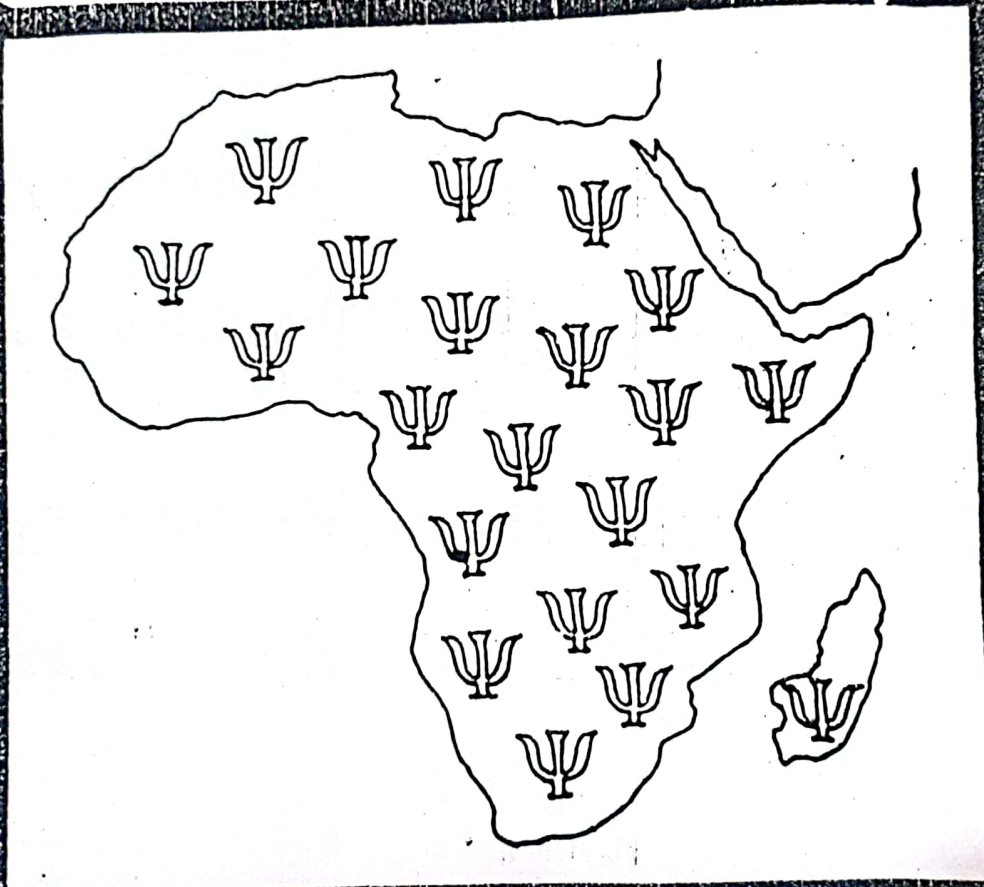


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ABSTRACT

Gender role stereotypes are an important aspect of any societal structure. In Africa, the traditional stereotypes still hold. However, in developed nations of the world, a tenacious hold on to traditional and negative gender stereotypes are constantly being queried. This could account partly to why such stereotypes are in a state of flux.

The concept of gender behavioural flexibility has become a significant focus of research by psychologists of varied learnings; social, educational, cognitive and so on. This paper examines the issue of traditional gender stereotypes and present the argument that it is encouraged by those who do as it serves as a vehicle for ego-justification. The theory of gender behavioural flexibility puts forward as an alternative to the traditional stereotypes and it proposes that it is a needed tool to be embraced by the agencies of socialization if the needed nations development in all spheres is to be in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Human beings are born with certain traits and personality characteristics that are distinct to them. Though many personality characteristics can be said to be biological, it is an undisputable fact that in many respects, most are socially learned and acquired. Gender is no doubt one of the most important indices of human

life and the dichotomy thereof is crucial to human experiences in every culture and society. Eckes (1994) opined that all known cultures specify that female-male is a fundamental distinction and therefore associate men and women with different sets of behavioural expectations.

Directions of sex differences in behaviour and attitudes are pan-cultural, and the extent and patterning differs between cultures, as a result of differences in experiences especially within the family setting. The family affects further include cultural norms and stereotypes and behavioural expectations which could be changed or modified by cultural dictates or circumstances at the individual levels. Norms and stereotypes of cultures can no doubt be continually maintained, especially so for the class with the upper-hand, but it could also be continually changed and created or modified by the given agency of participants in a given society: (Hinde, 1984; Hinde, 1987; Turner, 1991; and Archer, 1992).

Gender stereotyping underlies the cognition of most males and females and evidences for such abound in research. These include Six & Eckes (1991). In consonance with such theoretization, Sidanius, Pratto and Rabinowitz, (1993) delved into the social dominance orientation of people and the scale for response included reactions to such statements as:

- (i) Some people are just more worthy than others.
- (ii) Some people are just more deserving than others.
- (iii) Some people are just inferior to others.
- (iv) Too much effort at equality hurts a society.

The findings of their research proved a positive and statistically significant connection between gender and social dominance orientation, while males were found to be significantly higher in social dominance than females.

The stereotypical categorization and differentiation in behaviour and in education known in other parts of the world is entrenched in the African belief system and thus in the psyche of

most Africans. Stereotypic practices attaching to ascribed professions. Thus, home-making is a woman's affair and a man cannot afford to be emotionally expressive. Nursing is perceived as a feminine affair while few women pick the courage to go into technical profession.

It is not erroneous to say that in Nigeria as a case in study, professions with a good number of women is the teaching profession but only at the lower cadre of the profession. Where few women are available at the higher echelons of the profession, they are to be found most often than that in "appropriate" fields. Take statistics in Table 1 as a case in study.

Table 1

Teaching Staff at the College of Agriculture, Yandev, Nigeria, 1986 - 1987

SN	Department	Male	Female	Total
1.	Crop Production	4	-	4
2.	Home Economics	-	5	5
3.	Agric Extension	3	-	3
4.	Livestock Production	2	-	2
5.	Fisheries Management	4	-	4
6.	Agric Mechanization	3	-	3
7.	Basic Science	6	1	7
		22	6	28

SOURCE: Digest of statistics on Technical education in Nigeria. Published by national board for technical education. P. 232.

It is curious that in almost all the departments of the College of Agriculture, Yandev, apart from the home-economics department, only one other female existed in the Basic Science department for the session 1986-1987. Further, it is significant that apart from the department of Basic Science where a female

Home-Economics with no single male available on the teaching roll. A further survey of female-male roll of department in some of the nation's institutions of monotechnics would suffice to give a lopsided perspective to professions in view of entrenched gender orientations. The statistics available is as shown in Table 2.

The observed trend from Table 2 is an insignificant participation of women in the teaching roll of the institutions. It cannot be an accident of occurrence that the situation observed has come to be. The basis for gender differentiation in professions begins in early childhood through adolescence and rest its oars at adulthood, more so, through the socialization process. At adulthood, individuals build on the foundation of career preferences, career choice and basic qualifications worked for and acquired.

Psychologists generally agree that the human mind at birth is a tabular - rasa; a blank slate; and what is inscribed by the outer world and one's environment moulds the personality of the child. Most people may therefore find it difficult to shed off what has been ingrained in the psyche. This accounts for the potency power in the socialization experiences of most females in Africa.

As humans, we derive many of our self-conceptions and positive feelings of self by referring to other humans (Condry, 1984; Sidanius, Pratto and Rabinowitz, 1994). It follows that negative feelings of self are acquirable by a reference to others. Females could be more prone to this tendency because of ingrained psycho-contaminations through different mechanisms in the social interaction process. A faulty self concept may be acquired by incessant comparison of self as female to the male. The end result exemplifies itself in feelings of inferiority complex, low self esteem and self worth. Lack of internal fulfilment and self actualization, lack of will power to excel, sometimes even in the ascribed rôle of home making and a tendency to dependency in social interactions, all of which does not augur well to female psychological disposition nor to the maximization of their needed potentials for the nations development.

School - Federal Freshwater Fisheries School, New Nigeria

S/N	Department	Male	Female	Total
1.	Fisheries Management	2	-	2
2.	Aquatic Ecology	2	-	2
3.	Aqua culture	3	1	4
4.	Basic Science	2	-	2
5.	Fish processing technology	2	1	3
6.	Mathematics / Statistics	2	-	2
7.	Craft Technology	1	-	1
8.	Practical fishing	2	-	2
9.	Gear Technology	2	-	2
10.	Boat engine maintenance	1	-	1

School - Metallurgical Training Institute, Onitsha

S/N	Department	Male	Female	Total
1.	Maintenance mechanical	15	1	16
2.	Maintenance electrical	8	-	8
3.	Structural fitting and construction	11	-	11
4.	Heavy mobile equipment and central	6	-	6
5.	General Education	5	-	5
6.	Instrumentation and control	5	-	5

SOURCE:— Digest of statistics on Technical Education in Nigeria. Published by national Board for Technical Education. P. 227 / 263.

Gender - Behavioural Flexibility - A Needed Approach to the Socialization of African Females

The theory of gender behavioural flexibility assumes that most gender assigned roles and behavioural expectations are socially determined. That which is biological by nature may be exclusive to a given sex. That which is socially determined can therefore be cross-gender reascribed. This could be exemplified by emotionally expressive men, men nurses and men cooks.

Gender behaviourally flexible individuals do not organise materials basically on the cue of gender, and would most times, not be gender constant in cognitive organization. Such individuals could be said to be gender blind.

Different terminologies have been used to describe the cognitive process of gender blindness. Such terminologies include psychological androgyny and gender aschematicism. Effort have also been made to delve into the relationship of behavioural flexibility and social competence in interactions. (Bem, 1983; Mills, 1983; Lenny, 1991). They have demonstrated the need for gender behavioural flexibility among people. Advantages accrued include having positive self evaluation, stronger attributions for success, greater levels of inner happiness and self assurance. The observed tendencies could be because of the adaptive and adjustive mechanisms that gender behavioural flexibility equips individuals. While for women, it allows for maintenance between self achievement and family orientation among others, for men, it does not constrict or pigeon-hole them to certain emotional expressiveness. Gender behaviourally flexible individuals are believed to be more independent than others, and to be attractive to the opposite sex. They could also enjoy life better than others because of greater adjustive mechanisms that they have. Thus, females are found to have lower level of fear of success which may retard their progress as compared to their counterparts, and have greater level of mental hygiene (Lenny, 1991).

... hundred and forty-two women in

reported the behaviourally flexible women as having higher levels of competence and mastery and were pursuing non-traditional careers implying a free choice of career among the women. Rogers (1984) in a similar vein reported that behaviourally flexible women tended to be more achievement oriented exhibiting no fear of success tendency.

There have been arguments that gender stereotypes reflect and reproduce the division of social roles (Hoffman and Hurst, 1990). This could explain the latent power inherent in stereotypes and why those who should be informed pretend not to be and might even resist its breakdown. Thus Benaji and Greenward (1994) reported cases where subjects still unconsciously misattribute fame to males more often than to females just as was reported in an earlier study by Benaji, Harden and Rothman (1993).

It is apparent that once a set of event produces certain social arrangements, either by historical accident or human intention, the resulting arrangement tend to be explained and justified simply because they exist, so much so that stereotypes become psychological vehicle for system justification (Jost and Benaji, 1994). Spears and Manstead (1989) opined that through experiments, people have tended to use stereotypes to positively differentiate themselves from others. Evidences also abound that people are motivated to hold positive stereotypes of the in-group and negative stereotypes of the out-group, possibly for no other reason than ego-justification. Further, stereotypes serves to justify the exploitation of certain groups over others and they explain the poverty or powerlessness of some groups and the success of others in ways that make these differences seem legitimate and even natural. (Bar-Tal, 1989; Maass and Schaller, 1991; Mullen, Brown and Smith 1992; Jost and Benaji, 1994). Hoffman and Hurst (1990) for example opined that there is no justification for why women are grouped as nurturant, except for the fact that they are child bearers which leads to their being perceived as nurturant while men are autonomous.

Stereotypic expectations and behaviours perpetuated itself

and the process of self perpetuation becomes domineering when people who are stereotyped tend to choose social roles for themselves that are consistent with the stereotypic expectations others have of them and to the extent that stigmatised groups can be made to believe in their own inferiority, they may be prevented from achieving positive outcomes (Geis, 1993; Steels, 1992). While those who hold on tenaciously to stereotypes are usually those the stereotypes serve and they act so for ego justification, that seeks to protect the position, status or behaviours of the individuals involved. Stereotyping is thus employed for exploitative purposes and as a personal defense or rationalization of exploitation (Hogg and Abrams, 1988, Jost and Benaji, 1994). This description aptly describes the African situation. But man being a dynamic being with full potentials to change his thought process and behavioural expectations, can affect desired change as regards gender behavioural expectations. This seem desirable to make room for the tapping of female potentials, as a breakdown of positively traditional stereotypes would enhance the thinking, psychological make-up and behavioural disposition of females in Africa in varied ways.

Gender Behavioural Flexibility and Its Implication for Africa

It has been observed by some schools of thought that it would not be functional for an individual to ignore differences within each sex category (Ashmore, Del Boca and Wohler, 1986). This may be so especially differences due to biological make-up. This as it may, the scientific record on questions of sex differences based on biology and the differences put forward as evidences of the result of biology is shaky at best, and despite evidences of considerable overlap and situational specificity of gender related behaviours, beliefs in sex differences are still held tenaciously by many (Deaux and Kite, 1987), with no challenging argument put forward as to why the status quo must be. The fact remains that most gender functions are social by nature and could be modified

positively for both sexes. The socialization process is an important aspect as the vehicle of change, especially as it related to how it acts on people at the psychological and at the behavioural levels.

It is desirable for Africans to adopt a behavioural pattern that would accommodate gender flexibility among the sexes, to make room for support-system for both sexes, and more so, for the females, and to equally make for development not only in the different professions but also in the nation-politics.

In the developed nations of the world, the people's resources, either male or female, are pooled for developmental purposes. This is possible because a measure of gender behavioural flexibility has been attained. For educational, scientific and technological advancement of Africa, the continents brainpower and human power, including the females needs to be pooled together, especially as females constitute a substantial part of the nation's population. No nation has ever ignored its females in developmental tasks, that has not done so to her own peril. A deviation from the traditional stereotypes on gender issues to one that accommodates behavioural flexibility would aid in the maximization of the females potentials. Such a change would enhance the lives of both males and females in the nations. It would aid females to embrace achievement at varied levels without fear of success. And, they would bring, as specified earlier.

By applying our gains of knowledge on gender behavioural flexibility among the sexes, the need for eradication of erroneous and constricting stereotypes has become a necessity in Africa. Moreso when it is recognised that most behavioural characteristics are nothing but human characteristics that are amenable to change and modifications.

CONCLUSION

For the advancement and the development of Africa in all spheres, it is necessary that females are given the required

Socialization that would make room for their maximum input and for this input to be sustainable, their male counterpart needs to give the required support-system that aids in every ramification, that would not constrict either sexes psychologically. This socialization process would entail behavioural flexibility from both sexes, when this is ingrained in the African psyche, then, Africa would have taken a giant stride forward.

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