

RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL ISSUES IN GENDER EQUITY: IMPLICATION FOR SCIENCE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Education and Culture of any country determine its developmental rate. Culture affects the way women participate in social, physical and psychologically oriented functions. This paper reviews the status of women in science and technology education, discusses the religious and cultural impediments on women in science and technological education, pointing out the effect this cultural dogma has on the scientific and technological growth of women in particular and the country at large.

The author views the contentious stereotype of women psychic under-development as unfounded as facts on ground revealed that a lot of women have excelled in different sciences and technology oriented disciplines and have displayed such skills at different national and international fora. It is also the view of this paper that for women to further appreciate the need to embrace science and technology education effort should be made to debunk the culturally indeed stereotypes that science and technology education is best reserved for the males.

Further recommendations on this line were made.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of science education cannot be over emphasized. For any nation to develop technologically there must be massive education of the populace in science and technological education irrespective of race or sex. In Nigeria, the story is different it has been noted that women are under represented in science (Nsofor 2000) this implies that Nigeria in her journey towards development still have a long way to go. A nation cannot be dreaming of being developed when most of her women population are locked up, marginalized or discriminated against. The qualities of science training received during pre-school years affect how well citizens effectively cope with the complex world.

However, making science education available and affordable to all persons irrespective of sex becomes obvious, women, although constitute about 50 percent of Nigeria population, their levels of participation in science are not proportionate to their size (Okafor 2001)

It is painful that majority of Nigerian women are scientifically illiterate and cannot be directed positively in the quest for self-reliance and actualization.

This paper tries to outline these religious and cultural issues that work against gender equity in science learning and suggest a way forward.

GENDER: According to Okeke (2004) the word gender was first used by Anne Oakley and associates in the 70^s to describe those characteristic behaviours and roles that we acquire through socialization. Gender is dynamic and culturally determined.

EQUITY

Equity is the provision of equal opportunities to citizens irrespective of gender, religion, social class and ethnic affiliation (NPC 1981). Equity according to Okafor (2001) is therefore the provision of equal opportunities and treatment for men and women in all spheres of life, including Education. Condition for achieving equity in science must be created and sustained as sure ways of achieving meaningful development in science education.

RELIGIOUS ISSUES IN GENDER EQUITY

Both Christians and Islamic dogma encourage women to be taught more in areas

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that will make them good mothers and wives. The purdah system practiced in Islamic religion was the extreme case of shielding women from science education as well as western civilization. In science class, girls were inhibited from working with boys by religious beliefs (Ansah 1992). According to Okafor (2001) girls were denied the opportunity of gaining knowledge and skill like boys who are favoured traditionally to study science.

Gender issues in Gender Equity: these are gender roles, clusters of socially defined expectations that people of one gender are expected to fulfill. Gender roles are defined by culture and expectations are created for a gender to fulfill. Example of the ways culture prescribes roles to genders are.

1. MALES

- (a) Determines when to have sexual relations
- (b) Dominates certain professional fields like engineering, Security, Piloting, Politics etc.
- (c) The bread winner of the family
- (d) Disciplinarian
- (e) Dominant Partner in a relationship

2. FEMALES

- (a) Dominate Professional fields such as Nursing, Teaching Home Economics, Fashion Designing, Hair Dressing etc.
- (b) Care taker of Children
- (c) Responsible for general household chores such as sweeping, washing, cooking, shopping etc.
- (d) Must make herself physically attractive.
- (e) Wait for male to initiate relationship and sexual advances (AHI2003) There are also certain gender roles that are classified as stereotype, he/she is often forced by their culture to either accept them or be ostracized by the community. Women are stereotype as being more prone to tears, less rational having moods, being gentle, talking more, wanting to take care of children, being responsible for domestic chores. Men on the other hand are stereotyped as being uncaring, more rational, stable, strong, brave and rough, staying away from home more and being more interested in sport.

There are also cultural differences and attitudes towards male and females which influences their behavior

These are:-

1. MALE

- a. In some families males are given more privileges than their female counterparts. Males are often given education, important jobs, property through inheritance, etc.
- b. Some professions are perceived as exclusive careers for males which females are not allowed to enter.
- c. Males can perform manual jobs while females take care of domestic duties
- d. Males are often the heads of the family which means that they dictate the rules.

FEMALES

- a. Females often have responsibility of raising the children
- b. Females are often designated the cooks in the family
- c. Females are not supposed to propose marriage and in some cultures, have no say in who they marry.
- d. Females are to be found in professions that are not physically demanding

HARMFUL EFFECTS OF GENDER STEREOTYPING

The following are considered the harmful effects of gender stereotyping

1. FEMALE

- a. Are less likely than males to take physical risks
- b. Worry more about their appearance and may be more at risk of developing eating disorder
- c. Experience a drop in self esteem and more likely to be depressed
- d. Are more likely than males to contemplate suicide
- e. Are more likely to abandon educational aspirations
- f. Are less likely to pursue advanced education
- g. Are less likely to seek a job with high pay
- h. Are less assertive than males
- i. Are more often victims of physical and sexual abuse

2. MALES

- a. Males on the other hand are likely to take physical risks and be harmed

- b. Are more likely to be heavy users of alcohol and illicit drugs
- c. Engage more in fighting and serious criminal offences
- d. are less concerned about their health and getting check ups
- f. have fewer close friends

THE IMPORTANCE OF GENDER EQUALITY

The following reason are why we need to remove any stereotypes that are related to gender and find ways to promote equality.

1. Both males and females are human, with feelings and abilities
2. To enhance partnership in relationship without exploitation
3. To ensure mutual understanding and respect for both genders
4. Both males and females have equal values
5. To promote peace, justice and equity
6. To give equal opportunities for self development, self-realization and self-actualization
7. To ensure gender balance in education and development
8. To ensure balance development of the children who will see both gender treated with respect.
9. It is a fundamental human right law. Both male and female have rights of
 - a. freedom of speech
 - b. Freedom of choice or opinion
 - c. Freedom of movement
 - d. Freedom of expression etc. (Atli, 2003)

CONCLUSION

Gender identity is socially derived it is formed through socialization and not biology. It is determined by cultural beliefs about what it means to be a man or a woman in each society. It changes overtime, reflecting social realities in a given community. There are many rules governing the behaviour of male and females that have nothing to do with the way our bodies are built. These rules are taught to us continuously from birth. The resulting behaviours become defining features of what it means to be a male or female. Changes in gender roles do occur because of the influence of religion, family structure, politics, economic conditions, education, laws and traditions. Gender roles are more drastically altered by individual personal convictions. Since gender roles are culturally

determined, there is need to help boys and girls sort out how gender role expectation affect their behaviours, in relationships, leisure activities and careers. It is common for women in many cultures to be assigned gender roles that disregard their desires, needs and feelings.

This is what John and Catherine (2003) referred to as sexism. Sexism is the conscious or unconscious assumption that members of one sex are superior to the other sex by virtue of their biology. Sexism is a reflection of confusion of biology and culture.

IMPLICATION FOR SCIENCE EDUCATION

From the above, it is certain that parental attitudes towards males and females children, the immediate environment and the society constitute a great barrier to women participation in science in Nigeria. The Nigerian girl seems to respond to parental, societal and cultural influence in her choice of career. This state of affairs needs immediate attention because poor involvement of female in science and technology implies underutilization of adequate manpower for economic and technological development. After all, study has shown that there is no difference on the level of intelligence between males and females (Wokocha, 2007) there are several Nigerian female who have excelled in the fields of science and technology. Our girls need to emulate such roles models instead of listening to the negative cultural beliefs

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