

Gender stereotyping and socialization as tools sustaining patriarchal ideology in tertiary institutions

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Abstract

A major feature of the Nigerian traditional society is its patriarchal nature. Patriarchy is a social system whereby men dominate and lord it over women in the society. Two ways through which this system thrives are gender stereotyping and gender socialization. Society prescribes roles and behaviours for people. One characteristic feature of this prescription is that it is determined and limited by sex. From birth, a child begins to be moulded towards exhibiting the roles and behaviours assigned to her/him by the society. Through the process of socialization, the child comes to learn what is proper or otherwise with regard to the expectations of the society. Being that one of the aims of tertiary education is to inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and the society, one wonders if patriarchy as an ideology of women subjugation has not also permeated our universities. Using Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory, this paper therefore sought to find out the effect of gender stereotyping and socialization on the leadership of student bodies in the university. Data were generated through a survey of selected departmental students associations. The findings indicate a lopsided tilt in favour of a particular sex over a five-year period. The paper submits that every form of marginalization of any particular sex in tertiary institutions must be challenged, and therefore recommends awareness programmes on the importance of gender equity in the society.

Keywords: patriarchal ideology, gender, gender stereotype, gender socialization, marginalization

Introduction

The traditional Nigerian society is patriarchal in nature. Patriarchy is an ideology that believes that men are superior to women, and that women are naturally ordained to be under men. This may be why behavioural norms or sex roles in the society are made to reflect this belief. The society prescribes roles which are determined and limited by sex. This is known as gender role stereotyping, and through socialization, children are nurtured to exhibit the desired gender role. This is one issue that poses a serious impediment to the achievement of gender equality and equity. It has been argued that education is an important tool that will be used to fight stereotypes and consequently bring about the desired social and cultural changes. It will achieve this by re-defining the way the society represents gender. For there to be equality between women and men, there should be a promotion of gender equality in education and through education. The tertiary institution is regarded as an ivory tower, which means that it is an environment where the rigours of intellectual pursuit disconnect one from the reality of everyday life. One is therefore constrained to think that an ideal situation of a balanced treatment of the sexes will be obtained there. It is against this back-drop that this study seeks to examine the effect of gender stereotyping and gender socialization on the leadership position of the female undergraduates in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Gender in the society

The society is structured in such a way that men and women have attributes created for them. Consequently, apart from the genetic

and reproductive dissimilarities between the sexes, the society created other attributes in keeping with its ethics to differentiate between the sexes. According to Eakins and Eakins, “Our religion, educational, and political institutions promulgate attitudes along sexist biases ... patterned behaviour from our unwritten but ever-present cultural files of ‘what females do’ and ‘what males do’ (qtd in Emenyi 37). Thus, it is the society that has given birth to gender.

According to UNESCO baseline definition, gender refers to the roles and responsibilities which the society creates for men and women. It has to do with the characteristics and behaviours expected of each sex by the society. Gender therefore is very important in the study of societal organization because it shows how women’s subordination or men’s domination is constructed by the society (UNESCO’s Gender Mainstreaming). Vicki Hegelson sees gender as the social categories of male and female made distinct by a set of psychological features and role attributes that society has assigned to the biological category of sex (3). Rhoda Unger explained that gender is a description of the traits and behaviours which a culture regards as appropriate to women and men (Brannon 12). What this means is that these roles are not biologically predetermined; rather, they are social creations learnt through family and culture, as Simone Beauvoir would say “One is not born, but rather becomes, woman” (330).

By Beauvoir’s postulation, barring somewhat differing anatomy, all human beings are born alike; however, what one becomes depends on the society. Gender focuses on the social nature of the differences between women and men; hence, it is a social construct which varies from society to society, and from culture to culture, while sex is a natural and biological construct. It is a known fact that there exist differences between men and

women, but one wonders if some of these differences are not basically more of how the society thinks women and men are different than the way women and men essentially are.

Gender role and gender stereotyping

The features and roles which the society assigns to the sexes are known as gender roles and they differ according to societies. By this, each sex is expected to possess characteristics necessary for the tasks that particular sex normally performs. Gender roles metamorphose into, and sustain gender stereotypes as patterns of behaviour become associated with a particular sex (Brannon 153). Gender roles are behaviours, while gender stereotypes are beliefs and attitudes about femininity and masculinity. Gender stereotypes consist of beliefs about the psychological traits, characteristics and activities appropriate to women and men (153). That is to say that gender stereotyping considers all females similar, and all males similar. Consequently, it prescribes what women and men should be in the society, and how they should behave in life. As an illustration, on average, men are said to be more tacit than women, but this is not factual for some individual men and women, as the difference may even be reversed in some contexts. Briefly put, gender stereotypes generalizes the characteristics of each sex category.

According to Naomi Ellemers, gender stereotypes show that the society attaches primary importance to task performance in describing men, while for women, importance is attached to constructing social relationships (277). In the same vein, Wendy Wood and Alice Eagly posit that because more women than men undertake domestic activities like cooking, this activity and the skills associated with it will be labelled a stereotype of women by the society, and this will go to make up women's gender role

(701). Thus, it is gender stereotyping that makes more women than men pursue a career in education (teaching), medicine (nursing), child development, and other service sector occupations. However, due to the fact that a particular sex exhibits certain characteristics, people overemphasize that difference between the sexes but underestimate the variations within that particular sex. According to Deborah Cameron, there is a reductive tendency to stereotyping as it interprets a person's behaviour, personality, etc in terms of a set of common sense attributions applied to whole groups (Mary Talbot 468). Stereotyping is usually directed at subordinate groups like ethnic minorities and women, and it contributes to hegemonic struggle (471).

Gender Stereotypic Traits

Women	Men
Gentle	Aggressive
Passive	Strong
Emotional	Ambitious
Illogical	Dominant
Easily moved to tears	Independent
Quiet	Fearless
Talkative	Competent
Caring	Logical
Subservient	Bold
Seeing to hearth matters, etc	Enduring
	Leadership traits
	Tacit, etc

(Emenyi 37-38; Eme et al 2).

Gender socialization

Gender is always constructed in a situation where there are realities that maintain and sustain it. Socialization on its part takes place within a gendered social context (Yoder 81). Socialization is the process through which people are instructed on how to become good citizens of a society. It makes people understand and accept the norms, beliefs, values and expectations of a society. Socialization teaches the social order. Socialization is not voluntary as it gives one no choice regarding what is to be learnt. Once a person is born, and before the person has the intellectual capacity to comprehend what is happening, the process of imposing the social order has begun. A society is perpetuated through socialization.

People may be at a loss then as to what gender socialization means, and also may be oblivious of the fact that they may have been practising it. People are influenced by it as it is something that starts from birth and people also help to enforce and sustain it. Gender socialization is defined as “the process whereby humans in the course of social interaction as well as exposure and reactions to diverse information are moulded and continually shaped to culturally appropriate images of femaleness and maleness” (Sikic-Micanovic583). Isabella Crespi on her part says gender socialization is ” how children of different sexes are socialized into their gender roles and taught what it means to be male or female” (4). From these definitions, it is understood that through gender socialization, a child comes to learn the cultural roles attached to her/his sex. There are different expectations for girls and boys; hence, they are treated differently and assigned differing roles by the society. Men are socialized to be brave, confront danger, protect their loved ones, and hide their emotions.

Women are taught to be nurturers, caretakers and caregivers, and to always look pretty (Madison Day 1).

Patriarchal ideology, gender stereotyping and gender socialization

Patriarchy according to Bhasin is “a specific type of male-dominated family – the large household of the patriarch which included women, junior men, children, slaves and domestic servants, all under the rule of this dominant male”(1). However, patriarchy has taken on a new meaning in the wave of agitations for equal treatment between the sexes. In the light of this foregoing exposition, Nneka Okoye therefore posits that “patriarchy is a system of male authority which oppresses women making them submissive, docile and religiously adherent to tradition and culture which consider them as mere appendages to the society” (334). She goes further to say that patriarchy is a form of exclusion and isolation of women which makes them feel they are inferior to men intellectually, physically, and socially. Furthermore, Susan Walby says patriarchy is “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit the women” (20). Walby argues that the society makes it possible for every avenue of socialization – family, education, religion, politics, employment, state to be under patriarchal control. In patriarchy, the family is the dominant structure. Through the socialization process, the family inculcates in their members various values and tradition which project and sustain gender inequality and patriarchal subordination of women. The home therefore becomes the centre of female sex subjugation. As an illustration of the role of the family in patriarchy, Bell Hooks revealed that while growing up, she was taught that it was her role “to serve, to be weak, to be free from the burden of thinking,

to caretake and nurture others”, while her brother “was taught that it was his role to be served; to provide; to be strong; to think, strategize, and plan; and to refuse to caretake or nurture others” (1).

The basic belief in patriarchy is that men are superior to women, hence behavioural norms or gender roles in the society reflect this belief. In Igboland where Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka is situated, most times, when the news that a child is born is given, the question that is asked next is “*O mulugini?*” (What sex is the baby?). This question arises because Igbo land is patriarchal in nature, so there is a high expectancy for every pregnancy to bring forth a male child, and there is greater jubilation when a male child is born than when a female child is born. What the Igbo society has failed to recognize is that if every pregnancy brings forth a male child, in the course of time, the society will go into extinction as there will not be women to assist in the procreation of the future generation.

Tradition is one way through which patriarchal ideals are inculcated in children. From the outset, children are taught to support the views of the males as the superior sex. Mineke asserts that in Igboland, a woman belongs either to her father or to her husband; there is no middle course. Continuing, she reveals that marriages can be arranged without caring how the woman feels about her husband; and that her worth depends on the number of male children she is able to bring forth. (Maureen Udenweze 1).

In Igboland, the gender roles and gender socialization process encourage inequalities between women and men, thereby promoting patriarchy. For instance, in the family, a woman’s identity depends on her father, husband or son. Certain family matters are discussed and decisions taken between a man and his sons to the exclusion of his wife and his daughters. Even if a male

child is mentally deranged, he is still prized higher than a female child.

According to Nwala (qtd in Oha), anytime there is an argument which bothers on culture and tradition “the woman gives in to the man’s view on interpretation” since the man is regarded as being “higher ... in the ontological order”. If a woman gives birth to only girls, there is the tendency that her husband will take a second wife whom he hopes will give him sons. Children see all these and they register in their subconscious as to which sex is more important.

Theoretical framework: Social learning theory

Given that this study explores how gender stereotyping and gender socialization sustain patriarchal ideology, the theoretical framework relevant to this work is Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory. Albert Bandura (qtd in Saul McLeod 1) stated that learning is produced by observation and imitation. Through the Bobo doll experiment, Bandura showed that children observe and then imitate behaviours of the people around them. In the experiment, children watched as an adult treated a doll in an aggressive manner. When the children were later left alone with the Bobo doll, they treated it the same way the adult did. He continued that from the society, children observe some gender-stereotypic behaviours from the agents of socialization – family, school, friends, storybooks, and the media. They encode the behaviours of these models, and later on, when certain situations arise, they imitate and reproduce what they observed in the models. And of course, when models of the same sex exhibit a particular behavior over time, children will definitely link that behavior with that particular sex. Because children are exposed to

both female and male models, they learn the gender-related behaviours associated with the female and male sex.

The models or social agents – parents, teachers, peers, etc reward these sex-appropriate behaviours and discourage the inappropriate ones. For the years the undergraduates are in school, the better part of their life is spent in school. But at the interval during which they go home to their family, they observe what is going on. Even parents are known to divide household chores along sex lines. For instance, girls are assigned doing the dishes and other caretaking roles, while boys go to the farm or follow their father to his workplace. These are observed by the children, and of course, when they have the opportunity to act, they do that which they observe the elders doing, no matter the information they have.

Methodology

This study is constrained to find out the leadership positions of female students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, by compiling records of the headship of students' associations in two faculties - Faculty of Education and Faculty of Arts over a five year period: 2013-2018. Most of the data for this study were got from the information board on display in the general office of the departments under study. In the few departments where they were not on display, the workers in the office provided the needed information from their department's database. The two faculties were chosen because generally much of the talks and articles on gender studies emanate from them. So, one would expect that in these faculties, there would be a balanced treatment of the sexes or a better treatment of the female sex than is obtained in the outside world.

Leadership of Departmental Students' Associations by sex

The leadership positions of students by sex in the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Arts in Nnamdi Azikiwe University are presented below.

Faculty of Arts

Table 1

Department of English and Literature

Year	President	Vice President
2013 – 2014	Male	Female
2014 – 2015	Male	Female
2015 – 2016	Female	Male
2016 – 2017	Male	Female
2017 – 2018	Male	Female

In this department, over a five year period, the presidents were all males assisted by females except in the 2015-16 session, when there was a female president.

Table 2

Department of Igbo, African and Asian Studies

Year	President	Vice President
2013 – 2014	Male	Female
2014 – 2015	Male	Female
2015 – 2016	Male	Female
2016 – 2017	Male	Female
2017 – 2018	Male	Female

Here, no female student has ever become a president in the period under study. This also holds for the Linguistics Department (Table 3) and Philosophy Department (Table 4) below.

Table 3
Department of Linguistics

Year	President	Vice President
2013 - 2014	Male	Female
2014 - 2015	Male	Female
2015 - 2016	Male	Female
2016 - 2017	Male	Female
2017 - 2018	Male	Female

Table 4
Department of Philosophy

Year	President	Vice President
2013 - 2014	Male	Female
2014 - 2015	Male	Female
2015 - 2016	Male	Female
2016 - 2017	Male	Female
2017 - 2018	Male	Female

Table 5
Department of Music

Year	President	Vice President
2013 - 2014	Male	Female
2014 - 2015	Male	Female
2015 - 2016	Male	Female
2016 - 2017	Male	Female
2017 - 2018	Female	Male

Table 6
Department of Theatre and Film Studies

Year	President	Vice President
2013 - 2014	Male	Female
2014 - 2015	Male	Female
2015 - 2016	Female	Male
2016 - 2017	Male	Female
2017 - 2018	Male	Female

Tables 5 and 6 show one female president each in the years under study

Faculty of Education

This faculty recorded sameness of one particular sex as the president in the years under study, except for the Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education that produced a female president in the 2017-2018 session.

Table 7
Department of Adult Education

Year	President	Vice President
2013 - 2014	Male	Female
2014 - 2015	Male	Female
2015 - 2016	Male	Female
2016 - 2017	Male	Female
2017 - 2018	Male	Female

Table 8
Department of Educational Management and Policy

Year	President	Vice President
2013 - 2014	Male	Female

2014 - 2015	Male	Female
2015 - 2016	Male	Female
2016 - 2017	Male	Female
2017 - 2018	Female	Male

Table 9**Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education**

Year	President	Vice President
2013 - 2014	Male	Female
2014 - 2015	Male	Female
2015 - 2016	Male	Female
2016 - 2017	Male	Female
2017 - 2018	Female	Male

Table 10**Department of Library and Information Science**

Year	President	Vice President
2013 - 2014	Male	Female
2014 - 2015	Male	Female
2015 - 2016	Male	Female
2016 - 2017	Male	Female
2017 - 2018	Male	Female

Table 11**Department of Technology and Vocational Education**

Year	President	Vice President
2013 - 2014	Male	Female
2014 - 2015	Male	Female
2015 - 2016	Male	Female
2016 - 2017	Male	Female

2017 - 2018	Male	Female
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Discussion

It can be seen from the tables that female undergraduates in the two faculties under study hardly ever get elected into the topmost position in the students' associations. In the Faculty of Arts, for the departments under study (Tables 1–6), there were collectively thirty (30) presidents. Out of this number, only three (3) were female students; the rest were male students. Faculty of Education seems worse off (Tables 7–11), with just two (2) female presidents out of thirty presidents in the periods under study. And it is not as if there is a dearth of capable female students in these departments because in most cases, female students outnumber the male students; yet female students do not get to be elected into the headship of the student bodies. At the Department of Igbo, African and Asian Studies, this researcher happened to bump into the current president of the student body, a man, and asked what could be the cause of the lopsided tilt. His reply was that in Igboland, women do not lead men since if they are made leaders, they cannot perform some customary rites like breaking of kola nut. The reason for this line of thinking may not be far-fetched as gender stereotyping and socialization make female students to be seen as less able to lead other students (Naomi Ellemers 6). Ellemers revealed that in a study where teachers' behaviours (e.g promptness) during an online course were evaluated, if an instructor was identified by a male name, he would be rated high, while if it was a female name, the rating would be low. This presupposes a preconceived notion that men do not waste time at getting things done, but that women take all the time in doing so, and so can never be good at any leadership position.

The society, through its socializing agents, trains children to believe that the male child is a treasure, and so, most times, he is allocated a position superior to that of the female child. Girls are trained from the outset to believe that their position is always below that of the boys; hence denying them from the very beginning of the training for leadership roles. Children observe and assimilate these gender discriminations from the society. This then helps to perpetuate patriarchy as an ideology of women subordination. In higher institutions, it is believed that it is this socialization process that prevents female students from aspiring for the topmost position in the students' associations. It also makes them passive when it comes to aspiring for other leadership positions. They believe that it is the preserve of the male students. Clearly, it is not lack of competence that makes the female students not to get these positions, rather it is gender socialization which most times determines the position an individual will hold in the society.

Conclusion and recommendation

This study found evidence to show that the female sex in our tertiary institutions is still being marginalized. Even though girls now have access to education, discriminatory practices and lack of training opportunities act as barriers to their advancement. Our patriarchal society does not encourage women to aspire for power. There is always the glass ceiling factor which keeps women from rising to enviable positions in any organization they find themselves. And all these arise from gender stereotyping and gender socialization. The society should learn to equate ability with capability, instead of ability with gender. There is the need to modify societal gender-stereotyping and socialization process. This is because any signal of gender-bias gives children the

impression that one sex is more highly-prized than the other. They should dismantle every patriarchal structure that accords privileges to the male child over the female child. Our universities should help to eschew every form of subordination and suppression of the female sex. They should enact laws that make for a balanced representation of the sexes in their activities.

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