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## Articles and Statements

### Women in the C-Suite: Do They Have the Globe Enthralled?

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#### **Abstract**

Women have historically showed outstanding capability in leadership roles in varying societal spheres and periods across the globe. Although grossly underrepresented in leadership, those who take up the positions bring to the exercise of leadership an arsenal of strengths, which increasingly, are meant to benefit the entities they lead on local, national, and global levels. In the run-up to the Fourth World Women Conference held in Beijing in 1995, there was much hype about the issues of equity, equality and women representation. During the conference, the concepts of equity and equality, in relation to gender were expansively discussed. While the conference ultimately called for equal opportunities and equal representation, an examination of the several sectors in different countries revealed that the percentage of women in the C-Suite is still very low. Can one say that women are discriminated against or do they discriminate themselves? Do they get technically disqualified because they are women? This analysis focuses on the status of women leadership in politics, education, health and religion. While these are not the only sectors where women hardly get to the top management, they mirror the status quo in the other sectors. The few women at the top also face certain challenges, including the fact that they cannot make important decisions concerning their sectors without consultation. Those who do so are considered to be acting like 'men'. Although affirmative action is adhered to in many sectors, in most cases, women do not aggressively seek for leadership positions.

**Keywords:** Education, Health, Leadership, Politics, Religion, Women.

#### **Introduction**

The notion of women leadership is not new. Historically, women have prolifically led in different capacities. In varying epochs, women were in the C-suite applicable at that time, and although oftentimes, it was by inheritance, when they got into their positions, they made great strides and navigated their territories effectively. The early women political leaders faced resistance, just like the modern ones, and most of their leadership was so controversial that they at

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times had to be androgynous to assert themselves. Cleopatra, the legendary woman leader in Egypt was resourceful, disciplined and suppressive when managing the affairs of her kingdom (Aneni, 2016). She initiated development in Egypt and made male world leaders copy from her. For example, when Emperor Julius Caesar visited Egypt, he was so inspired by Cleopatra's kingdom that he established some reforms based on what he had learnt (Tsoucalas, & Sgantzos, 2014). The notable ones are the institution of a public library and the enactment of a law for the census policy in the Roman kingdom. Most men in the leadership circles in her kingdom did not agree with her policies but she was assertive and ensured that her ideas materialized. When she was about to lose the battle with Octavian, Cleopatra chose to commit suicide rather than be captured by her enemies. To her, defeat and possibly capture, was more shameful than death. She lived and died a heroic leader.

Queen Victoria is a historical woman leader who reached her potential during her reign. Victoria made it clear that she had the capacity to rule immediately after she ascended to power albeit a very young queen. She exiled her mother and fired her advisor because she disagreed with them about running the affairs of the monarchy. Femininity did not play any role in her leadership and she suggested several laws to improve the quality of life of working people in the deplorable conditions of the slums (McKendry, 1993). She is associated with the expansion of the British empire to the whole world and the rise in industrialization. The expansion was so great that:

*'During her reign, the sun never set on the British empire'* (p. 68). About seven assassination attempts were made against Queen Victoria during her reign. They were all made by men, revealing how disgruntled the men were with her leadership. Both queen Victoria and Cleopatra succeed in their capacities and endured bitter rivalry from men. In traditional Africa, there were women leaders who ruled traditional kingdoms and even led men in battles. Idia was an energetic, formidable, strategic and military warrior in her kingdom of Benin (Aneni, 2016). She led her army to war when they were attacked by the Igala people. She was a powerful and influential ruler who did all she could to protect her kingdom. Mekatilili wa Menza in Kenya was another fiery political woman leader who used her power to deal with the British invasion of the Giriama kingdom (Carrier, & Nyamweru, 2016).

Mekatilili led a public forum at Chakama to protest the British recruitment of African porters for World War I. During this protest meeting, the British fired at the crowd which made her more infuriated. She mobilized the Giriama to take oaths to maintain their allegiance to the Giriama kingdom. She led her people in opposing forced labor, payment of taxes, land seizure and restrictions about consuming palm wine. Mekatilili organized the famous Giriama uprising against the British in 1914 which led to the death of many Giriama because the British had superior weapons. Although the British won, they were challenged and they had to honor some of her demands like the use of forced labor and restriction on alcohol consumption. Like Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman (Ngunjiri et al., 2012) who campaigned fearlessly for the liberation of African Americans, Mekatilili struggled for the liberation of her people. Other famous known women leaders in African kingdoms include Syokimau of the Akamba and Wangu wa Makeri of the Agikuyu. Wangu wa Makeri, was an assistant chief appointed by the British during their rule in Kenya. She later became a paramount chief, which was the highest position for the locals at that time in colonial Kenya. She was a no-nonsense leader who did not encourage young people to be idle. She would have them arrested and whipped publicly. Many men avoided meeting her in the village paths especially the tax evaders who were made to carry the visitors on their backs, especially the British who visited her chieftom. She is said to have been a very stubborn and authoritative ruler of the Agikuyu community (Gathogo, 2008). When she was addressing her subjects, she sat on a man's back. Even in the traditional kingdoms, some men were opposed to women leadership but because they were effective, they remained in power. She lost her position in shame after men implicated her in a dance scandal and she was forced to resign. All these historical women show that women were successful leaders, long before the advent of feminist ideology. The dissent lies in the numbers and the rise of formal leadership structures which seem to alienate women.

The rise of the emancipation worldview in the last two decades, which emphasizes self-expression values, human choice and autonomy of women, has led to an increase in the number of women elites who can respond to the need for equal representation in different sectors of leadership. Women with good academic standing, who have interest in leadership and are ready to

overcome the existing gender stereotyping have made it to positions of leadership, even to the most top positions in government and major corporations. There are challenges to women leadership and these differ from one geographical location to another but most studies have established that economic development is central to women emancipation, empowerment and leadership.

In a Nigerian study by Anigwe (2014), most of the participants felt that their educational backgrounds empowered them for political office, but it was not a defining factor for their getting elected. Financial stability was deemed to be a more important factor when making the decision to vie for a political position. The women felt that the cost of a political campaign was too high. Spousal approval and support was also considered very important because patriarchy is the norm in African settings. Many African governments, including Nigeria, have failed to protect the rights of women and advance gender equality especially in key social, economic and political sectors (Chamley, 2011). Women empowerment programs have not succeeded in Nigeria because of the lack of adequate educational, economic and political development.

In the United States, women are involved in leadership in different sectors but the representation is still far from being equal to that of men. African American women are more underrepresented. Starting off as first-generation college graduate, most African American women leaders face challenges of having a background of low socio-economic levels (Johnson, 2015). Self-confidence, good communication skills, and motivating followers are important skills for today's leaders. Women stated that they did not consider gender to be a barrier in the ascending to leadership. They felt that diversity was increasing rapidly at the time and all they needed was to advance in their careers. This new information is important to aspiring women leaders and to women's leadership scholars in general.

### **The C-Suite**

What does Angela Merkel (German Chancellor), Drew Gilpin Faust (President of Harvard University), The late Wangari Maathai (Nobel peace prize winner), The late Margaret Thatcher (Former British Prime Minister), Ellen Sirleaf-Johnson (President of Liberia), Katherine Jefferts Schori (Former Presiding Bishop and Primate of the Episcopal Church), and Diana Natalicio (President of the University of Texas at El Paso) have in common? The simple answer is that they are or were women leaders. The apropos answer is that they are women who have sacrificed their time, passions, energies and resources to serve as public leaders in the top most leadership positions in different sectors in their countries. Only a few women bear these characteristics globally. Statistics continue to indicate the dearth of women in CEO positions across many different sectors and the unceasing slow progress over time in having more women infiltrate the C-suite.

Education plays a major role in getting women into leadership. When women have the knowledge and skills, they have empowerment which is the driving force in aspiring for leadership. A good percentage of women in the C-suite have got terminal degrees while majority are graduates. Schools play a prominent role in the development of women's leadership skills. Most of the women in leadership had teachers who recognized their leadership potential and nurtured their intellect while they were still in school. Women do not have to identify as feminists to perform their leadership roles and most of those who have led and enthralled the world did not use the term feminist nor preach the emancipation gospel (Phillips, 2016). Women continue to shatter the glass ceiling to rise to the most powerful positions in major sectors in different parts of the globe, even though the numbers are low due to the existence of different forms of barriers.

### **Women in political leadership**

Stereotypes and skewed perceptions still remain powerful and impede the advancement of women to top level positions in almost all settings. Political leadership is a challenge for both males and females because of the procedures involved before and the nature of the assignments involved if one succeeds. Women do not succeed politically purely just by pursuing the feminist agenda, Margaret Thatcher and other famous women leaders never identified themselves as feminists. Critics of feminism and women leadership claim that women policymakers, such as Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi, behaved exactly like men. Thatcher, the Oxford educated scientist, believed in persuading people to go her way (Phillips, 2016). Most women are able to handle

difficult situations without using force but Margaret Thatcher was a different woman in political leadership. She was forceful, directive, stubborn and uncompromising (Stepney, 2013).

She once said:

*'I must say the adrenaline flows when they really come out fighting at me and I fight back. I stand there, and I say, now come on Maggie, you are wholly on your own; no one can help you and I love it'* (p. 16).

- She was more of an authoritarian than a democrat and she claimed that she could 'steer the car from the back seat'. Her campaign slogan was 'Britain needs the *Iron Lady*' and she indeed proved to be the iron lady during her reign. She adamantly rejected communism and she never gave up, and never compromised on any issues affecting her country. She was at times unpopular among her own people, especially when she imposed controversial policies in a bid to revive the ailing economy at that time. Thatcher is, however, regarded as the strongest leader on the international stage Britain had produced since Winston Churchill. Two similarly powerful women heads of government, Indira Gandhi of India and Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan were assassinated for their controversial policies, including production of nuclear weapons, and broad populist appeal.

- The tag of feminism is associated with women empowerment although it has a negative implication of depicting feminists as liberals and rebels. The reasons why women seek political office may vary but the view of pro-feminism is still regarded as being against male dominance which may not be the motivation behind aspiring for political office. Even among the current global women political leaders, none can be identified with being a revolutionary in the sense of feminism but their ideology and perception is based on the values they stand for. Studies have shown that women and men make equally good political leaders (Kendall, 2014). Women and men have to meet similar requirements to gain leadership roles in the first place. Women and men tend to differ in their leadership styles, with men preferring a hierarchical, top-down and more of directive leadership and women being more interactive, consultative, restrained, and patient (Lynn, 2012).

- As of January 2017, approximately 10 percent of the world countries were headed by women, either as Heads of State or Heads of Government. Two women were in their eleventh year of leadership in their countries, Angela Merkel of Germany and Ellen Sirleaf Johnson of Liberia. Chancellor Angela Merkel is the world's only head of state with a Ph.D. in Physics. Matthijs (2016) describes Merkel as a leader who uses 'small steps'. Using this emblem, she has been able to achieve much and even put Germany as the leader in Europe. Merkel's leadership is characterized by caution, and she prefers to delay and conceal information so as to avoid big decisions. Evidence shows that women leaders typically have more compassion and empathy, and a more open and inclusive negotiation style.

- Merkel went against other European countries and opened German's borders to Syrian refugees in 2015, following her humanitarian impulse. She went against her counter parts in Hungary and Austria and directed that the refugees in buses, trains or foot, be received in Germany. This was a major collateral damage because she did not consult other European nations. The fact that she did not consult others may have been driven by the empathy that she had for the suffering human beings. She was filled with pity as a mother and did not consider rejection as an option, when the other leaders refused to have the refugees in their countries. She acted quickly to save a humanitarian situation. Critics said that this could cost her another term in office (it did not!) but as a woman, she was comfortable with her decision. Studies have shown that women leadership is characterized by consideration for others and leaders with more complex moral reasoning are more likely to value goals that go beyond immediate self-interest and to foresee the benefits of actions that serve the collective good (Ionescu, 2012).

- Many times, women experience disapproval for their more masculine behaviors, such as asserting clear-cut authority over others, as well as for their more feminine behaviors, such as being especially supportive of others. Merkel does not identify with feminism but she is for women freedom, opportunities and empowerment. Supporting a statement from queen Maxima of the Netherlands who stated that feminism meant women having equal opportunities, she said: 'If that is a feminist, I am a feminist'.

- In the United States, women made up 19% of the Congress, which translates to gross underrepresentation, considering that American women are said to be liberated. In 2016 only six of the 50 governors in the United States were women (Center for American Women in Politics,

2016), and only two are women of color. Barriers, both internal and external still exist for those women who wish to run for US congress. Warner (2014) states that in the political world, gender stereotyping is a major barrier to women leadership meaning that women are less likely than men to be recruited to run for elected office, are more likely to be discouraged from running, and are less likely to consider themselves qualified to run. Women are the majority in most professions, raise as much money and are as successful as male candidates when they assume public office but most times, they keep off the political arena. Historically, women in the US congress were concerned about women issues and supported ideas for the promotion of women. Although there is still support, much of the influence lies in allegiance to party affiliation. There is some evidence that Republican women legislators are oftentimes likely to make a priority of discussing issues relating to women in the house committee, but when it comes to final voting, they adhere to the party line. Being pro-woman is, however, in the eye of the beholder and there are those who openly show their support, irrespective of their party voting line. Democratic women are strong proponents of women political empowerment for leadership, however, it is worth noting that both congress men and women have valuable insights and perspectives despite their political standing.

- Rwanda has the highest percentage of women parliamentarians worldwide. Women there have won 63.8 per cent of seats in the lower house. After the 1994 genocide, women got a chance to work, just like men. They, however, face many challenges related to gender discrimination due to the patriarchal nature of the society. In her study on the private lives of the Rwandan women politicians' private lives, Uvuza (2014) found that with rare exceptions, no matter how powerful these women were in public, that power did not extend into their own homes. One participant expressed stated;

*'My husband expects me to make sure that the water is put in the bathroom for him to bathe, his clothes are ironed, shoes polished, and laid out with socks on top of them every morning, all by me, his wife, the parliamentarian' (p. 132).*

In an African family setting, it does not matter how high the woman politician ranks, she has to be at the beck and call of her husband. Many men say that they have paid bride price and the wife has to perform her traditional chores. In most African traditions, where Rwanda is included, a good woman is socially expected to be one who is married, and who takes good care of her husband and children. She is expected to feed, nurture, and nurse the ill members of her extended family. If a woman aspires for political leadership in Africa, she is connotatively referred to as an American woman. To be an American woman is to be liberal, aggressive and more so, a feminist. In fact, feminist is almost a no mention word in many African contexts. Aspiring young women politicians are often told that their place is in America, not Africa (Gaidzanwa, 2013). Unfortunately, this stereotypical thinking makes many qualified women to shy off from political leadership. In the United States house, women hold only 19 per cent of the seats. They may not be seen to focus on women issues because as leaders, they have to balance between policy and practice.

### **Women in educational leadership**

The dearth of women in top leadership roles in most professional fields creates the perception that women do not belong in those positions. In educational institutions, women administrators stay longer in service before being appointed to higher positions as compared to their male counterparts (Reis, 2015; Shober, 2014). Women face some disadvantage in obtaining promotions at all levels in organizations, have a discriminatory wage and promotion disadvantage compared with men. In Africa, women face barriers to their performance which range from stereotyping, double burden of family and public life to outright discrimination (Chamley, 2011). Research has shown that they do not apply for the positions, keep family obligations at the front and succumb to gender stereotyping. Women educational administrators in Nigeria have to be more qualified than their male counterparts in order to be appointed to the same positions (Ifedili, & Ifedili, 2009).

Women were therefore reluctant to aspire for positions, even when they were qualified. Some of the women teachers who have appropriate qualifications, positive attitude to work are seeking to be recognized and appointed but it doesn't always work for them. They look upon those in management to help them to achieve their ambitions. Aspiring South African women professors

have to have not only strong publication records and high qualifications, but should also have received good teaching evaluations and have been involved in community service. They are expected to be superwomen, excelling in all four pillars of institutional life. Mazjibuko (2006) argues that endogenous factors such as perception of the changing processes in higher education, self-perception, mentorship, and networking can act as transformative agencies for women succeeding in higher education. Sader, Odendaal, and Searle (2005) agree saying that not enough attention is given to leadership attitudes, performance and development needs of women, holding leadership positions in university. Some women educators who have appropriate qualifications, positive attitude to work are seeking to be recognized and appointed (Kele, & Pietersen, 2015). It is upon the women in management to help them achieve their ambitions, thus raising the numbers.

Women lead in educational institutions in Pakistan due to their very nature and composition and even so, they do not handle finance matters. Their leadership is also confined to the four walls of their offices. As long as they are operating within their sphere, then they are okay but if they venture into the male world of finance and resources, then they are inviting trouble. Guided by the religiously endorsed practice of sex-segregation in Pakistan, the educational institutions in the public sector are mainly single-sex, called *Zanana* (Shah & Shah, 2012). Single-sex colleges are an expression of the dominant culture of sex-segregation in most Muslim societies, which is justified in the name of Islam. Segregation is observed more closely in the rural regions because of limited exposure, than in the urban areas, and is generally stricter in the secondary and the college sectors. The age factor of the students in these levels is perceived as very sensitive within socio-religious discourse as it relates to sex, chastity, and moral code of conduct in the society. In the *Zanana* colleges, the leaders are women as well as the teachers. The other staff include men. In the study by Shah and Shah (2012) participants were unanimous that women college heads suffer a lot because of social norms and pressures, it is inappropriate for women to visit banks or other male offices.

In the United States, women college students outnumber males but the diversity of college presidents has not shifted substantially because only a third of United States universities are led by women. In 2014, white men made up 75 percent of superintendents, white women made up 23 percent, black women made up 1 percent, and women of other races and ethnicities together made up about 1 percent. From 2008 to 2013, half of the Ivy League institutions were led by women, most of whom were the first women to serve as presidents of their respective universities. Most of the college presidents try to attract female and minority faculty members to better represent their student population. The first woman president of Harvard, Drew Faust emphasized on the importance of free speech in a recent graduation. She stated that silencing ideas or basking in intellectual orthodoxy independent of facts and evidence obstructs access to new and better ideas, and it prevents a fair rejection of bad ideas. Drew Faust has initiated a broad expansion of financial aid, thus opening Harvard's doors to many more qualified applicants, and has championed increased diversity and inclusivity on campus.

Women exhibit a greater degree of transformational leadership skills (Eagly, Johannesen, & Van Engen, 2003). Some of the longest serving presidents in American universities are women. They include Sharon Diaz, the President and Chief Executive Officer of Samuel Merritt University (SMU), who has served for 32 years and, Diana Natalicio the president of the University of Texas at El Paso who has served for 29 years. In February 2016, Natalicio was the longest serving president at a major public research university. In a study on gender in university leadership participants experienced barriers related to gender, professional development and family life (Reis, 2015). Negotiation around these barriers was required to achieve leadership success. On self-identity, women college presidents, identified their strengths as communication, creativity, decision making, problem-solving, sense of humor, listening, identifying with others, making connections, willingness to question themselves, accepting their own imperfection, recognizing the relationship between self-confidence and making mistakes, and the value of relying on others (Alexander, & Welzel, 2007). Women in leadership make use of others to be effective. Most are transformational leaders who empower others and appreciate team work.

### **Women leadership in healthcare**

Over the past few decades, gender disparities in hospital executive leadership have narrowed. In the United States healthcare system, women make up 74 percent of healthcare service managers and 48 percent of medical school graduates but in the top echelons of power, there is dire

underrepresentation. Only 19 percent of US hospital CEOs are women and only 4 percent of top healthcare companies have women at the helm.

Although the future for women in healthcare leadership looks bright, many women who are presently endeavoring to reach the executive office are facing glass ceilings, competing priorities, and lack of access to support and mentorship. There are different societal challenges and there is not one specific factor responsible for the current underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in healthcare. Gender stereotypes still play a major role in the appointments, together with family commitments, parental leave policies and work schedules (Talib & Barry, 2017). Women sometimes also slow down their upward mobility with lack of aspirations and believing that limitations about their upward mobility abound. There are many women in the health sector who continue to work within the confines of the male authority in their institutions while slowly and quietly resisting and attempting to slowly bend the boundaries, rocking the boat from within, while being careful not to fall out of the boat.

In Ethiopia, women who advanced into leadership roles in healthcare were often asked to assume new responsibilities in addition to their prior roles, thus leaving little time for the already existing duties and pursuing of academic interests (Kvach et al., 2007). In a global health leadership symposium, participants stated that women healthcare leaders in low and middle-income countries often felt increasing burn-out, and some stepped down from the leadership positions altogether (Downs et al., 2016). Participants noted that, in these countries, overtly sexist assumptions that women ascend to leadership through nepotism or by exchanging sex for promotion is still commonplace ideology. Women confront a double challenge because they face barriers when pursuing leadership positions, and when they get into leadership, they are punished for achieving the goal.

Some research evidence accumulated over time suggests that gender differences in mentoring and leadership succession planning are key barriers that need to be addressed in healthcare leadership (Lantz, 2008). Most healthcare executives stated that the healthcare institutions do not invest enough in mentoring and leadership development, and the lack of attention is even more pronounced for women and minorities. Women healthcare executives who are married are more likely to have spouses who work full time unlike their male counterparts whose spouses may be taking care of family duties only. Still, in most families, women are more likely to spend more time attending to home care responsibilities than men and are more likely to take a leave of absence or have a respite from their jobs because of family roles. Adams and Funk (2012) argue that women spent more rather than less time with their children as a result of an increased tendency toward intensive parenting duties.

Women's leadership style tends to be transformational whereas men's style edges towards transactional. Transformational leaders are more people centered than hierarchical. Transactional leaders are more structure centered and the leaders expect the followers to do their duties to the latter. Men think more about the hierarchy of leadership than women and women prefer more of relationship based interactions in their leadership. However, the most effective leader is the person who incorporates both transformational and transactional leadership styles.

While the percentage of women in healthcare leadership positions doesn't reflect the composition of the healthcare workforce, hospitals have a long history of women in leadership positions in many countries. Available evidence alludes to the fact that when women lead in global health, health the outcomes are more equitable because they take decisions that directly and positively affect the wellbeing of women and children (Fontenot, 2012). Research findings show that promoting women creates a ripple effect that benefits families, communities, and countries. Women in political leadership in India advocated for immunization programs, girls' education, and women's employment. In the United States, women senators financed the Breast and Cervical Cancer Mortality Prevention Act in order to safeguard preventive breast and cervical cancer screening for all women.

To increase diversity of leadership in the top positions in healthcare, there is need for renewed commitment from organizations to improve leadership and eventually close the diversity and gender leadership gap. Although it will take time and investment of resources to see the results and initiatives reach those in early careers, efforts to change organizational culture, and to nurture community relationships are necessary. In a study on the successes and challenges of five health leaders, three themes on how women practiced effective health leadership to promote equity

emerged: (1) challenging status quos and norms; (2) leading by listening and leveraging others' expertise to build a common vision for health; and (3) having social support early on to develop confidence and credibility (Javadi et al., 2016). Leadership in healthcare is very political and focusing on the vulnerability of women requires their participation in the political sphere. Taking up leadership is therefore challenging because there are still differences in how men and women are perceived in society, and these are deeply entrenched in cultural norms, with the expectation of women being home makers. Women should be more involved in politics because the participation of women is a sustainable means of achieving equity in all sectors and it slowly changes the culture and puts shared power and responsibility on both men and women in driving society forward.

### **Women in religious leadership**

The gradual rise of women leaders in the world of religion over the last forty to fifty years has been largely unnoticed. In many Christian denominations, the issue of the ordination of women has divided many churches and resulted in many conflicts. In the bible, Jesus placed women on equal status with men and showed that they had equal legal rights in marriage. He did not support Moses in the Old Testament who asked men to divorce their wives. During his Galilean ministry, Jesus was accompanied by a group of women together with the disciples. They included Mary Magdalene, from whom seven demons had been cast, Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna, and many others who sacrificed their resources for the work Jesus was doing. While the Jewish culture elevated men and subordinated women, Jesus invited them to His ministry. If giving women their right place in society and more so in leadership implies being a feminist, Jesus was then a feminist. Christians claim to be followers of Jesus while practically doing opposite of what He did.

In the Roman Catholic Church, where ordained ministry is a prerequisite for church leadership, women cannot be ordained deacons, priests or bishops. They therefore cannot offer Holy Mass which is the most important sacrament in the Catholic faith. The Mass and other sacrament rituals are reserved only for the Roman Catholic priesthood, an all-male vocation consecrated by the sacrament of Holy Orders. The Vatican, under Pope Paul VI, issued an official declaration against women's ordination in 1977 with a statement suggesting that although it would cause dissatisfaction, it would lead to a better understanding of the roles of men and women in the church (Haskins, 2003). Pope John Paul II raised awareness on the importance of women in church ministry and called for the Catholic Church to increase the role of women and consented to women serving at the altar during Holy Mass (Henderson, 2004). In his letter to women in 2000, he admitted that women had been discriminated for long and their services had not been acknowledged. Having women as ordained leaders is yet to be accomplished. The teachings about the subordinate role of women emanate from the Palestinian cultural practice where women were supposed to serve their husbands. Pope John Paul in his letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem* disagreed with the long held believe that the man was the head in a marriage and instead supported mutual love and companionship.

The Roman Catholic Church continues to ensure that the subordination of women and other minorities persists and intensifies but in Australia, the female ordination movement, acts as a vehicle of change, and provides an alternative, an example, and a catalyst for reform within the Catholic Church (Spence, 2016). In order to liberate the alienated Catholics, there should be widespread subversion and transformation of Catholic traditional conventions. Although Paul's letters highlight that women should be subordinate to men, they were written in the context of the Jewish culture which was purely patriarchal. Due to this patriarchal influence, women leadership in the church declined and became hidden. The epistles are used today to degrade women and show that they are not supposed to lead, according to the bible. In the United States, women who were ordained priests were immediately ex-communicated from the Catholic Church and the bishops sent out letters to the Catholics in those areas not to attend Mass presided over by those priests. Presently there are now four women Catholic bishops in Europe who are accountable to the communities and aim at transforming the church (Rue, 2008):

*'Both male and female can represent, and must represent Christ' (p. 7).*

Historically, black women in the United States served as critical organizers and leaders within the black church and community. Yet, they still found resistance and vast opposition to their

leadership both in social movements and in the church mostly for socio-cultural and theological reasons. Famous black women church leaders include Julia Foote, Zilpha Elaw, Sojourner Truth, Jarena Lee, and Harriet Tubman. These pioneering women preachers were composed and resisted reactions that would break ties with the church. Ngunjiri et.al, (2012) call them ‘tampered radicals’ while Collier-Thomas (1998) calls them ‘daughters of thunder’ because they were not only toughened by their experiences in the black church but were also passionately committed to fulfilling their call to ministry. Jarena Lee was at first denied the opportunity to preach in the African Methodist Episcopal church but was later granted permission to hold prayer meetings in her home and serve as worship leader when the male preacher preached. This was the commencement of her preaching journey which took her to different states.

In the mainstream protestant denominations, the ordination of women was not acceptable until they expressed the need for equality following the rise of the American Civil Rights movement and the second wave of feminism (Barnes, 2006). Modern protestant conviction upholds democratic values, respect for all human beings and reciprocity. Studies have found that protestant adherents promote the status of women (Inglehart, & Welzel, 2010). Protestant heritage churches have opened doors to women ordinations and gender equality has become an accepted order, culturally and theologically in many churches. There are milestone accomplishments of women in religious leadership, like the election of Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori as the presiding bishop and primate of the Episcopal Church from 2006 to 2015, and the election of Dr. Ingrid Mattson as the first woman president of the Islamic Society of North America. Although officially elected, Bishop Schori was subjected to innumerable indignities, the most noteworthy of which was a 2010 order by Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams that she not wear a mitre (*the hat worn by Christian bishops to symbolize their spiritual authority*) when preaching in an English cathedral. Others in the church leadership made it clear that although she had the title of presiding bishop, she was not really a bishop and worked to undermine her authority at every opportunity. She faced a lot of challenges as a result of her gender, sometimes being excluded from meetings.

Some churches do not allow women to preach from the pulpit, stating that it surmounts to insubordination of men. Women preachers are allowed to use the floor or the side of the church. This has not gone down well with most women preachers as Pastor Royce indicated, when she is invited to a congregation, she immediately asks where she will stand to preach. If they indicate that she will preach from the floor as opposed to the pulpit, she declines such invitations (Ngunjiri et al., 2012). In the same way, a pioneer woman church minister, Mary Moore, who had been appointed to be the first woman at the helm of the New Salem Missionary Baptist Church in South Memphis said in a newspaper interview that she no longer accepted invitations to churches that do not allow women to preach from the pulpit.

Many people still believe that the Shariya law does not allow Muslim women to be leaders although women have led in Islamic nations since the early days of Islam. Khadija, Muhammad’s first wife, was successfully running her business and Aisha, the mother of believers, well-known as an *Ulema*, was an Islamic religious leader. She was the commander during the successful battle of camels. Muslim conservatives use the Quran to support their argument against women leadership, quoting some of the sayings of Muhammad, out of context. The saying, also known as *hadith*, that they cite mostly is one which says that ‘a nation that is led by a woman will not succeed’ (Rohman, 2013). Megawati Sukarnoputri is an Indonesian Muslim politician who persistently ran for president, and at times was barred from participating in the presidential elections by conservative Muslim men (Van Doorn-Harder, 2002). She however had the support of most of the citizens and finally won the elections in 1999. Although she had won the elections, she had to take up the vice-presidential position and a man became the president. She only got to be president when the man in power did not perform and they got rid of him and she took over the office. She was a one term president but proved effective amid many controversies bordering on gender insubordination. In the mosques, women are relegated to the rear during prayers which are led by male religious leaders or *Imams*. Muslim women have not been allowed to lead prayers in mosques. Some Muslim women have established women only mosques where they can get a chance to lead, especially in America and Europe. Rabia Keeble, an Islamic convert and the Imam of the second all women mosque in Oakland, California, said the idea for the new mosque was born from her frustration with the way women are separated from men in most mosques, how they are expected to behave, and how they are patronized by male Imams. The spiritual leader for the Islamic Center

of America, the largest mosque in the U.S, said he backs the women's idea of starting the women's Mosques.

### **Conclusion**

Success in leadership appears to be highly idiosyncratic for both men and women leaders. Women with the knowledge, attitudes, dedication, and stamina to assume the C-suite are the only individuals who stand a chance to survive, and indeed flourish, in positions that call for public accountability and dedication when serving people. Differences in perceptions, psychological challenges and societal values act as challenges when opportunities for leadership present themselves to women. Those who take up the baton have proved to be effective during their terms in office. In a study on barriers, fears and motivations encountered by women leaders in higher education leadership roles, Rabas' (2013) findings directly supported the motivational factor of mentoring for women. Women leaders reflected a desire to role model and lead for others within their department. Participants felt motivated to help others achieve their professional goals and also serve at a broader level with the desire to give back. Mentors provide key opportunities and offer a critical boost to the mentees' self-confidence as emerging leaders to seek promotions or make key career advancement moves early in their careers. Cultural values, including stereotypes, affect women participation in the top administrative positions in many organizations in ways such as family commitment, society norms, organizational culture and personal inclinations. These factors, although common, affect women differently depending on the geographical and historical context of their countries.

The last three decades have been a plethora of activity on gender equity and equality. The Beijing Declaration (1995), the Millennium summit (2000) and the World Summit (2005) have all been platforms of making decisions about gender and equal representation. Governments are committed to making the policies effective and most times, the affirmative action policy is a common call in job advertisements. Despite women being highly represented in formal political, educational, health and religious institutions, access to leadership positions is still limited. Women's empowerment initiatives must recognize and look for the inter-relationship between different forms and levels of leadership participation, and give due regard to the gendered nature of political campaigns and financial politics, while focusing on the intimidation women candidates experience (Haley, & Zubrinich, 2016). Women leadership styles reflect their nurturing characteristics although at times, they have to be androgynous to prove that they deserve their positions.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare the work has no conflicts of interest.

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