illustrate, in the schooling system women form only 30% of school principals, yet they constitute the majority (more than 70%) of the teaching population (Department of Education, 2005). Structural barriers to women's advancement in organisations have their roots in the fact that most organisations have been created by and for men and are based on male experiences of management, hence a particular form of masculinity in organisational management exist (Acker, 1990; Blackmore, 1999; Ely & Meyerson, 2000). Grogan (1996) also argues that the absence of women in power positions suggests that women are being seen through traditional theoretical lenses and are being measured against ideals that have historically served men best. Meyerson and Fletcher (1999) affirm that organizations still define their competence and leadership on the traits that were stereotypically associated with men, such as availability for work at all times. Most organizations, they assert, act as if the historical division of labour, that had the workplace as the men's domain and family as women's domain, still holds, even when women are as active as men in the working industry. These are the realities of gender inequality that drive the organizational life for which neither men nor women can be blamed (Meyerson & Fletcher, 1999).

The study reported in this paper was part of a larger project which aimed to examine the experiences of woman principals on their route to princi-palship, in order to understand the reasons for women's continued under-representation in education management. To achieve this aim, the following was a key question in the larger study:

What are the experiences and perceptions on the ground of women who attained management posts?

Some of the findings in this regard revealed that woman principals find it difficult to strike a balance between home and work and end up neglecting the family for the sake of career. It is this issue that is explored in more detail here in order to understand further the gendered realities faced by woman principals in the South African context.

I argue that although South African policy guarantees equal treatment of everyone before the law (Moorosi, 2006b), the reality of woman principals' experiences suggests that women fight a constant battle against discrimina-tion at two different levels: the organisational and the social level. At the organisational level women are prejudiced by traditional and deeply embedded patriarchal values and practices that devalue transformation processes aimed at achieving gender equity (Chisholm, 2001). At the social level, women are hindered by the lack of support from their families and the cultural associa-tion of principalship with masculinity, which assumes every principal has some form of support at home. I present an analysis of the experiences of 28 woman principals as they tried to negotiate a balance between their private and public lives. The theoretical frameworks used (see below), illuminate the gendered social practices affecting woman principals' performance in the management of schools as organisations.

Gender and organisational management

Access into educational institutions is rated as a key issue influencing the position of women in educational management. In some cases, this is attribu-ted to the dominance of men in powerful positions within the structure of school management such as school governing bodies and in district offices, which is usually regarded as detrimental to women's access and performance in these positions (Grogan, 1996). This male dominance in key leadership positions is linked to the traditional perspective of the position of women in society which had men controlling the highest administrative jobs within school districts. This constantly leads to these male administrators giving positions to those who resemble them in attitude, actions, and appearance (Grogan, 1996). Women who aspire to school management positions often face barriers of administration in hiring and promotion that often limit their up-ward movement. For example, in the bigger study referred to earlier (Moorosi, 2006a), some woman principals were found to have experienced blatant discrimination in their earlier attempts to participate in management on the grounds that male candidates were sought after. In the same study, many woman principals continued to face obstacles in performing the management

function even after they had been appointed. This manifested in lack of acceptance and resistance to woman principals' authority. Arguably, this treatment has a negative impact on women who are in promotion positions and are aspiring to become school principals.

Barriers from the home and the ways women are perceived, culturally and historically, are also regarded as barriers to women's advancement. For many organisations including schools, work and home life should be kept separate for women who are in positions of power. This view consequently constitutes a barrier for women teachers whose personal lives are inextricably linked to their work life (Van der Westhuizen, 1991). Women managers have additional difficulty performing their management role because of the conflicting attitudes and the stereotypes regarding what it means to be a woman and what it means to be a manager. Women who are managers and have children therefore straddle the dual worlds of parenting and working and are usually not successful in balancing the two (Dunlap & Schmuck, 1995). Further, Dunlap and Schmuck remark that:

> While the world of teaching more easily accommodates the dual world of many women, the demands of administration still often presume one has a 'wife' at home (1995:44).

For some women, moving into management brings an additional stress, since they associate management work with inflexibility and restrictiveness as compared to what teaching in the classroom offers them in terms of meeting the demands on their time. This is arguably because women's personal priorities and responsibilities outside their work roles can be seen to vie with professional commitments once they are in management, and the balancing of these different roles and responsibilities can be a source of pressure. Thus, in their attempt to balance their personal and professional lives, some women hesitate to seek promotion into management posts during their careers because they anticipate difficulty in maintaining the balance between the two. And for those who get promotion, balancing these responsibilities becomes a problem as pressure on the family domain is not reduced for them. This suggests that the problems women experience, after being appointed into principalship, add to the already existing pressure they have as women in negotiating a balance between the home and work.

An earlier South African study by Mahlase (1997) investigated the position and experiences of black women teachers and managers and acknowledged the treatment of race, culture, and ethnicity as issues affecting and having defined experiences of women in education in general and education management in particular. Mahlase identified marriage and child-rearing as factors that continue to have a negative impact on women's progress in their management career, since management continues to be defined in male terms. Greyvenstein (2000) also concluded that barriers facing South African women in education management are "numerous, multi-faceted, highly complex in nature and deeply interwoven in cultural norms and values" (2000:31). As noted earlier, I explore further in this paper the notion of balancing work and

family as a factor impeding women's progression in education management.

The work culture and gender in organisational management

The lack of women's participation in organisational management is a long observed problem that has been tackled through a number of interventions which yielded limited and/or short-lived returns. The lack of success with these interventions has been attributed to their limited approach to tackling the realities of the gendered social order (Ely & Meyerson, 2000) that leaves these practices intact. Realising the social order as problematic for women's advancement in organisational management, Kolb and Meyerson (1999) and Ely and Meyerson (2000) analysed intervention strategies to understand their lack of impact in bringing about the desired effects. They analysed three "traditional approaches" underpinned by liberal feminism and whose intervention has not had the desired effect and suggested an alternative approach that recognises the gendered nature of organisations. According to these authors, interventions informed by the first three approaches leave the gendered social practices intact, resulting in unsustainable progress that only benefits some individuals. In comparison, the fourth approach they suggest sees these social practices as "subtle and insidious sources of gender inequity" (Ely & Meyerson, 2000:115) that must be rooted out of the organizations.

The last (fourth) approach is underpinned by feminist post-structural strands that take a non-traditional route to understanding gender inequalities and do not regard gender as a basis for discrimination. In this sense gender is not seen as an "axis of power" that shapes social structure, identities and knowledge" (Kolb & Meyerson, 1999:139), but it is viewed as a complex set of social relations enacted across a range of social practices that exist both within and outside formal organizations. These social practices range from formal policies and procedures (work rules, labour contracts, managerial activities, job descriptions, etc.) to informal patterns of everyday social interactions within formal organizations (organisations' norms about how work is done, relationships required to do the job, distribution of roles and responsibilities, etc.). These social practices, as seen by Ely and Meyerson (2000), tend to reflect and support men's experiences and life situations by placing higher value on masculine identity, since they have been created largely by and for men and are based on male experiences. Because these social practices are so deeply embedded in the culture of organisations, they tend to be perceived as gender neutral and are regarded as a natural way in which organisations operate. The perceived neutrality of these social practices is what this approach finds problematic since it widens the split in the traditional notions of male and female, masculine and feminine, public and private dichotomies (Reiger, 1993) that are reflected by the daily social practices inherent in all organisations. This neutrality, it is argued, inaccurately shapes the discourses of what constitutes leadership and management within all organisations, including schools, and continue to disadvantage women.

Ely and Meyerson (2000) further argue that because the social practices within organisations were designed by and for some privileged men who have always dominated the management field, they appear to be neutral and tend to uphold gender as fixed, ranked oppositions. This representation of gender as oppositions originates and preserves male privilege and views 'management' work as part of the public domain associated with men and thus privileges men and disadvantages women. The approach suggested as an alternative acknowledges the difference in the way women and men are affected by these social practices which are determined by their historical background, race, ethnicity, social class, and other issues of diversity and suggest that these gender boundaries should be blended.

This approach therefore starts with the premise that gender inequality is deeply rooted in the cultural patterns and organisational systems and can only be addressed by a persistent campaign of incremental changes that discover and destroy the deeply embedded roots of discrimination driven by both women and men together. The target is to benefit both sex groups by creating a world where gender is not an issue. The intervention here starts with the identification of the problem and the premise that unless these gendered social practices are acknowledged as problems and therefore disentangled gender inequity will not be uprooted from the organisations. The approach acknowledges the differences in experiences shaped by these social practices, and suggests multiple solutions to all gender problems in the management of organizations.

The criticism levelled against this approach, however, is that although it appears to have the ability to tackle the gender discriminative social practices ignored by other approaches, its limitation is linked to resistance to change and difficulty of sustainability (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). This is because it makes no attempt to identify the endpoint, but continuously disrupts the social order and revises the structural practices and regards the process of change as both means and end. However, its acknowledgement of gendered social practices within organisations that appear neutral on the surface is useful for understanding the gendered nature of organisations manifested in the practitioners' experiences and conceptions of management while affecting negatively the progression of women in the management and leadership of schools as organisations.

The private–public dichotomy

Within the framework of the work culture in organisational management, Ely and Meyerson (2000) and Rao *et al.* (1999) identify the private–public dichotomy theme. For the purposes of this paper, the problems associated with the private–public dichotomy are understood as problems concerning time and allocation of time between work and family which arguably affect women differently from their male principal counterparts. According to Rapoport *et al.* (1996, in Ely & Meyerson, 2000), this theme manifests in the image of the ideal worker which is upheld by a variety of gender neutral social practices.

It is on the basis of this analysis that the image of the ideal manager suggests commitment as of one who is willing to put family obligations second to work-related obligations, creating an illusionary picture of the work place as asexual (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). Within this theme, the social practices still appear gender neutral because everyone appears to be subjected to them, while the reality is that these social practices sabotage women who cannot be available for work all the time. These social practices are therefore gendered in the sense that they tend to affect men and women differently since they bear disproportionate responsibility between home and work, making it difficult for women to strike a balance between the private and public spheres of their lives. The split makes it even more difficult for woman principals who are married and of reproductive age to balance their public and private responsibilities, since they are still expected to play their cultural roles as mothers and wives over and above their commitment to their work as school managers.

This cultural split of responsibilities therefore makes it difficult for women to be adequately available for work and therefore leads to their being labelled as less task-oriented. Ely and Meyerson (2000) suggest that these social practices are less punitive for women whose partners earn high income and who themselves do not necessarily have to work, but tremendously disadvantage single women and those with low income earning partners. In South Africa, the race and class dimensions of these practices manifest in the fact that most of these low income earners are, more often than not, black people who in most cases would be the sole providers of their families and can therefore not afford to take time off from work because that would mean less pay. These women would arguably not afford the luxury of choice between family and work responsibility, thus limiting their agency in dealing with their own situation. In Chisholm's (2001) study, the studied women opted out of provincial educational leadership positions as fast as they came in because of not being able to meet the work demands. Again, class and race tended to interact with gender and to play a significant role in these cases as women managers who tended to leave these high demanding jobs were those who had high earning partners, who were, in most cases, white. Thus, as Ely and Meyerson (2000) suggest, women of different social class and race experience the private–public split differently and because for working and middle-class black women the split is more complicated, as they are forced to navigate much more cautiously than their more affluent white counterparts.

Methodology

In the study I utilised feminist research methodology and focused on woman principals of secondary schools in the KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa. To select the participants, a letter was sent to all woman principals of secondary schools in the province asking them to participate in the study. Some did not respond and others were not willing to participate or could not be reached. Semi-structured interviews were therefore conducted with 28

woman secondary-school principals of varied races. These interviews were transcribed and reviewed by the participants. Woman principal participants' details are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1   Woman principal participants' details

Participants' status	Number
Racial status	
African	24
White	2
Indian	2
Marital status	
Married with children	14
Single with children	13
Single with no children	1
Age status	
30 and below	1
31 – 40	10
41 – 50	9
51 and above	8

As noted earlier, in this paper I analyse the data related to woman principals' experiences as they navigated the balance between their private sphere of home and public sphere of life after their appointment as principals. In the next section I focus particularly on woman principals' responses to the question on how they kept a balance between work and family. This question was asked in order to establish the impact of family on their performance as school principals.

In this regard, for all woman principals who participated in the study, family life was as important as were their careers, but there were tensions in satisfying these two important yet conflicting aspects of their lives. Their experiences revealed some differences between women of differing marital status, age, race, and social class.

Data analysis: balancing work and family

The relationship between family and career was seen as a difficult one for woman principals who had families. Analysis from the study suggests that woman principals' marital status was significant in fulfilling their duties between the home and the school. To illustrate, for single women (particularly those with grown-up, or no, children) most of their time was spent on work-related responsibilities. As such, for women in this category, their family status did not negatively impact on their responsibilities as principals. These woman principals believed that their circumstances worked to their advantage as compared to married women because they did not have husbands and young

children. This status seemed to have allowed unmarried participants with no children more time to attend to school matters without feeling the pressure of not leaving sufficient time for family. In addition, the absence of children in these participants' families also appeared to have increased the likelihood that woman principals would work professionally, since without husbands and children they tended to give the work their undivided attention without suffering the guilt of not doing well as mothers and wives. For example, a single woman with grown up children and no husband remarked:

> *Yah since they* (children) *are all big and gone, I do whatever I feel like doing. If I feel like going to school to catch up with some errands, I do that even if it's on Saturday* (Sindi).

Clearly for Sindi and others in her category there were no constraints imposed by the family responsibilities as such since they were on their own. However, this had its own disadvantages, as many of the women reported being consumed by their work and finding it difficult to create a balance between work and a social life. To this effect, Molly voiced her concern for the loss of her social life as a result of her responsibilities at the school, and decried the fact that she was not able to maintain a balance between work and personal life even though she was not married and did not have children:

> *In my situation where I am on my own, school takes over everything. And you tend to lose any other kind of life and so your balance is kind of thrown out. And one of the difficult things to learn is to keep some kind of outside life to form a balance so that your whole life isn't only taken over by the school. You got to have some outside balance and interests to keep some balance. I am working quite hard at it because it has affected me quite heavily. I spent most of the time on the school than anything else* (Molly).
>
> *… I don't have a lot of free time at home. I don't have a lot of social life at home. That is what really had to go. Because you can't go out to dinner if you've got reports to be done for the next day or you have an urgent meeting to prepare for the next day. This whole social part of my life is really gone. It's in the bottom drawer* (Hally).

Molly and Sindi on the one hand appreciated the fact that their single marital status has worked to their advantage as far as fulfilling their work obligations as managers were concerned, even though, clearly, their social life was taken over by school responsibilities. Hally on the other hand was married but also complained about the loss of her social life since she took over principalship.

On the other hand, married and younger women (who were still in their reproductive ages) complained bitterly about their neglect of the family due to their work commitments. For them, coping with both family and work was a big problem as they were still expected to perform the role of a traditional wife and mother even though they had a full time career. The ages of children created another dimension impacting on the role woman principals were expected to play — the younger the children the more attention they needed and the more they added to the pressures woman principals suffered. Mahlase (1997) indicates that there is a higher degree of difficulty for women to strike a balance when the children are of pre-school or primary-school age. Simi-

larly, in this study, women who seemed to have a bigger problem and expressed more concern about the lack of time left for family were those with smaller children of school-going age as seen in the following comments:

You know there is a lot of work at school. There are duties and responsibilities that you have to perform and even after school hours — then when you get home kids want to come near you and you have a lot of work to do. At the same time even your husband can't see that you have extra work that you have work to do. He wants this and that. So it becomes really difficult. And now I have a lot of responsibilities both at home and school, my children come with homework and I just don't have time … (Biziwe).

Frankly speaking I am failing to serve my role as a mother and a wife. I really can't. Because I stay at school supervising study from 4.30 to 6.00 pm and my husband … complains. Because I come home late, tired and I cook fast food because I don't have time even to supervise my own children's work because I have to do school work at home. I can't balance. It feels too much (Fundi).

… There isn't any balance really because if I really sit down and look at the whole situation, I can see that my children are really missing out because I sort of give myself more to the learners at the school because I feel that they are more disadvantaged than my children. But at the end of the day I am doing injustice to my children. But then you know I feel that the environment they are in, the school they attend they get a lot of support, but over there if I am not there it's a problem. … I make substantial personal sacrifices at the expense of my family for the sake of the school and I always fight with my husband … he feels that my children need me more than the learners at the school (Sino).

These responses highlighted the difficulty of playing dual conflicting roles of professional and mother and how family suffered while they attended to their work duties and responsibilities.

Another source of pressure on the woman principals, revealed in some of the quotes above, was the lack of support from spouses. Spouses appeared to be adding more pressure due to the cultural expectation that chores related to children are a woman's responsibility. Hence their lack of support even when these women have more pressures from the work place. Some woman principals reported that their husbands still expected them to perform household chores that could be done by the helper:

… Hey, he (my husband) *doesn't understand in such a way that whenever we come back home he sits here on the sofa, then I have to dish for him and take the food to him because he doesn't want his food to be prepared by the kids let alone the maid. So I have to attend to him and after that he puts the dishes over there and takes his newspaper and reads. Hey he doesn't understand. But regarding the work and the procedures to be followed as well as the management stuff he does support me at times. But with household things nothing* (Biziwe).

(Interrupting) *… I fail. I just fail.* (Cell-phone ringing) *As it is now it's my husband who is calling me and I'm ignoring him. I just fail and he will*

complain, and complain and complain. You know I normally come back from work at about 11 o'clock in the evening. I do study time at school; the study period ends at 10 o'clock in the evening. It's a boarding school. I drive from school to my place; by the time I come home it would be 11 o'clock. Sometimes I can see he is angry by the time when I come; the gate will be locked. He knows I do not have a key to open up the gate, and then I can tell today he is angry (Zama).

The lack of understanding and the expectation by spouses for woman principals to perform culturally gendered chores in the home seemed to be pervasive, and as has been seen was experienced mostly by the younger woman principals who were still raising children. Therefore, men as partners could play a crucial role in helping their wives cope with the demands of their work as principals, but without this support, women found it difficult to strike a balance between work and home.

It was also interesting to note that older married women who were not living with children enjoyed the support from their spouses as reflected here:

Well, I can say that I am fortunate because at home I no longer have more responsibility because all my children are old. So it's only my husband to look after and there is a person whom I have employed, for just cleaning and everything of that sort. So really I don't think I have a problem (Zandi).

Well of course my daughters all left home now. But my husband had to take over and offer a more supportive role. For example tonight I am not going to be home before eight o'clock nine o'clock, so he still has to sort out the home. We have lots of animals and he has to give them supper and his own supper (Hally).

Both Zandi and Hally were above 56 years of age and of different races.

Equally important, to the issue of support from spouses, has been the expectations of the schools in terms of the amount of time woman principals are expected to put into their work, reinforcing the assertion made earlier that the concept of 'ideal manager' does not suit women who are still expected to play the traditional role of mother and wife. This is evidently because principals are expected to give a lot of time towards school responsibilities and that assumes that there will be somebody at home cooking and taking care of children. Therefore the cultural norms and practices are still deeply integrated into the way organisations operate, making the latter only suitable for people who do not have as many demanding responsibilities as women do at home. The school rule, that study has to be supervised until 10 o'clock at night, appears normal because it is the accepted culture of the school. It is this normality of organisational cultures that I am arguing needs to be challenged in order to accommodate women within these organisations.

Men (as partners) who do not play a domestic role in the home make it even more difficult for women to handle demanding positions of power in the work place. Chisholm (2001) also affirms that in South Africa men hardly take a full domestic responsibility (e.g. child care and other domestic responsibilities) while women more often seem to be grappling with the issues of career and family at the same time. Earlier, Mahlase (1997) had also observed that

married-woman teachers' attempts to live in both the public sphere of work and the private sphere of home are very complicated and stressful and that these problems become acute when women are in the principalship position. This is perhaps one partial reason why fewer obstacles in this regard were experienced by unmarried women with no children living with them. This is an example of a gendered social practice to which liberal feminism is completely blind in its campaign for equal treatment of women. Men and women start on an unequal playing field due to social and cultural expectations of gender. Clearly, for as long as cultural roles are gendered, it is not easy for women to create the link between their private and public life. The demands are higher on them to perform better as principals while they also feel pressurised to perform well as wives and mothers.

It is also evident from some of the excerpts quoted that woman principals tend to struggle with guilt in trying to combine career and family life. These findings suggest that women who manage to do this suffer the guilt of not performing well as mothers and wives (also found by Biklen & Brannigan, 1980). The difficulty of keeping the balance between home and work resulted in the woman principals' feeling that their families were suffering while they spent most of their time doing work-related duties. Therefore, combining a career and family seemed problematic for women especially the younger ones who are still expected to prove themselves as good mothers and good wives. These women are under pressure to perform well in their career as school principals while the cultural expectations of motherhood and marriage are not necessarily in line with organisational expectations of a good manager. Woman principals clearly suffer the guilt of being good principals at the expense of their families. I argue therefore that in order for these women to perform well as principals, and to enjoy motherhood and being a wife, oppressive gendered social practices within the family/society and schools as organisations have to be challenged and corrected to suit the interests of both men and women working in these environments. If women's identity is characterised by motherhood and being a wife as well as being a professional, then clearly school organisational and family cultures have to be more accommodating to both women and men. Women should not be forced to choose between career and work on the basis of their gender.

Other aspects shaping the identity of the woman principals such as race, ethnicity, and class also need to be taken into consideration in dealing with these gendered social practices. In other words, it is unlikely that a single umbrella solution would expose and address all these sources of inequality within organisations. To illustrate, an interesting racial variance emerged where Hally (a white woman principal) indicated that she managed to take time off to start her family, and chose to apply for principalship when her children were grown up. This is the comfort that could not be enjoyed by a majority of the black African participants in the context of South Africa. For the latter, keeping jobs at all costs seemed paramount due to socio-economic reasons while the dimension brought by Hally's case suggests that for more economically advantaged women, combining career and family is a choice they

could afford to postpone until circumstances for child bearing and rearing are in their favour. But the reality of the majority of South African women is that the percentage of the economically affluent woman principals who could afford to take career breaks is minute. And even then, taking career breaks also works adversely against women since this means women lose out on the years of experience required for promotion into the principalship, further complicating the plight for women's advancement in the management of schools. For this reason, career breaks are considered detrimental to women's upward mobility (Coleman, 1994; Hanekom, 2001). This highlights the interplay between gender, race, ethnicity, and class oppression within the broader gendered aspect of organisational life that needs to be at the centre of the campaigns towards gender equality.

In summing up this section, while women managers in Chisholm's (2001) study compromised their ability to play leadership roles in their place of work by attending to their domestic responsibilities, the situation was different for the woman principals in this study. The latter compromised family time and other aspects of their social life and gave more time to work responsibilities. Therefore, while family commitments affected perceptions of commitment to work in the western cultures and some affluent previously racially advantaged South African women, such as those studied by Chisholm, the current study suggests that for black South African women (who constituted a majority in the study) the opposite is true — women neglected family for the sake of career. This reiterates the point made above that the majority of South African women do not have the economic luxury of putting their careers on hold while they take care of family.

Blending the gender boundaries: Is it a solution?

The tendency to sacrifice family life for work life by woman principals in this study can be interpreted as an attempt on their part to avoid being perceived as less committed to their work. This would ultimately portray them as unsuitable for the demanding leadership positions, thereby perpetuating the stereotype that women are less task-oriented than men, and are therefore unsuitable for management positions in schools. Ely and Meyerson (2000) view this as a dichotomy between public and private spheres which reinforces the image of the 'ideal manager' as one who is willing to put family obligations second to work obligations. Woman principals in the study tried to conform to this norm for fear of being judged as incompetent, while at the same time trying to keep up with family responsibilities as mothers and wives in the home. Clearly, this dual responsibility disadvantages women and produces conditions that make it impossible for them to do both, since women are still primarily responsible for family and reproductive activities (Rao *et al.*, 1999) which tend not to be in line with the notion of the ideal principal.

It is evident that factors affecting women's participation in management are not only structural or personal, but equally important are social barriers in the form of broader cultural expectations in terms of the sex role stereotypes, political, traditional, and historical influences. These factors are so

deeply rooted within schools as organisations and the society at large. They are therefore regarded as normal and gender neutral because they have always been the order of the day and because they are so deeply entrenched, they are difficult to eradicate. Blackmore (1989) posits that at a specific historical moment, traditional patterns of behaviour prescribe certain roles to which men and women conform to differing degrees, making it difficult to re-organise responsibilities within the family. That is why, for example, women's centrality to child rearing and family is not greatly challenged in practice and forms part of women's identity, values, needs (Rao *et al.*, 1999) and simply the way things are. While woman principals in the study acknowledged the difficulty in striking a balance between home and work, it still appeared a norm for them to be expected to do the household chores while they were holding demanding full-time jobs. This normality, I am arguing, needs to be challenged in order shape new discourses for women and men in education leadership and management.

This analysis is based on the experiences of women who have "chiselled through the glass ceiling" (Hall, 1996; Cubillo & Brown, 2003) and accessed the principalship. But it is evident that even at this level, women continue to face and experience challenges from within the organisations in which they work and the societies in which they live. It is evident that the glass barriers are not just at the top but all around women as stated by Cubillo and Brown (2003). This is arguably due to the deep structures (Rao *et al.*, 1999) and deeply embedded social practices (Ely & Meyerson, 2000) that devalue women's interests outside organisations. These challenges are not tangible and formal, but are intangible, informal, subtle, appear gender neutral (Gupton & Slick, 1996; Ely & Meyerson, 2000), and exist within the home and schools as organisations. These findings have illuminated the intricacy of the different levels (social and organisational) characterising factors affecting women's participation in education management. The interaction between the social and organisational levels is therefore inevitable, since cultural practices within society shape discourses within schools as organisations. It is the very same people who live in the community who also have influence on who should run the schools and how they should be run. This directly has implications for policy but as indicated in Moorosi (2006b), policy alone cannot guarantee gender equality. Hence, these gendered social practices both within schools and the society have to be identified and tackled as and when they happen in order to achieve broader and genuine gender equity.

Feminism has been criticized for its inattentiveness to race and ethnicity (Beasley, 1999) and liberal feminism in particular has been to a large extent linked to white middle class women of the west and as such does not adequately explain black African women's experiences. Perhaps we need locally developed feminist theoretical frameworks that treat gender inequity not only as an organisational issue, but as a social issue in order to put into perspective the experiences of women who live in Africa and to deal with the nuances influencing the course for gender inequity in positions of power. The currently advocated approach to leadership and management in South Africa appears

to suggest a more collaborative, democratic, and participatory style which is often associated with women. The question is whether this is an attempt to 'feminise' management and leadership in schools as an attempt to allow for more female participation in the traditionally male oriented domains which will in turn reduce the pressure on women by allowing them to work in ways compatible with their other interests. The effect and success of this approach remain to be seen.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I argue that for as long as social practices within schools as organisations are viewed as gender neutral, and for as long as women's work and interests outside these organisations is considered less important, there will always be a split between the private and the public and this will continue to affect the broader gender equity in education management. Further, unless there is recognition of how gender is conceptualised, attempts to address gender inequality in management within the context of schooling in South Africa will remain superficial. The focus on cultural and social practices enabled me to highlight these differences in a way that exposes these insidious and subtle discriminatory practices, which make it difficult to blend the boundaries between the work and family spheres. This exposure enhanced the understanding of some of the tensions shaping the discourses in the management of schools and as a means to achieving broader gender equity in school management.

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