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SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE MASTERS STUDENT'S CHOICE TO STUDY GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES AT THE MASTER'S LEVEL IN NAIROBI COUNTY

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Abstract

Purpose: The study aimed at identifying the socio-cultural factors that influence master's student's choice to study gender and development studies at the master's level in Nairobi County

Materials and methods: The study employed a case study design. Purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the respondents for the study. Interview guides and open ended questionnaires were the main data collection instruments for the research. Both qualitative and quantitative techniques guided by the research objectives and research questions were used to analyze data. Qualitative data was analyzed by use of themes and the coding technique while frequencies and percentages were used in the analysis of quantitative data that was collected.

Results: The study established that subject choice is influenced by a myriad of factors including, influence from peers, parents and societal opinions. Also reference groups in the society and environmental stimuli significantly contributed to subject choice. Gender unresponsiveness featured primarily when the students did not feel suited to the choice they had made due to factors such as family advice and their educational background constraints. Finally career counselling and mentorship programs for the students, seminars, outreach and sensitization programs played a great role in subject choice and the resolving and the gender unresponsiveness before it occurs in career choice.

Recommendations: The study recommends that universities should start career education sections to help resolve gender unresponsiveness through the creation of awareness about it by helping students to make subject choices where they can actualize their potential.

Key words: *social-cultural factors, gender, development studies, student's choice*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Career choices in education are made every day; the way these choices are made and implemented depends on the attitudes and perceptions of the society and their decision makers. An individual's education helps to form these attitudes and priorities during the career choice process. An educational career choice is important because of its potential to promote social change and of its role as defender of prevailing norms and values (De Groot & Maynard, 1993). Career choice is not only a question, of which institutions one chooses to attend but is also inclusive of a broad range of forces influencing the development of individuals, their educational experience and their later working life (Young, 1992).

According to Millet (1970) gender and development studies as a career choice ensures that education has a positive impact on improving the status and roles women and integrates men into the gender discourse. In furtherance the author argues that gender and development studies has the potential to challenge stereotypes about male and female roles, offer alternative ideas and to equip women and men to pursue a range of possibilities. Thus as a career choice this area of study is associated with power and control as gender has been and is a system of oppression.

This system of oppression has been demonstrated in the career choices that women have made since the 1970s. It's been noted that women's employment has been in the services. Women's career choices are geared to this sector which confines them to lower levels of pay and responsibility: in health, education and social services; banking and insurance; hotel and catering; the retail trade; and personal services such as hairdressing and domestic work. Women typically make up the majority of sales staff, cleaners, kitchen assistants, nursing auxiliaries, secretaries and primary-school teachers. Overall, more service jobs are part time, casual, temporary or 'informal' than are jobs in other sectors, posing a great disadvantage to women in these jobs (ILO, 2016).

The fact that women predominate in certain career choices that are characterized by lower levels of skill, responsibility and pay leads to job segregation. This implies that the career choices that women and men make differ leading to segregation and concentration in the fact that women are overrepresented in a limited number of careers (ILO, 2014). What is important in the gender system is the impact of women's career choices, their lack of opportunities in both formal and informal careers that increases competition between them and keeps wages low.

There are two types of segregation that women face when they make their career choices; the first is horizontal segregation where they find themselves in careers clusters that are dominated by women such as the services sector, especially in the personal and caring services. The second is vertical segregation where by a career choice is mixed with women and men; however women are usually in the less responsible, less secure and less well paid careers. Even when the career is predominantly female, men are still found in the management positions (ILO, 2016).

Gender studies emerged as an academic discipline of the social sciences as a result of the UN Women's Conferences (Mexico-1975, Copenhagen-1980, Nairobi-1985, Beijing-1995) that sought for an approach that integrated men and women, their needs and concerns in the

development process. Former development approaches such as the Women in Development approach (WID) prevalent in the 1970's exclusively focused on women without account of how their lives were shaped by their relations with men (Young, 1993). Globally gender studies seeks to address the structural relations of power and inequality in a wide range of political, economic, social and cultural spheres in which equality needs to be realized (De Groot & Maynard, 1993).

Gender studies in higher education seeks to draw out interconnections of relationships associated with power and meaning in different sites both between men and women, boys and girls. According to Unterhalter (2012), gender studies explore how universities and processes of learning operate to reproduce and transform inequalities. This is important because among others it highlights the process of choice whereby there are subjects defined as either those which women or men are "good" at or those which they are not. Gender studies in higher education is therefore, an academic discipline aimed at naming and changing the relationships of inequality that sets the conditions and processes that allow people to critically view their well being. The term gender studies flourished in the mid-1980s in research and publications which substituted the word 'gender' rather than 'women' as their area of focus (De Groot & Maynard, 1993).

Gender and development studies in Kenya were started as an effort to situate gender equality issues at the center of policy decisions and they entail bringing out the perceptions, experience, and knowledge of women as well as men to bear on the development agenda (National Policy on Gender and Development, 2000). Gender and development studies examine the status and conditions of women and men in developing economies. Kenya has made efforts to promote gender equality in higher education in various policy documents such as the Constitution; article 27 states that "women and men have the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres". International agreements also underscore the importance of achieving gender equality in education such as the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), the Dakar Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

According to Onsongo (2006), universities are expected to play a role in leadership and transformation of the society with regard to gender relations and women's participation in particular. These goals adhere to one of the Gender and Development approach (GAD) key propositions, that a focus on women alone was inadequate to understand the opportunities for women for agency or change (Young, 1993). Gender and development studies goals and objectives in Kenya are directed by the National Policy on Gender and Development (2000) and Sessional Paper no.2 of 2006 on Gender Equality and Development which among others seek to address two key priority areas relevant to this study.

The first is the removal of impediments to equal access to economic employment opportunities for men and women and second, the elimination of gender disparities in education and training to enhance and sustain gender parity in access, retention, transition and performance in education for boys and girls, women and men. The contemporary gender approach in development requires in its process that gender is mainstreamed, this involves ensuring that attention to gender equality pervades all interventions such as gender and development studies programmes at the university (UNDP, 2000). Gender imbalances or unresponsiveness in career choice have been deemed to be an impediment to inclusivity and representation of students, as both women and men are not participating and benefiting equally from the developmental policies put in place to ensure their

equal access to gender and development studies. This study therefore examined selected universities in Nairobi County that offer gender and development studies at the master's level. Socio-cultural factors were investigated in the study.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In Nairobi County, almost all public and some private universities in response to international and local gender policies that aim to establish gender equity and equality have sought to offer gender related courses. Gender and development studies is of importance as it accommodates both women and men's perspectives in its classes, benefiting the society by examining the structures that keep women and men in separate spheres. These structures occur on the social, political and economic levels and shape values and attitudes throughout the society.

While making subject choices it has been noted that even if men and women have the same opportunities available to them, several factors condition their choices in different ways. This leads to gender imbalances in terms of gender representation despite interventions by universities which are aimed at ensuring gender inclusivity. Subsequently, misperceptions about certain subject choices continue to flourish, affecting enrolments in certain departments. Even though subject choices made by both men and women are personal, patterns emerge as some courses are dominated by a specific gender leading to a gender unresponsive *status quo* in universities. However there exist few studies that address subject choice of gender and development studies from a gender and socio-cultural perspective.

Additionally imbalances in enrolment patterns in career choice go against Kenyan Constitutional efforts to promote gender equality and equity as enshrined in Article 27 of the Kenyan Constitution which states that: women and men have the right to equal treatment including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres.

Therefore the purpose of this study was to identify the socio-cultural factors that influence choice of gender and development studies at the masters' level.

1.3 Objective of the Study

To identify the socio-cultural factors that influence masters student's choice to study gender and development studies at the master's level in Nairobi County

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Socio-cultural Factors that influence Student's choice of Gender and Development Studies at the Master's Level

Culture is seen as a collection of practices by which meaningfulness develops within a group and provide social interpretation framework for its members (Maatta & Lyckhage, 2011). Culture is one of the aspects that provide a backdrop to choices that master's students make in choosing gender and development studies and it involves a complex interaction between biological characteristics, social, cultural, political, ideological and economic structures that influence equality between men and women. Society plays a role also in determining which course students pick with the concept of social gender which is based on non-biological differences between men and women and social structuring of the roles undertaken and relationships.

In the African university, choice as to which degree to study consists of access, cultural perceptions of the roles which women are expected to fill, the extent to which women participate in formal education and the type of education to which they have access. Gender is one the determinants that play a role in social relations and it has been noted that in higher education women are underrepresented which has roots in the lower levels of the schooling system (Klasen, 2002). When assessing gender and choice, policy implications such as institutional reforms to embrace for example a concept such as gender mainstreaming in the university policies comes to the fore. Although Ibid. (2002) notes that in Africa gender as a determinant that plays a role in choice-making, Ibid. (2002) does not identify key components in choice making that maintain or change the gender system. This study sought to identify these key components such as beliefs in socio-cultural contexts that influenced master's students' choice-making process.

Institutional reforms in such a perspective cannot be seen solely in terms of ways of facilitating access to gender and development studies for relatively 'marginalized' groups such as women or conversely restricting access for other categories such as men. Often when it comes to the gender imbalance in choice-making in courses like engineering in higher education in Africa it is assumed that during choice-making the playing field is even or levelled. The choice whether to take gender and development studies therefore is not only about access or about mainstreaming but also about engendering whole socio-political and economic processes and institutions (Assie-Lumumba, 2006). What does not emerge from Ibid. (2006) is that institutions play a key role in the activation of gender beliefs in norms and structures of the university. Choice making is therefore not only influenced by the field being uneven but also by having gender beliefs being institutionalized in norms (Klasen, 2002). This study sought to identify how gender beliefs as enforced by socially advantaged actors in an educational context, operated in playing a role in the choice making process for master's students.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the rational choice theory (Goldthorpe, 1996) which posits that individual choice is the foundation of action and inaction, the theory explores how individuals react to and seek to structure the varying constraints on action that occur, whether they are sets of institutions, patterns of group interaction or constellations of socio-economic structures. In particular the rational choice theory seeks to focus on individual choice making as influenced by social factors making it relevant to explain how master's students in Nairobi County made their subject choices.

Rational choice according to Goldthorpe, (1996) deploys some distinct tenets about human nature that are important for this study; the first is that human beings have preferences that are for the purposes of analysis, that is individuals are purposive entities rather than just vehicles for wider social and economic forces. They are as such, are capable of choosing their own projects and preferences. Second rational choice theory assumes individuals act in their self-interest rather than for the interest of others.

People are instrumental rather than expressive and they seek to maximize their personal utility rather than to give life to their personal and collective identities. Personal utility is maximized

through an optimization process whereby individuals maximize their income or balance out a number of preferences such as between current and future benefits.

Third, people express their preferences as clear goals. Fourth, rational choice theorists often assume individuals have information about the preferences available to them. Fifth, when individuals examine the information available to them they select the course of action that satisfies their preferences and are able to modify their courses of action when the benefits and costs of choices change (Goldthorpe, 1996). In this study, the rational choice theory was applied to explain master's student's process of choice making as influenced by socio-cultural factors. Goldthorpe's argument that individuals are purposive entities seeks the individual student's preferences of choice before those of the society. This was significant to this study as when the society's socio-cultural beliefs played a role in influencing the student's choice of master's program before their own preferences could lead to conflict.

In addition, the posit that individuals act out in their self interest rather than the interest of others was applied in the study. According to the rational choice theory the interest of the individual comes first before that of society thus making the student's attitudes and beliefs free from socio-cultural encumbrances. Goldthorpe argues that even though the society may have certain expectations for a student's choice the prime motivator for the student to act should be their own individual preferences. Therefore Goldthorpe approaches choice making as an individual process which emerges as rational when the chosen alternative is primarily based on the student's individual preferences. Applied to this study the theory provided the opportunity to achieve gender responsiveness in subject choice by focusing on the student's individual preferences.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a case study design, in collecting information from the sample population in order to assess gender and development as a subject choice for master's students in Nairobi County. This research was carried out in selected universities in Nairobi County that offer gender and development studies at the master's level. Public and private universities were targeted because the study sought diverse views from students from different parts of the country who were mostly found in public universities and students from Nairobi County who were mostly found in private universities. The universities in Nairobi County had an approximated total postgraduate student population of 240,000 registered for various courses (KNBS, 2015). The target population for this study comprised of master's students in both public and private universities taking gender and development studies and development studies. The County has a total of seven public universities and fifteen private universities out of which only eight (four public and four private) offer gender and development studies or courses with a gender and development component such as development studies. The eight universities had approximately a total 250 master's students registered in the gender and developments studies departments for years 2013/ 2014 to 2014/2015.

The researcher purposively selected four universities that offered gender and development studies or courses with a gender component. The four universities were inclusive of public and private universities. A sample of 54% from the total population of the students taking gender and development studies in the four universities (which was 122 students) in the years 2013/2014 to

2014/ 2015 was chosen which translated to a total sample of sixty six students. Lecturers, chairpersons and gender and development master's students were purposively selected to act as key informants. The study used both primary data and secondary data. Primary data was collected from the study respondents in the form of open-ended questionnaires and interview schedules. While secondary data was collected from libraries in the form of information from textbooks, journals and research theses and publications.

4.0 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Demographic characteristics of the respondents

4.1.1 Gender distribution of the respondents

In this sub-section the study sought to establish the gender distribution of the respondents to enable a clear gender analysis of the findings. The total number of students of gender and development and development studies departments for the years 2013/2014-2014-2015 is shown in table 1 below. The total number of students who participated in the study were 51(77%) women and 15(23%) men making a total of 66 respondents as shown in table 2. Of the 20 key informants, 10 were women and 10 were men. This study purposively sought the views of both men and women taking gender and development studies to ensure inclusivity and representation of both. It was also crucial to get the views of both to make the study more meaningful from a gender and development perspective.

Table 1: Total registered students per department for years 2013/2014- 2014/2015

Institution	Men	Women	Total per University for years 2013/2014-2014/2015
Kenyatta University (gender and development studies)	10	45	55
University of Nairobi (gender and development studies)	7	43	60
Mount Kenya University (development studies)	15	20	35
St.Paul's University (development studies)	12	14	26
Total	44	122	

Table 2: Total number of respondents per university

Institution	Men	%	Women	%	Total per University
Kenyatta University	7	46	15	29	22
University of Nairobi	4	27	20	39	24
Mount Kenya University	3	20	10	20	13
St.Paul's University	1	7	6	12	7
Total	15	100	51	100	

From table 1 and 2 above it is noted that the student distribution is asymmetrical with there being more women than men both in terms of those registered for gender and development studies and those who participated in the study. Flabbi (2011) attributes this to a variety of reasons such as women acquire a little more tertiary education than men, are the majority of graduates in humanities and perform better than men in the humanities. In the World Development Report (2012), it is noted that there are gender differences in tertiary education across the world where women are overrepresented in arts and humanities, health and education and underrepresented in engineering, manufacturing, construction and science.

Additionally the report notes that in tertiary education women are more likely to participate than men a difference that increases with overall participation rates. The report further notes that between 1970 and 2008 in Sub Saharan Africa, the number of female tertiary students increased more than sevenfold (from 10.8 million to 80.9 million) compared with a fourfold increase among males. The researcher notes that this trend of more women participating and enrolling could be a factor contributing to the above asymmetry in the enrolment for gender and development studies in Nairobi County.

4.1.2 Marital status of the respondents

The study sought to establish the marital status of the respondents at the master's level pursuing gender and development studies to get a clear understanding of the findings. As shown in Table 3 of the 16 men students, 4 (25%) of the men interviewed were married, 10 (62%) single and 2 (13%) in a come we- stay- relationship. Out of the 50 women students interviewed, 11 (22%) were married, 35 (70%) single, 2 (4%) divorced and 2 (4%) in a come we- stay- relationship.

Table 3: Marital status of male and female students

Marital Status	Number	Men (%)	Number	Women (%)	Total
Married	3	20	11	22	14
Single	10	67	36	70	46
Divorced	0	0	2	4	2
Separated	0	0	0	0	0
Come we- stay- relationship	2	13	2	4	4
Total	15	100	51	100	

In identifying this variable, the study took note of the fact that gender and development studies as a career choice for women and men students is based on the notions of gender equality and how these are defined and perceived in or outside the marital context (Klasen & Francesca, 2009). The findings showed the highest number of women and men students that made the choice to pursue gender and development studies were single as compared to those who were married or in a come we –stay- relationship. This suggests that gender and development studies was more appealing to single students as they did not as yet have fixed notions of gender issues such as equality whereas those in marriage and come we-stay relationships were influenced by how the society perceived gender issues as having a detrimental role in families (Amin and Islam, 2015).

4.1.3 Age of the respondents

Age of the students was thought to be a crucial component, as it reveals the age categories of those pursuing gender and development studies at the master’s level. Scholars have noted that, the age may influence individual values which in turn influences the student’s choice (White, Cox and Cooper, 1992). The findings are presented in table 4.

Table 4 Age of the male and female students

Age	Number	Men (%)	Number	Women (%)	Total Number
20-29	8	54	28	55	36
30-39	5	33	17	33	22
40-49	2	13	3	6	5
50-59	0	0	3	6	3
60-69	0	0	0	0	
Total	15	100	51	100	

From Table 4 the group aged 20-29 years had the highest number of men 8 (54%) and women 28 (55%) students followed by the group aged 30-39 years with 5 (33%) men and 17 (33%) women. The possible explanation for more younger and literal no older students pursuing the master's degree could be the fact that in Africa consumption of education is higher among the younger age groups and consumption of healthcare higher among the older groups (Canning, Raja & Yazbeck, 2015)

There were fewer older people choosing gender and development studies with 2 (13%) for men and 3(6%) for women for the age bracket of 40-49 and 3(6%) women for the age group 50-59. This decline in choice by the older people could be attributed to the maintenance and decline stages in the career development, which did not allow them to make new choices (White, Cox and Cooper, 1992).

4.2 Socio-cultural factors influencing gender and development studies as a master's choice program

4.2.1 Family relational networks

In order to establish the influence of family relational networks on students master's choice of gender and development studies, the respondents were asked, "Did your family play a role in influencing your choice of gender and development studies? To which the students were either to answer yes or no.

Table 5 Role of the family in career choice

Role of Family	Yes				No			
	Women No.	Women (%)	MenNo.	Men (%)	Women No.	Women %	Men No.	Men %
	43	85%	(6)	38%	8	15%	9	62%

In this regard 85% of the women and 38% of the men reported that family played a role whilst 15% of women and 62% of men reported that family did not play a role by supporting their choice, encouraging them and advising them. These findings show that the families of the women students were more supportive of their choice than that of the men students. These findings are in line with Catalyst, (2005) and KPMG, (2014) who observed that families either support or discourage their children in pursuing certain subject choices owing to given stereotypes about the career choice. In this instance women student's parents could have been more supportive of their choice as gender and development studies strengthened certain career choice stereotypes about women. With regards to this one woman respondent noted that:

My family and especially my mother was very supportive of my choice, my mother felt that I was in a career that suited me as a woman and that would greatly aid in my holistic development. My father on the other hand supported my choice because he found the course related to women's interests and thought I could manage to score good grades. (O.I Eunice 16/08/2015).

As deduced from the verbatim above, parental support for gender and development studies was higher among female students as it was perceived as a subject traditionally associated with women. However parents may not be aware that gender and development studies seeks to integrate both men and women in the development process and has inclusivity at its core (UNDP, 2000). Also the female student's parents saw that their daughters stood a better chance in excelling at the subject content. Further probing revealed that parents thought that the content was dealing with women's issues only whereas this is not the case.

Lastly, gender and development studies was viewed as more marketable and advantageous for women as they could utilize the qualification more than their men counterparts. This awareness of gender and development studies marketability could reveal its association to NGO's well paying jobs that have employment policies that seek to integrate women more in employment to close in on gender gap (Kasente, 1996).

The men respondents gave reasons for their family not being as supportive as they were challenged for going into a woman's field, their family feared that they were contributing to the erosion of patriarchal structures and some did not want to be in a class full of women. Other men's respondents' family such as the one below did not believe that gender and development was as marketable as other career choices. In this regard one male respondent noted that:

My family had mixed reactions towards my choice, my father wanted me to take an education based masters as he felt it was more marketable while my mother wanted me to continue with mass communication because she felt that gender and development studies would not blend with mass communication(O.I Anthony, 18/08/2015).

As deduced from the verbatim above, parental support for gender and development studies was lower among men students as it was perceived as a subject traditionally associated with women. This association could have lead to biased perceptions and stereotypes on gender and development studies. However men respondents who were pursuing gender and development studies had a clearer understanding about the content of gender and development and were free from biased perceptions and stereotypes.

When it came to marketability, even though some men respondent's parents did not find gender and development as marketable as other courses the male students who participated in the study felt that there was a gap for them to fill in the equality debate even though they were underrepresented in the gender and development classes with women outnumbering them. Hargrove et al. (2002) found that the perceptions of family and goal orientations may play a role in the formulation of clear and stable career goals and the promotion of self confidence in regard to career choices.

Eccles (1994) further notes that families are the cornerstone for choice and that gender roles from an early age influences the way in which parents view their children and direct them in choice-making. Parental views on appropriateness of gender roles influence factors in their children's lives such as perception and attitudes towards of subjects at school.

As this study noted earlier in this section, 85% of the women student's families supported their choice, this could signal a societal change from a gender perspective. Families could have noted the positive impact that gender and development studies affords women in terms of broadening their expectations in what they can achieve in the society through their educational capabilities. Arbache, Kolev&Filipiak (2010) note that in Africa the returns from education on earnings were important and education has a positive effect on gender wage equity.

Parents could have realized that women have been traditionally disadvantaged in education access and employment wages. Gender and development studies advocates for gender equity both in employment wages and educational access (ILO, 2012). This is beneficial in the society as the status of women needs to be improved as they have traditionally been tolerated since birth rather than being celebrated. The researcher found that although it has been noted as above that gender and development studies has benefits that primarily seem to accrue to women because of the various equity and equality challenges that they face, gender and development studies has the potential to impact men as well.

This is because the gender perspective challenges stereotypes about men and women's roles, and offers alternative roles to both (ILO, 2012). Thus as women in the society change their outlook on issues, the families get educated in the process and gradually their societies evolve around the gender based perspective.

4.2.2 Socio-cultural factors

The study having established that gender inequalities among male and female students existed, the researcher sought to find out which socio-cultural factors may explain this scenario particularly in relation to subject choice. To this end, the study posed open and closed-ended questions that generated the following responses which are discussed under the following sub-sections: traditional values, societal values, perceptions of the society, socialization process, gender roles and feminine and masculine self concept. The results are presented in Table 6 below:

Table 6: Socio-cultural factors influencing career choice of gender and development studies

	Women		Men	
	No.	%	No.	%
Personal Values	8	16	0	0
Traditional Values	11	22	4	33
Social Values	10	19	0	0
Perceptions of the Society	6	12	6	40
Socialization Process	4	7	0	0
Gender Roles	6	12	0	0
Feminine and Masculine Self Concept	6	12	5	27

The study found that traditional values at (33%), perceptions of society at (40%) and feminine and masculine self concept at (27%) were the major influencing socio-cultural ideologies among the male respondents. Female respondents were mainly influenced by traditional values at (22%), societal values at (19%) and personal values at (16%). The discussion for personal values has been omitted as it closely correlates with the discussion of individual view of choice in the subsection after this one. These results are discussed as below:

4.2.3 Traditional values

The results of this study as shown in table 6 above indicate that men were influenced by traditional values at (33%) which was higher than that of the women at (22%). When it comes to traditional values and choice Burt (1982) explains that the ability to choose is patterned by the social structure which is inclusive of an individual's influences from their traditions. The author explains that this social structure from which values emanate creates action indirectly by shaping actors' perceptions of their interests and by directly constraining choice. Traditional values are deemed important as they play a role in shaping the students' perception of their choice and also constrained this choice.

Examples of such traditional perceptions in Africa that emerged from the respondents views in the study were that: men are perceived to be stronger and higher than women in the society. As a result of such perceptions, men are expected to be the breadwinners and perform tasks demanding more physical strength than women's physical strength. In addition to this decision-making powers are supposed to be vested with men as when a woman possess these, it is seen to be detrimental to a man's authority as she will 'sit' on him.

Traditions have been viewed as reflecting cultural beliefs which have a component of gender stereotypes which contain specific expectations for competence (Ridgeway and Correll, 2000). Such a competence that emerged in this study was that men are natural rulers and that an African man cannot be ruled by a woman as he is expected by traditions to be above her. This outlook

was linked to patriarchal norms that men considered and situated their choices in. One male respondent said the following:

Our cultures particularly in Kenya provide us male students with notions that influence our career choices. Patriarchy in particular, grants men with a variety of choices more than women. Career choices are tolerated by men in the society in as much as they are not considered as being feminine or those of the female domain. Feminine courses are those seen to be cheap or easy while masculine courses are those that are tough and concentrated with men such as engineering (O.I. Paul, 7/08/2015).

From the above views culture it seems plays a greater role influencing career choice more for men than women. Flexible self perceptions of gender roles are restricted by traditions leading to rigid and stereotypical attitudes when it comes to making career choices (Arnold & Bye, 1989). Consequently, this may lead to role conflict restricting the respondent's ability to actualize their human potential.

Traditionally men are perceived to be stronger and better placed in the society to make better choices than women. When such a perception is challenged in reality it may lead to producing an inner conflict for the men (Lease, 2003). Gender and development studies challenges this perception leading to what one male respondent called "the soul searching of the definition of their masculinity" owing to how they had been socialized by the society (O.I. Kevin, 5/08/2015).

Conversely, when it comes to women they believe that a career that empowers them in their roles will help them achieve self mastery and this affects their choice making process (Osipow and Fitzgerald, 1996). Experiences in childhood may expose and sometimes limit women to the sources of information necessary for the development of strong beliefs of efficacy in many occupational areas (Correll, 2001).

To encapsulate, traditional values act like a signpost or reminder of where traditions have placed us and this requires us to conform to them when making career choices. However our traditional values need not be personal values and with change of attitude gender responsiveness can be achieved.

4.2.4 Social values

As shown in table 6 social values featured at as the second highest socio-cultural factor for women at 19% while this variable did not feature for men. Social values in this context were explained to the respondents as ingrained ways that had influenced their perspective of their career choice as pertains to their cultural rules or schemas. Social values emanate from social relational contexts which are: any situation in which individuals define themselves in relation to others in order to act (Correll and Ridgeway, 2004). These social relational contexts from which these social values may emerge may include everyday interactions and the media.

From the qualitative data women respondents opined that their social values influenced the process of defining themselves in relation to others when it came to their career choice. One of the women respondents noted:

Pursuing gender and development studies has given me a greater awareness of what it means to be a woman. Before taking the course I saw women defined as less competent than men in the society but during the course I have developed an alternative set of beliefs where I find women just as strong, capable and competent as men. (O.I. Eunice, 11/08/2015)

The above observation is in line with what Correll and Ridgeway (2004) who note that men are viewed as more status worthy and competent overall while women on the other hand are seen as less competent and better at communal tasks. These narrow descriptions about men and women that pervade in the society may be responsible for shaping social values associated with career choice.

The researcher is of the view that if women focus on these narrow social understandings of men and women they are likely to expect to be treated according to these beliefs. Examples of such beliefs that emerged from this study are that there are some career choices that are feminine and others that are masculine. And since men are viewed as more competent than women, the masculine courses are more marketable or competitive. The feminine courses are viewed as less demanding and as women's fields.

The above beliefs can influence career choice of women may assimilate these beliefs as they make educational choices. Such social understandings could be from diverse aspects in the society such as the rights and traditional status of women as from one woman respondent who noted that:

My gender played a role in my career choice as I come from Kajiado where women are not allowed to inherit or own property. As a woman I would like to change such biases against women by empowering myself by going back to pursue my masters which will put me in a position to empower other women (O.I, Anne, 3/08/2015).

Examples of other socio-cultural norms that emerged from the study were: allowing a woman to enjoy her full rights would empower her and this would upset the power balance breeding a tough headed woman. Another example is, it is the man of the home who represents the family and speaks on behalf of the family, and women in most instances are expected to be silent. And there was a saying among Kenyan men as one male lecturer noted that:

"If you lead a woman down the path of ambition and popularity she will 'sit' on you" (O.I., Omondi, 24/08/2015).

Such socio-cultural norms and values, differences in education and lack of women's power within the household are some of the most important factors that lead to worsening outcomes for women in the labour market (Arbache, Kolev & Filipiak, 2010). These outcomes have implications for women's futures as women's employment and earnings are essential in the fight against poverty because of the direct contribution they make to the household welfare. Additionally their employment provides personal power for women in making family decisions and redirecting household spending on essential needs especially in favour of children's health and education (UNICEF, 1999).

From the qualitative data from other women respondents in the study, other variables such as better earnings, career progression, leadership and empowerment played a role in their career choice of gender and development studies.

4.2.5 Perceptions of the society

As shown in table 6 the men felt that the perceptions of the society influenced their choice at 40% while that of women was at 12%. The researcher noted that the perceptions of the society of the respondents' choice played a role as a socio-cultural factor. These perceptions by the society contained specific expectations as to what men or women should pursue as career choices. The perceptions of the society could influence men more than women owing to men's greater awareness of and impact of socialized sex differences. In relation to this a lecturer had the following to say:

Most of the perceptions held in our society regarding subject choice are stereotypes and misconceptions. These perceptions are not based on a true understanding of women and men's true capabilities (O.I, Sheila, 12/08/2015).

Burt (1982) suggests that these perceptions norms that develop in the society when actors occupy similar network positions in the social structure and evaluate their options vis- a-vis the alternatives of similarly situated others. In this study a perception that emerged among both men and women respondents was that gender and development studies was associated as being a course to do with women's causes. This perception was primarily shaped by the media that presented women mostly when discussing gender concerns.

Gender and development studies was also perceived to be advocating for mainly women rights and activism for these and other rights and was opposed by some men in the society because of turning away women from patriarchal norms. In relation to this one man respondent had the following to say:

Cultural norms and values are threatened by gender and development studies as men are seen to be the initiators of development; and gender and development studies goes against this norm. Some women are from deeply patriarchal societies and view life from a man's eyes. This patriarchal view of women is continually challenged, revised and updated by gender and development studies whereby women have to assess patriarchal situations critically. Women have to learn how to do what is best for themselves even though it goes against the Kenyan Society's patriarchal norms (O.I, John, 14/08/2015).

Other men respondents concurred with this but emphasized what was being challenged by the gender and development career choice was:

The African ideal of masculinity is reinforced by entrenched socialization norms, such as men are stronger and more competent than women. A challenge to male dominance and the existence of alternative gender roles as is sought by gender and development studies is a threat to such norms as men have to relinquish their inward and outward status and power. (O.I. Kevin, 5/08/2015).

According to Kabeer (2005) one way of thinking about power is the ability to make choices, to be disempowered means to be denied choice while to be empowered means to gain the ability to make such a choice. Power of choice in the researcher's view could be what gender and development studies offers and what is opposed by men in the society.

When the above emergent perceptions of gender and development studies are examined they relate to the ability of women to attain power and become empowered through their choice. Viewing career choice from this angle means that gender and development studies as a career choice, ceases to be a personal choice but one with an impact on the society.

In this regard Emma opined:

I think the negative attitude towards gender and development studies is due to fears from the community in seeing that after some women receive empowerment from knowing their rights they become radical. By radical I mean they become transformed and changed. A woman is now independent and being independent is viewed negatively or frowned upon by the society but in my opinion I think that every woman is entitled to her own independence (O.I, Emma, 14/08/2015).

Other women respondents associated these negative perceptions towards their choice by the society as also having to do with the notion of equality, stereotypes about women, rigid gender roles, and misperceptions of gender and development studies content and lack of proper implementation of pro-women policies.

Despite the negative perceptions among the men and women respondents there were also positive perceptions towards their choice of gender and development studies. The women respondents the positive perceptions emanated from: the empowerment of women, balanced media coverage on gender issues, the representation of women in leadership positions, reduced inequalities for women, enhanced employment opportunities and the involvement of men in the gender agenda.

Some of the male students had positive perceptions of the choice of gender and development studies towards the realization that: women formed an integral part of the society and that the empowerment of women was crucial in all aspects of their lives.

In this regard Charles opined:

Those like I who have chosen gender and development studies would like to think of it as an open system of thought, embracing both information and empowerment. In the course of my study I have known more about women, their concerns and how to treat them both at home and at work. (O.I. Charles, 4/08/2015).

Additionally these male students owing to their choice of gender and development studies, were now: aware of their rights, introduced to role sharing, equipped with new knowledge and exposed to better employment opportunities. If the positive and negative perceptions from women and men towards gender and development studies are investigated research will find that they embody ideas, values and identities.

4.2.6 Socialization process

As shown in table 6, eight per cent of the women indicated that the socialization process played a role in their career choice process, while for the men this did not feature as a variable. By socialization the women indicated that their past and present interactions with their family and friends encouraged them to choose gender and development studies. Their societies impressed on

them the need to improve their status by choosing a degree choice that would positively impact on them and their communities. In this regard a woman respondent opined that:

I was encouraged to choose gender and development studies by the strong women who surrounded me as I was growing up in particular my mother and aunties. Their assertiveness made me feel that women are recognized in the society and that they cannot be subdued in the society if they are able to articulate their issues. This made me interested in choosing gender and development studies to live up to this ideal of the strong woman (O.I. Decy, 6/08/2015).

In such an instance, the role of socialization is twofold: first it provides models that have particular roles and behavior with which the student identifies with, and then the student makes a choice that they feel is at par with these roles and behavior. Second, the student identifies with the role model and incorporates and internalizes the roles and values of the person such as in this instance the mother and aunts (White, Cox and Cooper, 1992).

The role of socialization was related with gender roles and played a role in the self definition of women. This self definition was influenced by the educational system. With regards to this one lecturer noted:

When it comes to Kenyan traditional values, gender roles play a part in shaping perceptions that certain subjects are for men and others for women due to socialization by teachers. Teachers at an early stage reinforce the notion that men are more capable than women and women internalize this and mould their future career ambitions on this untrue notion (O.I. Leah, 8/08/2015).

The finding is in line with students who when asked who influenced their choice, some mentioned their lecturers. It may therefore be inferred that among the earliest role models that will socialize the women into their choice of courses and career paths are teachers. Eccles (1994) notes that socialization is likely to influence educational and vocational choices in part through its impact on individuals' perceptions of the field of viable options, as well as its impact on expectations and subjective task value.

Socialization as a variable has been noted to first lead men and women to have different hierarchies of core personal values and place different values on long range goal and choices (Eccles, 1994). With regards to personal values women students were noted in the study as having different values from those of men. Women focused more on family values such as feeding, educating and caring for the family, while men focused more on their career growth.

When it came to long range goals, women in the study were more focused on finishing their graduate degree and seeking employment or a work promotion, growing personally and getting empowered. Men on the other hand focused primarily on better employment prospects. Eccles (1994) notes that women have multiple roles and multiple goals, while men focus on one main goal which is their professional development. From the above we may deduce that the socialization process may have made women aware of their unequal status with men in the society. This unequal status may then influence women's career choice in a direction that will not only earn them a graduate qualification but seek ways for them to uplift their status and improve their well being in the society.

4.2.7 Gender roles

As shown in table 6, eleven per cent of women indicated that gender roles influenced their career choice while this did not feature as a variable for men. Gender roles featured as a variable as they influenced primary activities for women. These primary activities bring about differences between men and women. For example although the biological factor of having a child does not, in itself, make it impossible for a woman to choose a specific career, she may be prevented by a number of factors determined by gender.

Among these are cultural norms restricting women to the home, stereotypes about 'suitable' career choices for women, or the lack of child care and family services for married women or single mothers who want to go back to school and pursue a career (Eccles, 1994). In view of this one respondent was of the view that:

One of the greatest challenges that I faced when I decided to pursue my graduate course was that of my gender roles. As a mother I was expected to earn a living, feed, wash, clean and take care of the family. My husband on the other hand was focused only on earning a living. Together with my husband we made the necessary arrangements and he encouraged me to pursue gender and development studies. At present my husband now realizes that this arrangement was to his undoing as I am empowered in terms of decision-making, ideas and newfound knowledge attainment. (O.I. Eunice, 11/08/2015).

This view was echoed by other married women who participated in the study who said that their gender roles as mothers constrained them in terms of achieving a work-family balance. Other issues that emerged from the women respondents in relation to their gender roles was the reaction of family and friends towards their choice of gender and development studies. Some women noted that even though their husband's were supportive of their choice, their friends did not approve of their choice. Their friends thought they would be influenced negatively by those taking gender and development studies to seek new freedoms and abandon their marital duties.

Some single women also reported the same reaction towards them from their friends who saw that they were transgressing their gender roles. One woman respondent commented that:

My male friends were biased because studying gender and development studies creates a newfound awareness of your rights that is not necessarily consonant with the given gender roles for women. From gender studies you learn how to negotiate for your space and men are not comfortable with this, as an addition to my space is a reduction in theirs (O.I. Mima, 12/08/2015).

A theme that emerged from most of the women as the one above is that most of those who echoed caution towards their choice for fear of the women's gender roles being eroded were their friends, while their families were supported their choices. Opposition from their friends was a form of caution as the content of the course was perceived to be radical, the break-up of their marriage was perceived inevitable and not finding a marriage spouse due to being defined as a radical feminist was possible.

Young (1992) links this opposition to the weaker bargaining point for women which has its genesis in the gender division of labour that is closely connected with gender roles. This could be true in the above instance because when a woman decides to pursue gender and development

studies she will have to balance her studies and family time and this will inevitably put strain on performance of both. The second issue that emerges from the discussion is the ideological challenge to gender roles that gender and development poses in terms of its content.

The researcher notes that the content of gender and development studies seeks to integrate both men and women equally in the development process. This can bring about an ideological shift in gender roles which are unequally assigned with men being highly excluded from reproductive roles such as household work. This 'natural' role assignment process is what is challenged by gender and development studies.

From the above discussion it emerged that a new outlook on gender roles can be accepted by the family members as most members accommodated the choices women made to pursue gender and development studies. The ideological shift in the gender roles was however, not easily accepted by friends of the women respondents as they did not approve of their choice of gender and development studies.

4.2.8 Feminine and masculine self concept

As shown in table 6, eleven per cent of the women respondents said that their feminine self concept influenced their choice, while 27% of the men respondents said masculine self concept influenced their choice. The term self concept was explained to the respondents as how they viewed themselves with particular emphasis on their gender, values and place in society. For the men their self concept played a greater role since the content of gender and development is associated with feminine values. The male respondents did not want to make a choice that seemed to be associated with feminine values and that would undermine their masculine self concept. In this regard a respondent opined:

My male friends were not so enthusiastic of my choice of gender and development studies because of the implicit erosion of patriarchal structures which they fear. They told me that since gender was associated with women they will perform better than me in class and dominate the job opportunities (O.I. Charles, 4/08/2015).

Other men respondents reported similar sentiments such as the above, and it is of particular interest that their friends are the ones that took part in appraising whether their career choices fit the societal masculine self concept. And those that did not fit into this societal self concept by choosing the 'other' in this case gender and development studies were lead to believe that they would experience an inner conflict. This anticipated inner conflict was related to aspects of male domination and the adherence to the culturally prescribed gender roles. In this regard a male respondent noted:

Men's inner conflict occurs when they choose a course such as gender and development studies that fights for women's rights. This is because they juxtapose themselves with other men who are outside the course who believe in male domination and women's submission. Men who have chosen gender and development studies might experience inner conflict because our patriarchal norms are constantly reinforcing the norm that women should be confined to reproductive roles and men to productive roles(O.I. Meshack, 9/08/2015).

Thus it is evident that patriarchal norms in the society may reinforce a certain masculine self concept and provided the setting for unresponsive career enrolments. Men's self

concept as defined by these patriarchal norms was linked with advantage. The men respondents in the study elaborated this advantage as their ability to be the sole breadwinners and the rulers in the political, religious and household spheres.

These views were confirmed by a lecturer, who had the following to say,

Men tend to associate control and power with the productive domain and gender and development studies is not viewed favourably as it is viewed as putting women into this productive domain and out of the domestic one(O.I, Casper 6/08/2015).

As noted by Young (1992), control and power are exercised in many different ways, with culture including religious beliefs being used as means of control as well as justification. The above observation by Young (1992) shows that this inner conflict may have its basis in the fact that men are there to safeguard theirs and other men's self concept.

This can be contrasted with the women who felt a change was needed in the way patriarchal structures in the society defined the feminine self concept. A female respondent had the following to say:

What shapes the reactions, ideas and opinions towards gender and development studies is predominantly patriarchy. Men do not want a new power relations regime because they are beneficiaries of the current status quo, socialization processes support patriarchy and are deeply entrenched. Gender and development studies is seen to enhance women's self concept more than that of men and viewed as women's department making it out of bounds for men (O.I, Eva 3/08/2015).

The above sentiment was reported by other women in the study who linked the definition of their feminine self concept to societal patriarchal structures. Decision making, lifestyle and authority are aspects the women respondents felt that were at the core of choice making and comprised an integral part of their self concept. The women in the study further noted that their choice of gender and development studies contributed to their self concept as they felt more empowered and self assured.

Correll (2001) notes that career choices for women are influenced by cultural beliefs that contain specific expectations for competence. Individuals in the society may thus not attribute to the feminine self concept competence and this may influence the choice to choose gender and development studies.

The researcher noted that even when an individual holds a stereotypic belief about the feminine or masculine self concept and its association to gender and development studies, they rely on others especially in this study their friends to reinforce these beliefs.

5.0 DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

The objective of the study was to identify the socio-cultural factors that influence master's student's choice to study gender and development studies. The findings indicate that the socio-cultural factors that influence student's choice included: family relational networks, personal values, traditional values, social values, perceptions of the society, the socialization process,

gender roles and feminine and masculine self concept. The study noted that there were no specific offices for career education within the gender and development studies departments nor was career counselling offered before the career choice. Consequently in most gender and development studies departments, the career choice processes did not incorporate a gender perspective that was the purpose of universities gender policies. Thus, while many women were aware of the benefits of gender and development studies and enrolled in high numbers, few men enrolled for the course leading gender unresponsiveness interventions at the master's level. The study therefore underlines the lack of sufficient career education and career counselling in career choice, was a major reason explaining gender unresponsive enrolments in gender and development studies.

5.2 Conclusion

The study concluded that since women and men while making their choices are conditioned by different factors, there needed to be the implementation of career education that incorporated these factors such as exploration with career counsellors and provision of career resources by mentors and role models. This career education needs to factor in the context specific socio-cultural elements in the Kenyan society, such as women's decision-making, the masculine ideal of leadership, stereotypes in societal gender roles and traditional socialization processes.

5.3 Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made for achieving gender responsiveness in enrolment interventions in gender and development studies in Nairobi County:

1. Universities in the county should implement career education in the form of career counselling and mentorship programs for the students. This can be a good avenue for self exploration with students during choice-making where they can be administered tests to ensure that they make their choice free of gender bias and stereotypes.
2. To narrow the chances of gender unresponsiveness there should be equal participation of women and men in gender roles implemented in educational curricula at all levels. This will prepare women and men for a career in which they do not experience underrepresentation thus being productive to their employers and enjoying their career choice.

5.4 Areas for further research

This study focused on identifying the socio-cultural factors that influence master's student's choice to study gender and development studies at the master's level in Nairobi County. A study should also be undertaken in other urban counties to establish other determinants of career choice in gender and development studies.

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