4.8 DILEMMAS RELATED TO GENDER

“There are numerous dilemmas associated with achieving gender equity in organizations. The following discussion contains seven types of dilemmas inherent in the quest to overcome the gendered reality present in modern organizations” (Hale, 1996, p. 7).

Dilemma 1: Differing Perceptions of the Problem

Men and women perceive the concept of women in the workplace from a different stance. The modern working day woman wants her contribution to be felt in the working environment, she wants her mark to be felt and above all she wants a challenging working environment where she can achieve self-fulfillment (Hale, 1996, p. 7).

Dilemma 2: Opposition of Men who do not want to treat Women as equals in the Workplace

Men think women’s competitive entry at upper levels in organisations is not such a good thing. This line of thinking usually leads to the belief that women are better fitted for less “supportive” tasks than for “directive” roles where leadership is required. Because a considerable proportion of men find it difficult to trust or share power with women, their inclination is to hang on to the trappings of authority that served to maintain their sense of security in the past (Hale, 1996, p. 7).
Dilemma 3: The Private/Public Dichotomy

Many Americans believe that men and women should be of equal rank in the realm of family (the private sphere), but they should be of different rank on the job in the public sphere (see Epstein, 1988; Stivers, 1993; Johnson and Duerst-Lahti, 1992).

It is problematic to promote gender equality in the working world, and this is termed the “private/public split”. It emphasises the broad distinction between the world of work and the home and family life (Hale, 1996, p. 9).

An explanation for the lack of appropriate regard for gender equity in the work force is that policy makers and organisational leaders are often less interested in considering men and women as equals and more interested in preserving the historically male advantage (Guy, 1992; Hale & Branch, 1992). In other words, while public concern and persuasive talk has been “up”, private desire for, and attention to, gender neutral employment policy and impartial practice is “down”.

Dilemma 4: The Debate over Essentialism and Malleability of Gender

The debate over essentialism and the malleability of gender differences poses another problem for those seeking to focus on the problem of gender equity in workplace. Those researchers and scholars who share a belief in inherent gender difference point to the notion that women are somehow better than men in some matters or that men make better leaders than women, and that men and women tend to differ consistently from each other in predictable ways (Chodorow, 1976; Elshtain, 1981, 1982 Gilligan, 1982; Harding, 1986; Rhode, 1990; Ruddick, 1980).

The truth is that gender is not a reliable predictor of most workplace behaviour (Epstein, 1988; Kohn & Schooler, 1973; Lott & Maluso, 1993; Miller, Schooler & Miller, 1979).
Dilemma 5: The Dilemma of Professional Autonomy

Work in most organisations, particularly public agencies which feature rigid hierarchical structures, “leaves little room for personal autonomy” (Ferguson, 1984; Hummel, 1977; Phillips, 1986, p. 390;). While this problem of self-determination is experienced by both men and women, women are more often viewed as being less capable than men of activating agency and autonomy (Stivers, 1993; Van Nostrand, 1993). As a number of scholars have sought to demonstrate (Chodorow, 1976; Gilligan, 1982), men are socialised to believe that work, and their own achievement in work, is based on purposeful detachment from others. “Conversely, women are taught that advancement comes most surely through attachment to others (chiefly men). This learned dependency perspective means that women, on the whole, tend to lead less autonomous working lives than men. By embracing ideas of ‘individualistic’ enterprise (for practitioners) or solitary scholarship (for academics), arguments for professional autonomy continue to constrain opportunities for women” (Hale, 1996, p. 11).

Dilemma 6: Failure in Action

“While some men do not want to treat women as equals in the workplace (Dilemma 2), many men, if not most, do not consciously oppose gender equality (at least not equal opportunity) in the workplace” (Hale, 1996, p. 11). However, as Reskin (1991, p. 156) notes, “this silent majority avoids the fray”, leaving the field to those who do resist to act on behalf of all men (Bergmann & Darity, 1981).

Such “failure in action” is the discrepancy between what is said (and not said) and what is practised. This inconsistency is, in fact, the conflict between the conscious and espoused, rational ideas of equality and the unconscious unwillingness of individuals to act on these ideas. This unconscious inaction is conditioned by individual and organisational socialisation experience (Van Nostrand, 1993). Men, being in power, are the primary creators and beneficiaries of employment rules. It is reasonable to understand that their self interest and inaction is an important source of unequal outcomes in the workplace (Hale, 1996, p. 11). The vested interest thus creates inequality of outcomes between men and women.
Dilemma 7: The Necessary Length of Time for the Democratic Process to Work

The time involved in moving the democratic process from “deciding to” to “actually sharing” power equally between men and women has supported leaders’ indecisive and incremental approach to the integration of women at all levels of organisations (Conway, Ahern & Steuernagel, 1995; Guy, 1992; U.S. Department of Labor, 1991, 1989). This gradual change ties up with the preservation of the privileged position for men. Leaders are thus not concerned with maximising benefits for both men and women, as they are concerned with trying to avoid or reduce negative effects for men (Hale, 1996, p. 11).
4.9 FIVE MYTHS THAT STILL HOLD WOMEN BACK

Karla Taylor (2001, p. 51) makes a profound statement: “Sex discrimination hasn’t gone away, but it has changed in ways you may not realize. Here are the warning signs plus practical measures that make a difference.” There is a question that diversity experts continue to ask: “Why are women still part of the diversity picture? Can’t we consider sex discrimination a closed case and move on? ... These same diversity professionals reply, somewhat wearily, that such questions reflect a common misperception — one of several about why equal numbers in the workplace don’t necessarily add up to equal pay, status, or opportunity. The following five myths point out the most common areas of misunderstanding”. Taylor (2001, p. 51). Taylor (2001, pp. 51-56) presents the five myths:

MYTH 1:

WE SOLVED THE PROBLEM OF SEX DISCRIMINATION IN THE 60s AND 70s, SO THAT IS ALL BEHIND US NOW.

What the experts say: “Not so, according to the claim counters at the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. This year, 2000, produced 25 194 sex-based discrimination charges and saw a record $109 million paid out in monetary benefits.

The number crunchers at Catalyst, New York City, a research firm that tracks women's progress in business In its ‘Labour Day Fact Sheet’, Catalyst noted that even though women held 49 percent of managerial and professional specialty positions in 1999, women claimed only 5 percent of the highest corporate titles and were a mere 3 percent of the highest corporate earners. The problem exists for women of all races but is especially acute among women of colour. For every dollar white men earned in 1998, white women earned 78 cents, African-American women earned 67 cents, and Hispanic women earned 56 cents.”
**MYTH 2**

**I’M A GOOD PERSON WORKING FOR A RIGHT-MINDED ASSOCIATION. WE WOULD NEVER DISCRIMINATE AGAINST WOMEN.**

However, “it is not only bad people that discriminate, well meaning organisations unintentionally perpetuate a culture that results in inequality” (Taylor, 2001, p. 52). The aspects that are commonplace are as follows:

- The tendency to appoint and promote prospective employees and current employees in the same mould as the people already in power;

- The tendency to appoint women for less pay, simply because they are available at a cheaper rate;

- The tendency to perpetuate the same tendency, because of the comfort zone — even if that’s not the most effective practice.

How are these aspects can be addressed:

- Conduct a study of the pool base of candidates. Analyse why they get hired. Research broad trends and individual trends of hiring capacities. Analyse if your recruitment favours certain groups — and excludes others? If so, address the facts and implement changes for the better.

- Consider working more flexibly. Talk to staff about what would make them more productive, effective and loyal.
MYTH 3

IT'S THE JOB OF OUR DIVERSITY COMMITTEE AND HUMAN RESOURCES STAFF TO TAKE CARE OF DISCRIMINATION PROBLEMS FOR US.

- A common misconception is that diversity efforts can run on separate track from the organisation’s real work — almost like a social committee.

- The human resources department needs to know what diversity is all about and how to resource prospective employees who come from a diverse background.

- The recruitment process needs to be proactive — not recruiting in the same old ways but going to ethnic newspapers, going to agencies that recruit people that are very diverse.

- The human resources staff must also feel comfortable working in addressing the organisation’s blind spots. They should be given the latitude to implement regulations regarding discrimination, and to apply the letter of the law to the benefit of the organisation.
MYTH 4

WOMEN COMPRISFIFTY PERCENT OF OUR STAFF, SO WE OBVIOUSLY DO NOT DISCRIMINATE.

• The issue is not so much that women are not prolific in organisations. The major point is that the ones who have made it, have had a much longer and harder road than their counterparts who happen to be males.

• The upward direction has improved, but the rate of female appointments is still slow.

• The most powerful barriers to female career advancement are cited as:
  • Negative assumptions in the executive ranks about women, their abilities, and their commitment;
  • Perceptions that women do not fit the corporate culture;
  • Lack of career planning and lack of job experiences to fit the future needs of the organisation;
  • Lack of core opportunities for female employees with management potential;
  • The assumption that women will not relocate for career advancement;
  • Failure to make managers accountable for advancing women;
  • Reluctance of management to give women line, or revenue-generating, experience;
  • Absence of, too limited, succession planning;
  • Negative mentoring — from higher-ups who intentionally or unintentionally steer women away from top jobs — and negative selection — when women deliberately choose jobs that will keep them off the executive track;
  • Lack of mentoring and exclusion from the informal career networks, where men have typically learned the unwritten rules of success.

• The practical advice on amending the practice is to consider hiring an independent consultant to do a formal study of how one’s association works.

• Culture audits are of invaluable help. They show whether and how your organisation is set up to work against full inclusion.
I'VE GOT AN ASSOCIATION TO RUN. THAT'S MORE IMPORTANT THAN WORRYING ABOUT GENDER DIVERSITY.

There are numerous benefits to embracing diversity. These are the tangible benefits:

- decreased turnover, which results in lowering hiring and training costs;
- improved productivity, when jobs are filled by the most qualified people rather than the people whom favouritism helped climb the ladder;
- better ability to stay in sync with changing demographics, especially as women and minorities become prominent in the workplace and the market place;
- less vulnerability to legal challenges; and
- an enhanced reputation as a great place to work or to become a member.

PRACTICAL ADVICE

- To reap the business benefits of gender diversity, take a businesslike approach to planning, budgeting and staffing for results. This can be broken down into three steps:
  - PHASE 1: Ensure that the initiative has sound business rationale and that there is buy in from all managerial levels;
  - PHASE 2: Benchmark the perceived outcome for women’s development in the organisation, including time slots for deliverable milestones;
  - PHASE 3: Develop, pilot and implement action plans. Two of the most effective actions involve work-life supports (usually benefits that make it easier to balance job and family) and women’s leadership development.
- In addition, set up scholarship programmes for women, who have the potential. This would include detailed career planning and on-the-job coaching;
- Send women with potential to business schools for development, and sponsor the studies.
4.9.1 Summary of dilemmas that hold women back

There are a number of dilemmas facing women in the workplace. These can be summarised as follows:

**DILEMMAS:**

**Dilemma 1:** Differing perceptions of the problem: Many men believe that there is not a specific phenomenon called the gender issue.

**Dilemma 2:** Opposition of men who do not want women as equals in the workplace: Men perceive women coming into the organisation as threats to their previously entrenched positions. Some men also believe that women are not necessarily cut out for leadership positions.

**Dilemma 3:** The private/public dichotomy: In the public eye, it is hoped that women and men are equally viewed in the workplace; however in reality, men are still more favourably perceived than women. Women want the world of work to be separated from the world of the home environment.

**Dilemma 4:** The debate over essentialism and malleability: This essentially says that gender is not a reliable predictor of workplace behavior.

**Dilemma 5:** The dilemma of professional autonomy: Some men generally operate autonomously, whereas women operate from an integrative standpoint. This causes problems for women with regard to promotional opportunities.

**Dilemma 6:** Failure in action: Many men do not consciously oppose gender equality. Those who oppose it are in the minority. But this does not mean that if nothing is said about gender, that men actually accept gender equality. Because men make the rules, it is natural to assume that their self-interest, self-preservation and inaction are an important source of unequal outcomes in the workplace.

**Dilemma 7:** The necessary Length of Time for the Democratic Process to Work: The time taken to equal the playing fields at work could be due to organisational leaders trying to hold onto the privileged positions for men and trying to reduce negative effects for men.
4.9.2 Summary of myths that still hold women back

• **MYTH 1:** Sex discrimination was solved in the 1960s and 1970s. This certainly is not the case as the number of sex discrimination cases against women in 2000 was over 25,000, in the USA.

• **MYTH 2:** The right-minded organisation would not discriminate against women. However, many organisations do unintentionally discriminate and perpetuate inequality.

• **MYTH 3:** It’s the job of the diversity committee and human resources to take care of discrimination problems for the organisation. Resolving discrimination is a line function and very much the concern of the whole organisation.

• **MYTH 4:** Women comprise 50 percent of our staff, so we obviously do not discriminate. The problem is not that women are not employed; the problem lies with organisations that do not have confidence in appointing and developing female staff. There is limited career succession planning for women and the perception that females do not fit the core culture of the organisation creates problems for the advancement and development of women.

• **MYTH 5:** I have got an organisation to run, and there is no time for worrying about gender diversity. In hiring women, one is drawing from a larger pool of qualified applicants, which means that organisations can be in line with demographic norms and have a reputation of being an organisation of choice for which to work.
4.10 GENDER AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

4.10.1 Introduction

“With the new dispensation coming into effect in 1994, South Africa is characterised by way of its Constitution, as a country practicing no racism and/or no sexism. Equality based on gender and race is enshrined in the Constitution. Equality and race are also guaranteed in the Bill of Rights. Of concern is the equality afforded to black women. Treating race and gender differently would tend to marginalise black women, in preference for black men and white women, which has been proved to be the case in international experience” (Albertyn & White, 1994, p.57).

There is a great deal of occupational inequality in the South African labour market. It is reflected in the category of females, distributed horizontally across job categories and vertically within the job hierarchies. Bhoola (1996, p. 51).

The net effect for prospective economically active women is that they are confined to a range of narrow career choices, which in turn means marginal career prospects. Their pay structures also lag behind those of their male counterparts. Women in the South African labour market are employed largely in service and administrative sectors but are very under-represented in the managerial ranks and technical sectors (Bhoola (1996, p. 51). Bhoola (1996, p. 51) attributes this mainly to factors such as discrimination and employers who do not train and develop women in the working environment because of inherent stereotypes of women. These stereotypes are typically that women are not able to succeed in a man’s world and that women are the homemakers, responsible for family commitments. These all reduce opportunities for women in the working environment (Bhoola, 1996, p. 51). This was also discussed in detail at the beginning of this chapter, with specific reference to gender typing, sexual stereotypes and the differences between men and women.

In the working world, affirmative action policies and measures are a way of achieving equality (Albertyn & White, 1994, p. 57). Affirmative action is a component of employment equity “in which barriers and obstacles to full and equal participation in the workplace are identified and removed” (Albertyn & White, 1994, p. 57). The affirmative action process also addresses variables such as “sexual harassment and the provision of parental rights” (Albertyn & White, 1994, p. 57).
4.10.2 Legitimacy versus efficiency argument

The stance adopted in South Africa is that current policies must make up for the injustices of the past, to promote equal opportunity for all South Africans (Albertyn & White, 1994, p. 58). This is referred to as the “legitimacy argument” (Albertyn & White, 1994, p. 58). The counterbalance to this is an “efficiency” argument that suggests that affirmative action is not the best economic rationale. Affirmative action does not actually aid economic growth. Negative viewpoints on affirmative action are as follows:

- High standards are not maintained and “the subversion of the merit principle”;
- Normal appointments based on qualifications and merit promotions are not applied;
- Benefit groups suffer from a loss of self-esteem, as they know that their appointment was not based on merit, rather on the basis of tokenism (Albertyn & White, 1994, p. 58).

There is evidence to support these arguments, but they have not been challenged by formal research. Where affirmative action appointments have not been successful, it has mainly been due to hostile working environments and a lack of organisational support and sufficient training and development offered (Albertyn & White, 1994, p. 58).

Summary of gender and affirmative action

Even after the election of a democratic government, the situation for women in this country has not improved. Women are still discriminated against and the reality of race and gender marginalises Black women in favour of Black men and White women. The concept of affirmative action is but a small process within the wider spectrum of employment equity. For women, this process should include issues such as sexual harassment and the provision of parental rights.

There is no legitimate evidence that can substantiate that affirmative action leads to the lowering of standards. On the one hand affirmative action is meant to redress the legacy of a discriminatory past, but the counter argument questions its efficiency. Some parties are of the view that affirmative action does not have economic benefits and that it impedes economic growth and development.
4.11 GENDER AND DISCRIMINATION

As discussed in chapter 2, there are direct and indirect discrimination.

4.11.1 Gender and direct discrimination

“Direct discrimination refers to the unfavorable treatment of an employee on the basis of a prohibited ground, such as gender. It manifests for example, in job adverts that say ‘Male Technician required’. Often their is an intention on the part of the employer to exclude women” (Bhoola, 1996, p. 52).

4.11.2 Gender and indirect discrimination

“Indirect discrimination refers to neutral practices which have a more severe impact on a certain group, because of their position in society. It occurs in requirements that applicants, say for police jobs, have to be of a certain height or weight. It has a more detrimental effect on women because fewer women that men can comply with the job requirement. The employer’s intention is irrelevant because the requirement discriminates against women by denying the access to those jobs” (Bhoola, 1996, p. 52).

4.11.3 Proactive measures to prevent discrimination against women

The concept of actively prohibiting discrimination is an empty term, unless it is backed up by interventions. Positive measures are required to address the following type of issues (Bhoola, 1996, pp. 53-54).

- Employment equity legislation requires employers to assess the barriers that women face in employment and take active steps to remove them. This would underpin flexible employment goals for recruitment and promotional requirements of women;

- Large numbers of women appointees must be made in under-represented occupations;
• Women must be developed by way of accelerated training and development programmes, through career-pathing and formal mentoring programmes. This would ensure that they would be able to perform optimally in their appointed positions;

• Employers should guard against employing women as part of window dressing, and trying to balance profile statistical numbers. This could have the effect of greater stereotyping of women and it perpetuates the notion that women are not able to succeed in the working world;

• The working environment must lend itself to being conducive to women’s development;

• Organisations should have formal sexual harassment policies and offenders towards women should be dealt with through the formal disciplinary procedure route;

• Internal promotion for women should be encouraged, so as to offer career paths for women to aspire to senior management. The process should be facilitated by way of training and development. External appointments should only take place once there is no suitable internal female candidate to fill a certain position;

• In some cases women should be preferentially hired over men;

• Organisations should thus critically evaluate recruitment and hiring practices and set right those practices that could be regarded as being discriminatory towards women;

• Discriminatory questions asked in interviews towards women, about marital status and the questions relating to children and child care, should not be asked;

• There must be due consideration given to the status of full time and part time work for women — would part time work be offered on the basis of discriminatory practices;
• Employers must cater for family responsibility leave so that women can attend to sick children;

• The notion and principle of equal pay for equal work must apply;

• One of the major areas of discrimination is pregnancy. “In the United Kingdom the House of Lords has confirmed that to dismiss or refuse to employ a woman due to possible pregnancy is unlawful discrimination and this was precedent set in the case: Webb vs Emo Air Cargo [1992] 2 AER 43 (CA). Also to select a woman for retrenchment because she is pregnant and would in any event require maternity leave, constitutes discrimination against women” (Bhoola, 1996, pp. 53-54).

It is not sufficient to recognise that gender discrimination exists in the workplace. Employers need to take active measures to promote women is the workplace. This would include:

• Actively assessing gender numbers in certain job categories.
• Training and development programmes for women.
• Analysis of discriminatory policies that could disadvantage women.
• Eliminating discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy.
4.12 ORGANISATIONAL INFLUENCES ON WOMEN’S REPRESENTATION IN MANAGERIAL POSITIONS

Huffman (1999, p. 738) did a study on organisational influences on women’s representation in managerial positions in 1999. This study argues that decisions at macrolevel affect personnel decisions about the staffing of managerial positions, thereby influencing women’s representation in such jobs. Huffman used random sampling in 552 service sector and manufacturing work establishments in the United States. The study examined job and organisational-level influences on women’s representation in managerial positions. Huffman (1999, p. 738) found that “the percentage of women in non-management positions has the strongest effect on female representation in management, while measures of the institutional environment have strongest effect on female representation in management, while measures of the institutional environment have strong and, in some cases, contradictory effects. The effects of both firm size and the presence of formalized human resource policies differ markedly by industrial sector.” Huffman (1999, p. 738) concluded that organisational structure is important. Human resource policies that assume anonymity as far as sex is concerned, do not have the effect on promoting equal opportunity in the workplace that is often assumed.

4.12.1 Summary

- The percentage of women in non-management positions has the strongest effect on female representation in management;
- Measures of the institutional environment have the strongest effect on female representation in management;
- Organisational structure is important, although the use of identity-blind human resource policies may not have the effect of promoting equal opportunity in the workplace that is often presumed.
4.13  SPECIFIC STUDY DONE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Maharaj (1999, p. 98) gives the findings of a study conducted by the organisation CGE. The topic of the study was called “GENDER AND PRIVATE SECTOR”. The size of the survey was 103 companies and the following findings were made:

- 47% of the companies interviewed, indicated that they had no gender policy and a number of companies indicated that they are not interested in the issue of gender — they are interested in business and employ people on merit.

- 59% of women in the survey sample are located in the lowest rung of apprentice and trainee level jobs.

- 77% of men are located at managerial level compared to 23% of women.

- 55% indicated that they did have a policy on sexual harassment.

This study endorses the position of the working women in the working world.

4.14  STUDY DONE ON WORKER CONTROL: THE BASES OF WOMEN’S SUPPORT

4.14.1  Introduction

A study done by Collom (2000, p. 211) shows that workplace democracy applies to women. The study uses survey data from 1991, to analyse women’s support for worker control over workplace decision making. The support is hypothesised by propounding four branches of feminist theory.

4.14.2  What is workplace democracy?

Greenberg (1986) “identifies workplace democracy as emerging from three intellectual/political traditions that have nurtured the democratic left. First, there has been interest in the problem of alienation and its alleviation. Second, the tradition of
participatory democracy is based upon the belief that participatory decision-making in all major social institutions is both necessary and proper. Third, the tradition searching for radical, yet democratic strategies for the overthrow of capitalism has interpreted workplace democracy as the first step toward a self governing democratic socialism.” Collom (2000, p. 212) states that “the most well-known form of workplace democracy is worker participation”.

Smith (1996) writes that workplace democracy largely neglects women. The reason for this is that workplace democracy has been contextualised relative to traditional white male, blue-collar factory work. Yet workplace democracy may be more relevant for women. Reskin and Padavic (1994) point out that under flexible capitalism, women’s work has become increasingly contingent and deskillled. Technological advances have tended to routinise women’s work more so than men’s.

4.14.3 Feminist theory

“Feminist Theory is the most appropriate basis from which to hypothesize about women’s potential support for worker control” (Collom, 2000, p. 214). Rothschild (1992) “argues that the organisational requirements of ‘collectivist-democracy’ are virtually the same as the values and organisational practices of feminism”.

4.14.4 Four feminist standpoints

The diagram below depicts the four feminist theories as propounded by Rothschild (1992):
Figure 4.1 COMPARING FEMINIST THEORIES


Rothschild details these four theories as follows:

4.14.5 Socialist feminism

Alvesson and Billing (1997, pp. 146-147) point out that women are more inclined to adopt a democratic work approach than men. This is mainly due to childhood socialisation and family experiences. It may also be explained as “an expression of their weaker authority”. “Workplace democracy is congruent with feminine principles and values” (Alvesson & Billing, 1997, pp. 146-147).

Ferguson’s (1984) viewpoints are opposite to those of Alvesson and Billing. Ferguson (1984) “contends that as subordinates, women’s experience sheds considerable light on the nature of bureaucratic domination”. Also, as caretakers, women’s experience offers grounds for envisioning a non-bureaucratic collective life. Feminism is not compatible with bureaucracy. A feminist restructuring of work entails...
rejection of the hierarchical division of labour of bureaucratic capitalism and the reintegration of the planning and performance of tasks (Ferguson, 1984).

4.14.6 Psychoanalytic feminism

Psychoanalytic feminism supports workplace democracy in a distinctive female ethic of care that is anti-hierarchical. Sirianni (1994) “adopts a psychoanalytical approach”. The psychoanalytical perspective emerges from a standpoint that asserts leadership roles to take on a democratic stance (Sirianni, 1994). “The distinctively female ‘ethic of care’ from feminist theory served as the basis for the adoption of a radically egalitarian version of participatory democracy in the women’s movement” (Sirianni, 1994).

4.14.7 Marxist feminism

Collom (2000, p. 215) states that “approaches that are materialist and reject the idea of a female ethic can be considered as Marxist feminist”.

4.14.8 Liberal feminism

Smith (1996) points out that women have an interest in workplace democracy for two reasons:
- They are fairly new entrants into the labour force, in an environment of white-collar workers;
- Women see workplace democracy as an opportunity to gain new skills and as part of the process of career building. “This is a human capital approach that rests on the notion of equal rights and equal opportunity and resonates with the claims of liberal feminists” (Collom, 2000, p. 216).

4.14.9 The study

The four perspectives were used as a basis for Collom’s study. A national telephone survey of adult Americans over 18, in 1991, was conducted. The survey contained 10 questions on worker control over decision making (Collom, 2000, p. 218).
4.14.9.1 The dependent variables

The basis of the study had to do with how much influence the respondents felt management and non-management employees should have over decisions in the workplace (Collom, 2000, p. 219).

4.14.9.2 Independent variables

There were 14 independent variables, which included, age, education, married, race, political views, skilled, and authority (Collom, 2000, p. 219).

4.14.9.3 Discussion and conclusion

Collom (2000, p. 227) cites the following findings:

- Support for worker control of decision-making is not widespread. Women are not overwhelmingly more supportive of worker control than men. This implies that women do not have a generic predisposition toward worker control as the female ethic of care arguments (socialist and psychoanalytic feminism) predict.

- Variables that were thought to play a significant role such as wages, profession, authority and decision-making power had inconsistent effects on attitudes. This does not tie up with the subordinate status for women as the Marxist feminist approach predicts.

- The most applicable approach thus would be the liberal feminist approach. Women would invariably see that having access to decision making within an organisation would increase their opportunity to gain more skills.

- With respect to the gender gap, women felt that they should have the right to flexi-time, and that would assist with family responsibility. Many women felt that workers should be in a position to decide who would get overtime, and currently it was felt that male managers tend to make such decisions (Collom, 2000, p. 227).

- Reskin and Padavic (1994) found that most women were assigned the unfavourable, meaningless tasks in the working environment. Jobs become more
stereotyped as “women’s work” and managers make gendered job assignments (Collom, 2000, p. 228). If women had the decision-making power within an organisation, women could demand a more equitable division of labour (Collom, 2000, p. 228).

Over and above these perspectives, it is not clear how women would be able to influence the decision making in an organisation. Using the union movements would as a channel would not necessarily champion the cause of women, because it has been shown historically that unions are sceptical of “worker empowerment programmes” (Collom, 2000, p. 229). This is mainly because they perceive the empowerment programmes as diluting their power base and “fostering labour-managerial co-operation” (Collom, 2000, p. 229). This is very similar to the new Workplace Forums as presented in the new South African Labour Relations Act. Unions are sceptical of these forums, and they believe that they would eradicate their power base and negotiating power.

Phillips (1983) points out that the focus of workplace democracy is on skilled male employees. Women have been found to be more receptive to management and their proposals of worker empowerment than unions themselves. Pollert (1981) believes that the union movement is still the best champion of women’s substantive issues and workplace decision making. “This is ironic given the unions’ historical neglect of women” (Collom, 2000, p. 230). “Fortunately, this history is being reversed” (Cobble (1993). Goldfield (1997) points out that recently the union movement has focussed on women’s issues, and has been more successful in championing their cause.

In concluding, Collom (2000, p. 216) states that “despite the different bases of women’s support, all four theoretical approaches do predict the same thing. That is women will hold more favourable attitudes towards worker control than men.”
4.14.10 Summary

The four feminist theories are as follows:

- Social feminism: Women are more inclined than men to adopt a democratic style, and this is mainly due to their nurturing disposition.

- Psychoanalytic feminism: This approach is based on the premise of the female’s caring and nurturing approach. This forms the basis of participatory democracy in the women’s movement within the working environment.

- Marxist feminism: This approach is based on the negation of a female ethic within the working environment.

- Liberal feminism: Women workers are compelled to participate in new systems of governance for the work experience. Women see workplace democracy as an opportunity to gain new skills and as part of the process of career building.

The results of Collom’s (2000) study are as follows:

- Women do not have an innate predisposition to worker control because of the female ethic of care;

- Substantive benefits and the quality, level and rank of women’s occupations have inconsistent effects on attitudes;

- The liberal feminist approach may provide the most insight about the bases of women’s support;

- The working environment is still divided into “female” and “male” jobs. If it were up to women they would like to make decisions on the division of job accountability, therefore ensuring a more equitable division of labour;

- The union movement must give more attention to women’s issues and be the springboard for lobbying on female issues in the work place.
4.15 EQUAL PAY PROPOSALS FOR WOMEN

Lirieke Meintjes-Van der Walt (1997, p. 45) is of the opinion that the principle of equal pay will not necessarily ensure equality. For discrimination to be eradicated, pay structures should be governed by the principle of “equal pay for work of equal value”.

Inequality in pay or remuneration is perhaps the most persistent form of discrimination between women and men. Despite women constituting just over a third of all employees, more than half of the employees who earn under R2000 a year are women (O’Regan, 1994, p. 65). The 1996 Green Paper on Employment and Occupational Equity proposes that all employers should “undertake procedures to … ensure equal pay and benefits for equal work” (Department of Labour, 1996, p. 8). The need for policies to address employment inequity stems from the recognition of the existing inequalities associated with race and gender. However, the Green Paper does not incorporate the principal of “equal pay for work of equal value”.

4.15.1 Equal pay for equal work

“The notion of equal pay is normally interpreted to mean that women and men with the same qualifications and experience should receive equal pay only when they are performing exactly the same work under identical conditions” (Meintjies-Van der Walt, 1997, p. 45). This definition is limited in its application. The reason for this is that there are few women in a very limited number of occupations and this places “downward pressure on wages in these occupations” (Meintjies-Van der Walt, 1997, p. 45). Equal pay for equal work does not overcome de facto discrimination in a situation where there is a predominance of women in jobs considered to be typically female (Eyraud, 1993:35). In such circumstances, there is very often no comparison with male incumbents to prove that discrimination exists (Meintjes-Van der Walt, 1997, p. 45). The situation is often exacerbated in South Africa, in that there is no legislation to govern equal pay agreements. Only recently have unions negotiated equal pay agreements only for employers to regrade certain jobs that are predominately female (NUMSA, undated). “The demand for ‘equal pay for work of equal value’ has arisen to address the problem of discrimination through the back door” (Meintjes-Van der Walt, 1997, p. 45).
4.15.2 Equal pay for work of equal value

If the government is serious about its intentions to rectify “the gendered and racial nature of occupational structure by accelerating the hiring, training and promotion of people from historically disadvantaged groups” (Department of Labour, 1996, p.33), then governance should be on the basis of “equal pay for work of equal value” (Department of Labour, 1996, p.33). In the United Kingdom the 1983 Equal Pay Amendment Regulations modified the 1970 Equal Pay Act, so that comparison would no longer be explicitly based on the criterion of identical jobs, but rather on that of jobs of equal value. This approach goes a long way to bridging the inherent problems that arise where there is a concentration of women in specific occupations (Meintjies-Van der Walt, 1997, p. 46). “In many States of the United States, specific laws which are based on the concept of equal value have been passed. Title VII of the 1964 Civil rights Act, which prohibits all discrimination, accepts the concept of equal value for purposes of a plea on the grounds of discrimination”. (Meintjies-Van der Walt, 1997, p. 46).

In the case of “equal pay for work of equal value”, value is assessed on the basis of common criteria. The main problem is establishing the criteria for assessing the value of a particular occupation. In the comparative study, done by Menjties-Van der Walt, 1997, it became apparent that value could be assessed from the point of view of work content, training and experience, and complexity and responsibility.

In the UK, the Equal Pay Act provides that where women perform tasks/work that is rated as similar work, as equivalent under an evaluation scheme, or work of equal value, if any term of a female’s contract is less favorable than that of a close comparator, the equality clause can be evoked (Meintjies-Van der Walt, 1997, p. 46). In the UK there are formalised job evaluation processes. Work is categorised as being of equal value if the requirements regarding skill, effort and responsibility made on a woman worker are equal to those made on a man in the same or similar employment (Meintjies-Van der Walt, 1997, p. 46).
4.15.3 Summary of equal pay proposals for women

EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK:

- The concept of equal pay for men and women would mean that males and females doing exactly the same work would be paid equally;
- Equal pay is normally espoused if there are many people in the same category of work and downward pressure on wages is exerted in these occupations;
- If there are a large number of women in a certain position, the condition of equal pay for equal work does not always apply;
- In South Africa there is no legislation to ensure quality of payment for equal work performed;
- Certain unions have negotiated equal pay agreements for certain employers to regrade positions that are predominantly female.

EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL VALUE:

- The principle of equal pay for equal value would go a long way towards ensuring that there is no discrimination in the form of pay differentials;
- In South Africa, however, there is no legislation that protects employees from discrimination as regards pay differentials;
- In America, Title VII (1964) of the Civil Rights Act contains laws on the concept of equal value;
- The “concept of equal pay for work of equal value” is assessed on the basis of common criteria. This is normally established by a comprehensive job analysis and job evaluation process;
- In the UK the Equal Pay Act provides that where a woman is engaged in work that is rated equivalent to work under an evaluation scheme, or work of equal value, then the equality clause operates in the case of any term of the contract that is less favourable than that of a close comparator..
- This protection in law is not afforded in South Africa as yet.
4.16 CONCLUSION

This chapter is essentially divided into four components: an introduction that sets the tone for gender issues; the differences between women and men in terms of biology, gender socialisation in society and gender stereotyping; aspects of sex-differentiated work attitudes and behaviour, the differences between men and women in the working environment, and the glass-ceiling; sex segregation in the working world and myths and dilemmas facing women in the working world.

Principles discussed in chapter 2, namely affirmative action and discrimination, are incorporated into this chapter to provide a link between the concepts that have been discussed previously and gender issues.

Thereafter, various gender studies were discussed, positioning gender issues in the working environment. Lastly, macro scenarios from various countries were discussed to indicate their gender stance from a national perspective. It is very evident that the fate of women in an economy is generally set by the macro-economic maxim on the incorporation/non-incorporation of women as part of the economically active population. In closing, a profound statement made by Reeves (1984, p. 48) says it all: “Women should be favoured as personnel, not to promote equality, but because their gender socialisation has come to have corporate significance.”

The next chapter will deal with the statistics employed and the objectives of the study. This will explain the reasons for using the various statistical tests used.