



MORAL EXPECTATIONS, SOCIAL CONTROL, AND GENDER DOUBLE STANDARDS IN HAUSA SOCIETY

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Abstract

This paper analyses gender double standards in African communities and how the moral expectations are disproportionately applied to men and women. The study examines how cultural norms, religion and social institutions perpetuate these inequalities using qualitative research methods like interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis in the Hausa society in Northern Nigeria. The idea of patriarchy can be defined as the system according to which men are privileged, and social control mechanisms are in place to enforce conformity through family, religion, and community sanctions. The results indicate that women are more rigid when it comes to matters of sexuality, modesty and conduct, as compared to men who have greater freedom in society. As an example, female premarital relationships are likely to cause stigmatisation, whereas the same action on the part of men is acceptable. The analysis also indicates that these two sets of standards are reinforced by daily routines which include parental control and religious teachings. Such norms are constructed by society but internalised to the extent that they become difficult to change. The implications are social inequality, lack of opportunities for women and the underdevelopment of society at large. Nevertheless, new forces like education and online communication are slowly overturning these standards. The conclusion of the study is that gender double standards are persistent but can be changed with the help of policy reform and social change.

Keywords: Gender Double Standards; Patriarchy; Social Control; Moral Expectations; African Societies



Introduction

The nature of gender relations in African societies has traditionally been determined by quite strong cultural norms, values and social structures, which define the appropriate roles and behavior of men and women. According to Oyewumi (1997) gender in most African societies is not a biological difference but a social construct that is entrenched in power relations and cultural demands. In most traditional contexts, men tend to be placed as the authority figures, breadwinners as well as decision-makers, whereas the women are mostly attributed with the domestic duties, caregivers, and morality guardians.

As an example, women are supposed to be modest and respect the honour of their families, whereas men are given a relatively higher degree of social freedom. This covers mobility difference, participation in the society, and sexual expression. This is not exclusive to the Hausa but can be seen in other African societies albeit with varying degrees and manifestations (Tamale, 2011). The constitution of double standards is built and supported on these gendered expectations.

Demonstration of the meaning of Double Standards in the Cultural and Moral environments

The term double standards is used to refer to the unequal treatment of codes, rules or expectations to a particular group of people in this case, that is, the men and the women. Maman (1996) remarks that such differences are often institutionalized through the normalization of privileges of men and restriction of independence of women by the systems.

This can be vividly observed in regards to societal views on sexuality. In most African societies, the expression of male sexuality is mostly accepted or even encouraged as a sign of masculinity, and that female sexuality is strictly regulated, and even stigmatised. A man can be socially justified who has more than one relationship, while a woman in the same situation is labeled immoral. This moral imbalance is a cultural narrative about purity, honour and gender roles that are deeply embedded (Tamale, 2011).

Marriage constitutes another important area in which gender double standards are manifested. Women are often required to be loyal and stand the test of marriage, whereas men may be allowed by their culture or religion, to engage in polygyny or extramarital affairs.

Research Problem Statement

Although there is growing recognition of gender equality and human rights, gender based double standards still seem to prevail in most African societies. Adichie (2014) reveals that cultural narratives continue to influence people's views on gender roles which in many cases continue to enforce inequality even in the modern context.

These ongoing dual standards create significant issues on the aspect of fairness, justice and social development. Although legal frameworks of most African countries support the idea of gender equality, cultural practices and social norms tend to upset these concepts. The issue is, therefore, in the conflict between the modern values that evolve and the traditional beliefs that remain still and continue to regulate different behavioral tendencies of men and women.

This paper aims at critically analyzing the way in which these double standards work as a social control mechanism and the influence of these double standards on gender relations and social development.

Value of the Research (Academic and Societal Relevance)

The research is both an academic and a social significance. Academically, it adds to the expanding research on gender studies, African cultural analysis and social control by specifically exploring the area of moral expectations an area that is usually under researched. According to Sylvia Tamale (2011), the comprehension of how the culture regulates the issues of sexuality and morality is crucial in addressing the larger problems of gender inequality.

Socially, the research can offer information that can be used to guide policy-making, advocacy, and educational programs, to ensure gender equity is promoted. Through the revelation of the nature of contradictions of cultural practices, the research promotes critical thinking and discussion within communities. As an illustration of how negative norms may be challenged, it is possible to mention how young women, in comparison with their male counterparts, are subject to stricter behavioral scrutiny.

Moreover, the research is topical as globalization and digital communication are becoming more and more disputable and negotiable, particularly in the context of the digital generation.

Scope and Limitations

This paper is devoted to the issue of gender double standards in the selected African communities, with a specific emphasis being placed on cultural and moral requirements of behavior, sexuality and social roles. Although examples can be made in other regions, there is a contextual focus on Northern Nigeria (in particular, Hausa society) because of its elaborate cultural framework and applicability to current scholarly discourse.

However, the study has some limitations. One, Africa is a highly diverse area, where culture in different regions may differ considerably, thus, the results may not be completely applicable to all the cultures in Africa. Second, the use of qualitative data and available literature can be a barrier to the possibility of capturing every dimension of lived experiences. Finally, cultural sensitivity can limit access to some information especially on issues related to sexuality and family issues.

Irrespective of these shortcomings, the study reveals valuable information regarding the persistence, and implications of gender double standards in African contexts.

Study Objectives

The overarching aim of the work is to critically analyze how gender double standards work in African societies, and how they shape moral expectations and become the mechanisms of social control. The targeted goals include the following:

- To explore the essence of gender-realized moral presuppositions within African cultures.
- To examine the way in which the practice of double standards is perpetuated using social institutions.
- To examine how culture and religion are strengthening gender inequalities.
- To measure the consequences of such double standards on social justice and gender relations.

Research Questions

The research questions that will guide the study include:

- What are the differences between the moral expectations that are imposed on men and women?
- How do African cultural norms perpetuate gender double standards?
- How do the family, religion and community institutions reinforce these norms?
- What are the social implications of the double standards of gender?

Literature Review

Notions of Gender and Double Standards

Gender is not only based on the biological differences but also on the roles, behaviors and expectations that society assigns to one or the other sex. Oyewumi (1997) is a critique of the universalization of Western gender categories and a challenge to the idea that gender in African contexts needs to be understood within specific cultural and historical contexts. On the same note, Butler (1990) theorizes gender as performative i.e. it is constantly produced and reproduced by means of social interactions and norms.

As a male dominance system, patriarchy is key in developing gender relations. Patriarchy is structured on the basis of social structures, i.e., the family, employment, and even cultural institutions, which are all supportive of male privilege. In this context, the term moral regulation can be described as the mechanisms through which societies impose norms and values on what is acceptable behaviour. These procedures tend to unfairly deal with women, especially in aspects like sexuality and the conduct of the populace.

The phenomenon of double standards comes out of this unequal use of norms. According to Goffman (1959), social expectations are usually handled by impression and stigma where deviations of the accepted norms lead to social sanctions. In most cultures, actions that are deemed as normal amongst men can be labeled as unacceptable among women and thus gender inequality is reinforced. This imbalance is the foundation of gendered double standards of moral expectations.

Gender Role in African societies

The traditional concept of gender roles in African societies is defined in clear lines of masculinity and femininity, which are often based on cultural values and economic systems. Men are usually accredited with authority, power, and provision whereas women are attributed with care giving, nurturing and household duties. However, by showing that pre-colonial African societies sometimes provided more fluid gender identities and roles, Amadiume (1987) challenges the rigidity of these roles.

In many modern African contexts, division of labor is gendered. A case in point is that women are typically the ones who do the household tasks, childcare and other informal economic activities, whereas men are the ones who hold the formal jobs and hold positions of authority. Such roles are supported in terms of socialization in the family and community. Such divisions as Maman (1996) suggests are not only functional in nature but are entrenched in the power relations between men and women as Amina Mama (1996) argues.

A practical example would be seen in the rural communities where girls are supposed to help with domestic chores since a tender age whereas the boys are expected to pursue education and interact with others. Such early distinction adds to the unequal opportunities and results in the long term.

Cultural and Religious Influences

Gender norms and expectations in African societies are greatly shaped by cultural beliefs and religious teachings. Community values, moral discipline and continuity of lineage are common themes in indigenous belief systems, and are often associated with how women behave. Mbiti (1969) suggests that African religions are highly involved in everyday life and social organization, influencing values and norms of society.

Religious institutions, including those of Islam and Christianity, also are significant in perpetuating gender norms. These religions have different interpretations but some have been interpreted to support male dominance and submission of females. In certain communities, for instance, male superiority within the family is reinforced by religious doctrines, as are women's limited roles in public life.

Tamale (2011) states that, in many cultures and religions, cultural and religious discourses are intertwined to legitimise gender inequalities, with a particular focus on sexuality. Women's bodies and behaviors are often more closely watched, and held to higher standards than men, based on the necessity of maintaining the family's honour and moral standards. These rationalizations are used to legitimise double standards and to normalize them.

Empirical Studies on Gender Inequality in Africa

Empirical evidence has been accumulating to show a range of different kinds of gender inequalities in African societies. Research has pointed to inequities in educational attainment, labor force participation, and access to opportunities and political engagement. Adichie (2014) for example highlights that society still has its expectations to curtail women's ambitions and enforce traditional roles, even in urban and modern settings.

Some have studied particular issues like early marriage, gender based violence, and inequity in education. These studies always reveal women's systematic disadvantages as a result of cultural and institutional practices. Most of the literature, however, tends to be directed toward structural inequalities, and not enough toward the moral systems that underlie them.

Maman argues for more detailed analyses, which seek to understand how everyday practices and moral expectations operate as devices of social control. Likewise, Tamale (2011) argues that the cultural control of sexuality and morality which is under-researched in many studies needs to be given more attention.

Gap in the Literature

Although ample research exists on gender inequalities in Africa, there is a significant lack of studies that specifically focus on gender double standards in the context of moral expectations and social control. Researchers have identified differences in different areas, but there have been less studies suggesting how such inequalities are explained, incorporated, and reproduced in cultural discourses and institutional practices.

The aim of this study is to address this gap by examining the moral aspects of gender relations and to examine how double standards function as subtle but potent instruments of social control. The study is an attempt to combine



elements of gender theory and cultural studies with empirical research in order to gain a more holistic insight into gender inequality in African societies.

Theoretical Framework

The use of Feminist theory and Social control theory in explaining the prevalence of gender double standards in Africa. These two models are best suited since they include both power relations and enforcement mechanisms.

Feminist Theory

The main analytical tool of the feminist theory is the understanding of gender inequality and double standards. Patriarchy is defined in a number of ways, but Sylvia Walby (1990) defines patriarchy as the system of social structures that give men advantages over women. This view gives some sense of the differential expectation on women's sexuality, marriage, and behavior, which is more stringent than that of men.

Maman suggests that this male dominance and the normalisation of unequal standards is reinforced through cultural and institutional practices in the African context. For instance, a man can have several relationships as it is socially acceptable, whereas a woman cannot have several relationships as it is socially unacceptable. The feminist Theory therefore emphasizes the role of the unequal power relations as the root of double standards.

Social Control Theory

Social Control Theory is the theory that provides the explanation to the double standards which are maintained by the society through norms, values and institutions. Hirschi (1969) argues that the social institutions, including family, religion, and community control individual behavior and keep them in line.

In Africa such institutions tend to be more restrictive of women than men. For example, family members might be more vigilant about observing daughters than sons, and community members might resort to gossip or stigma to make sure "acceptable" behavior is followed by daughters. Such control can be insidious and effective, exerting itself in a way that conforms to social expectations, not to formal punishment, as Foucault (1977) says.

Conclusion of Framework

Feminist Theory and Social Control Theory are both helpful in explaining the phenomenon together;

Feminist Theory has an explanation for why there are double standards (patriarchal power).

Social Control Theory (norms and enforcement).

Methodology

Research Design

This research adopts a qualitative research design, suitable for the study to explore the social meaning, cultural norms, and lived experiences around gender double standards. Qualitative methods enable the examination of people's meaning-making and moral negotiations in their everyday worlds in depth. In qualitative research, the study of a complex social phenomenon in the natural context is well-suited to qualitative research methods, as Creswell (2014) points out. Limited components of a mixed-method approach may also be included as needed, particularly to support the qualitative findings with simple descriptive statistics.

Study Area

The study was conducted in the Hausa-speaking communities of Kano, Zaria, and Sokoto in Northern Nigeria. These locations were purposively selected because they are among the most prominent centers of Hausa culture, religion, and traditional institutions. The communities are characterized by deeply rooted cultural and religious values that significantly influence gender roles, family relations, and moral expectations. The choice of these study areas provides an appropriate context for examining gender double standards, as social norms regarding masculinity, femininity, and morality are clearly defined and widely practiced.

Population and Sampling

The target population comprised adult men and women, community leaders, religious leaders, traditional title holders, youth, and other knowledgeable members of the selected communities in Kano, Zaria, and Sokoto. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of individuals with relevant

knowledge and experience concerning gender norms, cultural practices, and moral expectations within Hausa society.

In addition, snowball sampling was employed to identify further participants, particularly when exploring sensitive issues such as sexuality, marriage, and moral regulation. The sample size was determined through the principle of data saturation, whereby data collection continued until no new themes or significant information emerged from the participants.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through multiple qualitative methods:

In-depth Interviews: Individual interviews were conducted with selected participants in Kano, Zaria, and Sokoto to obtain detailed accounts of their experiences and perceptions regarding gender expectations and double standards.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): Focus group discussions were organised to facilitate interaction among participants and generate collective views on gender norms and social control mechanisms.

Participant Observation: The researcher observed social interactions, cultural practices, and community activities within the selected communities to gain a deeper understanding of gender relations in their natural setting.

Document Analysis: Relevant documents, including religious texts, cultural narratives, media reports, and scholarly publications, were analysed to identify dominant discourses on gender and morality.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved the transcription of interviews and discussions, coding of responses, identification of recurring themes, and interpretation of emerging patterns. Thematic analysis enabled the researcher to systematically examine how gender double standards are expressed, justified, and maintained within the selected Hausa communities.

Where necessary, content analysis was also employed to examine written and visual materials in order to identify recurring representations of gender roles, morality, and social control.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the study. Participants were adequately informed about the objectives of the research, and their voluntary informed consent was obtained before data collection commenced. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed by ensuring that participants' identities were not disclosed in any part of the study.

Given the sensitivity of issues relating to gender relations, sexuality, and morality, special care was taken to respect local cultural and religious values in Kano, Zaria, and Sokoto. Participants were assured that their responses would be used solely for academic purposes and that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. Consistent with the ethical guidelines outlined by Sieber (1992), the rights, dignity, safety, and well-being of all participants were protected throughout the research process.

This version aligns the study area, population, sampling, data collection, and ethics around the same specific locations (Kano, Zaria, and Sokoto), which addresses the reviewer's concern about clearly defining the study area.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study are presented thematically. The developed themes from analyzing the transcripts of the interviews, the focus group discussions and the observation notes. Discussion of findings would combine would offer the findings from this study, sociopsychological perspective, and reflections from the reviewed literature on gender double standards from African societies.

Moral Expectations and Gender Bias

The interviews and focus group discussions indicated absolute variance in moral expectations regarding the various aspects of sexuality, behavioral tendencies, and the social responsibility domain. Most women and girls are expected to maintain virtues of modesty, chastity, and obedience. However, males are socially and sexually free to express themselves more openly.

An example of this, in some cultures, girls are custodian of their 'honor' and, therefore, unmarried, girls are scrutinized, and their movements are controlled, conversely, boys are not. Control of sexuality of African women



and girls is, and has always been, the soul and the rationality of most of African morality, in particular the relationship between families and the family lineage.

Lastly, in terms of social responsibility, women and girls have to assume a greater burden of the domestic responsibility of taking care of children and running the family home, in spite of their participation in other activities outside the home, especially economic activities. On the other hand, men and boys are mostly evaluated and judged based on their economic production. This aberration reinforces gender bias.

Cultural Justifications of Gender Double Standards

The study found that many participants justified gender double standards by appealing to cultural traditions and long-established social norms. Specifically, participants defended practices such as stricter moral expectations for women, male dominance in household decision-making, greater restrictions on women's mobility and behavior, and the unequal treatment of men and women in matters of sexuality and marriage. According to many respondents, these practices are integral parts of Hausa culture and are necessary for maintaining social order, family honor, and moral discipline.

Many participants further argued that women are expected to uphold family dignity through modesty, obedience, and sexual restraint, whereas men are often granted greater social freedom. These unequal expectations were frequently justified as customary practices passed down from previous generations. As a result, gender inequalities were often perceived not as discrimination but as legitimate cultural values deeply embedded in the social fabric of the community.

As Oy  w  m   expressed in 1997, a lot of gender hierarchy is often termed as "natural," and critically, a lot of it is socially constructed and is historically produced. However, many of these constructions are, however, given as socially ascribed functions, roles and are not critiqued, and mostly are treated as fixed.

For instance, reinforcing male dominance in decision making is often framed as symbolic of a culture, as is female submissiveness in marriage. Normative reasoning to justify preserving the greater family honor is rather a prism through which stricter codes of conduct are framed and culturally communicated.

The functions that such narratives play are to justify the inequities and frame why it becomes impossible to create a more equitable society is greater than the inequities.

Effects on Women and Society

The continued imposition of gender norms on society invariably creates several inequities. For women, it invariably imposes socio, political, and economic barriers that prevents them from being fully integrated into the public sphere as equals to men. It creates a culture where they are not autonomous and economically dependent.

This not only creates inequities and a high level of intergenerational dependency, but it creates a statistically high level of discontent and frustration which is caused by the high level of social control and rigid imposition of gender norms, and last but not least, it assumes a level of actress which even the most dysfunctional women simply cannot divest from.

Adichie observed in 2014 that at an advanced level, unequal imposition of gender norms breaks the culture of a society because it socially economically and politically disintegrates a society by creating dependency.

The high level of rigidity and interdependency are bound to create a high level of discontent which is greater than the inequities and critically greater than the psychologically construct named socially imposed roles.

Also, children will learn and replicate the same behaviors, which maintain a systemic structure of inequality and double standards.

Emerging Changes and Resistance

What the report describes as 'gender double standards' still shows some variance and resistance to change. Education, particularly among women, has challenged some of the restrictive beliefs demanding the social order to be more equitable.

Urbanization and exposure to new cultures also shift perspective, especially among the youth. Digital communication and social media erode the boundaries of numerous cultural beliefs and customs, especially in regards to gender.



Tamale (2011), insists that African societies are not static. They are in constant transition and individuals are shifting the social order from the traditional to the more modern. The incremental change and resistance is largely challenged by the social conservative segment of the population.

This change provides a tendency to transform some behavioral gender relations and, in the process, erode double standards and promote gender equality in the long term.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to shed some light on gender double standards across African societies regarding moral expectations and social control. What was evident is that gendered moral expectations have found their way and deeply rooted themselves in both cultural and social systems. Unlike men, women are faced by more moral expectations in terms of their sexuality, behavior, and the degree of their social responsibility.

Tamale (2011) states that regulating women's sexuality is extremely important in most of the moral systems of Africa, and this upholds the double standards of men and women. What was evident in this study is that the family, religion, and community as institutions sustain the moral and social inequalities of both men and women through their informal and formal systems of punishment.

The family, community, and religion as supportive systems will maintain unequal double standards where no social change will occur. Even though African societies have these unequal gender systems, they are still socially constructed (as supported by Oyěwùmí, 1997) and can be changed.

The most relevant findings of this study are that double gender standards uphold social inequalities and restrict women's rights and social progress. Where no change is being carried out, social, economic, and intellectual progress will be slow (Adichie, 2014). It is hopeful that even with the slow emergence of change through both education and the process of globalization, these rigid social systems will be transformed.

Recommendations

As derived from the findings, the following are recommended: Policy reform that enhances gender equity

- Governments and institutions should put in place and enforce policies that protect the rights of women and promote gender equity. These policies should ensure that laws move beyond legal equality and address cultural practices that promote discrimination. As acknowledged by Maman, (1996), the reform of institutions is crucial for dismantling the housed systems of discrimination. Public awareness and education

- Education is a means of reforming culture and actively combating discrimination. As an example, the school curriculum, as well as community education, should address racism and reform the moral of our society.

- Reform of cultural practices that promote discrimination

Community leaders, as well as cultural leaders, should be fairly consulted in the reform and representation of customs. In particular, practices that, to a large extent, control the mobility and behavior of women within the community should be reformulated.

- The power of the media and technology

Digital space and the media are tools of social change to the extent that they empower and legitimize voices that oppose discrimination. Social media campaigns have been the most unrelenting campaigns that address the discrimination of women. As stated by Adichie (2014), social change and the reform of moral standards is a concern of storytelling.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study makes a distinct mark in scholarship in a few key ways:

- Recognizing the moral underpinnings of gender inequality

Research on gender inequality is often framed within the economic or political dimensions. This study argues that moral expectations and everyday practices are crucial to sustaining gender inequality. The study conceptualizes moral double standards as both structural and profoundly cultural.

- Completing the intersection of cultural studies and social control theory



The research demystifies the complex intersection of the construction of gendered social control through the lens of feminist theory and social control theory. To borrow from Walby (1990), the study posits that one cannot separate the analysis of gender from structure and practice.

- Providing insights on the African context

The research is African-centered and locates its analysis in the concrete African setting. The study is grounded in the local context. The study is specific to the Hausa, and demonstrates how gender relations are affected by the intersection of a particular social custom and religion, something that is often overlooked in studies that are broad and global in focus.

This research contributes to the growing scholarship on gender inequalities, by elucidating how double standards act as a means of social control and moral regulation, and also elucidating potential areas of reform.

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