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## SECTION I

### **Frameworks for Understanding Women's Concerns and Gender Issues – Pathways to Reordering Gender Relationships**

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# 1

## The Meaning of Gender<sup>1</sup>

### Outline

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- Introduction: Sayings and Titles to Ponder
  - What is Sex and What is Gender
  - Sex and Gender: Two Key Questions and Arguments (Variabilities in the Conception and Practice of Gender)
  - Gender Connotes Hierarchy
  - Gender and Social Injustice
  - The Link to Medicine
- 

### Introduction: Sayings and Titles to Ponder

- *Obinrin bii okunrin!* (A woman who acts like a man, or a woman who is like a man!).
- “*Male daughters, female husbands*” (Amadiume, 1987).
- “One is not born, but rather becomes, woman” (Simone de Beauvoir, 1949).

### What is Sex and What is Gender

- Sex refers to the biological differences between men and women, or male and female, which are universal and do not change.
- Jackson and Scott (2003) wrote that Oakley (1972), who borrowed from Stoller (1968) “defined sex as the anatomical and physiological characteristics which signify biological maleness and femaleness, and gender as socially constructed masculinity and femininity” (p. 9).
- Gender means those roles, responsibilities, and expectations that are *ascribed* to girls and

women, and boys and men in specific socio-historical contexts.

- Gender refers to social attributes that are learned or acquired during socialization as a member of a given community. Because these attributes are learned behaviours, they can, and they may change over time.
- Gender therefore refers to the socially given attributes, roles, activities, responsibilities and needs connected to being men (masculinity) and being women (femininity) in a given society, at a given time, and as a member of a specific community within that society (UNDP, 2001).
- According to Jackson and Scott (2003), Simone de Beauvoir’s classic *The second sex* (1949) laid the foundation for feminist analysis of gender when she said, “one is not born, but rather becomes, woman.” Beauvoir thus distinguished the social character of womanhood from biological femaleness.

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<sup>1</sup> I facilitated this session at the 5-day short course organized by the University of Medical Sciences (UNIMED), Ondo, in collaboration with the Centre of Excellence in Reproductive Health Innovation (CERHI) on 12th March 2018. The theme of the 5-day course was Understanding gender, rights, cultural and ethical issues – Implications for reproductive health and development.

#### 4 Women, Gender Relations and Social Justice: Teaching, Learning and Identity Politics

- Stoller, made the point that masculinity and femininity are products not of biology but of the social, cultural and psychological attributes acquired through the process of becoming a man or a woman in a particular society at a particular time.
- If we try to synthesize the meaning of sex and gender, we will arrive at Butler's (1990) position that, "there is a natural or biological female who is subsequently transformed into a socially subordinate 'woman', with the consequence that 'sex' is to nature or 'the raw', as gender is to culture or 'the cooked'" (p. 37).
- Oloruntimehin (1998) indicated that the family, religion, schools and the mass media teach children and adults to learn and accept their expected and 'proper' roles in society. Men are taught to be dynamic, strong, domineering, authoritarian, powerful, competitive, etc., while women are taught to be gentle, submissive, dependent, docile, weak, helpless, etc. Whenever men and women and children behave contrary to their expected roles, they are treated as deviants, and punished.

#### **Sex and Gender: Two Key Questions and Arguments**

- The questions which often arise from a discussion of sex and gender, which Stanley (2003) captures aptly are:
  1. Does 'sex' (our 'maleness' or 'femaleness', the biological basis of sex differentiation) cause 'gender' (the culturally ascribed notions of 'femininity' and 'masculinity')?
  2. Is gender a social construction and to what extent is it a social construction?
- Responses to these questions pitch two key arguments.

**The first argument** is biological determinism/ biological essentialism (the biology is destiny argument); this is the argument that the social roles and psychological attributes of females and males in relation to a whole range of behaviours and personality traits are biologically determined.

- It would appear that the causal relationship that essentialists wish to establish between sex and gender is actually 'habitus', a term popularized by Pierre Bourdieu.
- Habitus is the dominant mode of conduct, taste, and feeling among members of particular groups, even if they are unconscious of the fact that they share these traits with members of their group. The English expression of "Habitus" is *second nature*, which means, *an acquired tendency that has become instinctive* (Mennel, 1994).

**The second argument**, which is social constructionism, is that whatever nature gives is mediated by society – that society forms, builds, moulds, delineates, interprets and explains. Therefore, the character traits, behaviours and roles of females and males are not transcontextual and transhistorical.

- Stanley (2003), like Amadiume (1987), Weitzman (1975) and Mead (1935) provided evidence showing variations in gender roles and psychological traits between cultures and within a culture over time.
- The concepts of sex and gender therefore enable us to think of masculinity and femininity as historically and culturally variable rather than fixed by nature.

#### **Examples of Variabilities in the Conception and Practice of Gender, Pre-Colonialism/Pre-Modernity**

- Let us take examples from Ifi Amadiume's study of Nnobi, currently in Idemili South Local Government of Anambra State, Nigeria. Amadiume described a flexible gender system and the flexibility of Igbo gender construction during the pre-colonial period (pre-1900).
- If a wealthy man has no son who will take over his large farm and *obi* and has no close relatives, he could recall his daughter from her marital home, so she would take residence in his home as a male. She would then have the status of a son and would be able to inherit his property. It is expected that a father

would invite members of his patrilineage and announce his decision. Amadiume referred to such women as “male daughters.”

- In addition, first daughters, barren women, rich widows, wives of rich men and successful female farmers and traders could marry ‘wives’. Amadiume referred to the women as “female husbands.”
- In Yorubaland, pre-colonialism, there were female *obas*, such that the throne and decision-making were not the exclusive preserve of men.
- Weitzman (1975) and Stanley (2003) recorded that Margaret Mead’s study of three New Guinea tribes provides evidence of cross-cultural variation in assigned sex roles and personality traits. Mead found that the Arapesh regarded both men and women as cooperative, unaggressive and responsive to the needs of others; characteristics normally labelled as feminine or maternal. Among the Mundugumor, she found both men and women to be aggressive, unresponsive and individualistic; traits usually regarded as masculine traits.
- Neither the Arapesh nor the Mundugumor ascribed contrasting personality characteristics to men and women.
- In the third society that Mead studied, the Tchambuli, there was a reversal of the typical sex roles found in Western cultures. The Tchambuli women were dominant, impersonal and managing, while the men were emotionally dependent and less responsible than women.
- From the assumption that women are ‘naturally’ weaker and less aggressive than men, the belief was held that women are not fit for war. However, in pre-colonial societies such as Dahomey, women were great warriors. Another example was Queen Amina of Zazzau (<http://www.africanfeministforum.com/queen-amina-of-zaria-nigeria/>). Even in post-colonial societies around the World, women have actively engaged in warfare.

- As Weitzman (1975) observed, “physical strength is almost irrelevant in modern society. Certainly, an industrial society does not give its highest rewards of money, power and prestige on the basis of physical strength” (p. 106).
- Examples have also been cited of studies of life histories of persons who are intersexual (they used to be called hermaphrodites, a term that is now contested as impossible). The results showed that in virtually all cases, the sex of assignment (therefore of rearing) proved dominant in those who were assigned one sex at birth and were later found to belong biologically (genetically, gonadally, hormonally) to the opposite sex.
- In making the case against the assumed link between female hormones and women’s absence from high-level jobs, an example was cited of the Soviet Union in the early 1970s, where women comprised 33% of the engineers and 75% of the doctors (Bem & Bem, 1970 cited in Weitzman, 1975).

### Gender Connotes Hierarchy

“It’s a girl!”

“I am a boy!”

These are the tags Judith Thurman’s aunt saw on babies (including Judith) in the nursery of the hospital where Judith was born (see Judith Thurman’s introduction to Simone de Beauvoir’s *The second sex*, 1949).

- For practical and political purposes, and for theoretical engagements, the issue with ‘gender’ is not the differences in gender roles and responsibilities; the issue is that gender signifies a hierarchical relationship between men and women.
- This hierarchical relationship results in relationships of power that are skewed in favour of men.
- Through societal structures, institutions, practices and enduring attitudes, when compared with boys and men, girls and women do not have access to power resources and are usually unable to use opportunities and power

resources when they have them, because of structural, institutional and internalized barriers.

- Today in Nigeria, most females in most cultures are gendered as women, and the females that are gendered as men, such as found in Ifi Amadiume's *Male daughters, female husbands* (1987) are few.
- We do not want to forget, of course, that the British colonialists brought their own conception of human nature and women's nature, which was derived from the scriptures to Nigeria (Fashina, 1998).
- However, fifty-seven (57) years after the end of formal colonialism, with Christianity and Islam being omnipresent in the polity and competing for the souls and hearts of Nigerians, in the face of glaring economic changes that have affected many women and men, and also in the context of the existence of formal international declarations of equality of all persons, of all races, gender, religion, etc. (Mejiuni, 2013) the hierarchical relationship between men and women persists and is unchanging.
- The hierarchical relationship subsists through patriarchy; the rule of the fathers, a traditional form of authority vested in men as heads of families (Marshall, 1998). Patriarchy is any form of systematic male domination (Mckenzie, 1993).
- The hierarchical relationship between men and women (gender relations) often results in social injustice.

### Gender and Social Injustice

- A woman (or a female human person that has been cooked into an adult female human person), in our society's consciousness, carries with her a lot of baggage – the object of desire; can't think; too dirty for the shrines

of the forefathers; too weak to partake in key political decisions; economic parasites, etc., such that this is the socially subordinate adult female human being.

- This negative and demeaning perception of the woman (the person the society has cooked into a woman) leads to social injustice, and results from social injustice.
- Social injustice or discrimination includes minimizing, trivializing, and non-recognition of the issues, concerns, experiences, interests and needs of individuals and groups who are either in the minority or who are not in the mainstream of decision-making processes or power.
- Social injustice involves not taking account of the values, beliefs, interests, and needs of minorities because such are not norms. This would usually have a negative impact on the well-being of those concerned. A lack of attention to the values, interests and needs of those who are not in the mainstream shows contempt for the persons concerned.
- Discrimination includes the attribution of characteristics to individuals and groups<sup>2</sup>, characteristics, which, when socially and institutionally applied to groups of individuals, define their rights and duties, which then affect the quality of their lives (Wiley, 1994).
- Discrimination also involves unequal opportunities to access resources (usually stemming from social and institutional(ized) prejudices), and unequal and unfair distribution of rights and resources. Finally, to discriminate is to dominate: to insist on prioritizing the interests and needs of a group over those of others, by fiat. Such prioritization would usually not have a rational basis; it is usually steeped in unconscious or hidden bias (prejudices) and subsequently, explicitly enforced through subtle or overt exercise of power.

<sup>2</sup> Stereotyping/prejudicing (preconceived opinion or bias against or in favour of a thing or a person) could be positive or negative, but it is usually negative. It is usually a negative or an unfavourable attitude towards a group or its members. Prejudice is characterized by stereotyped beliefs that are not tested against reality, but rather have to do with a person's own feelings and attitudes. It is inherently unjust.

## The Link to Medicine

- MacLean and Ross (2008) wrote that an area of health care delivery which is usually “hidden from casual observation or critical examination is the historic neglect of research on women’s health relative to men’s.”
- They stated that:  

Women have been excluded from clinical research samples, ostensibly because of concerns that they may be pregnant or become pregnant during clinical trials, or that women’s hormonal cycles will interact with treatment protocols. Yet, medical protocols and treatments based on all-male clinical trials and samples are prescribed for women. Although in 1986, the National Institutes of Health in the United States issued a new policy requiring justification for excluding women from federally funded clinical research, the new guidelines were not integrated into the grants application process until 1991 ([http://www.sage-ereference.com/gender/Article\\_n204.html](http://www.sage-ereference.com/gender/Article_n204.html)).
- Nine (9) years after MacLean and Ross wrote that the historic exclusion of women in clinical research samples was a hidden fact, Stefanick (2017), called attention to the influences of rampant research bias, lopsided science, and sex and gender biases on medical diagnosis and treatment for everyone. Citing examples of the specific forms of cancers, heart problems, mental illness, thyroid autoimmune illnesses, rheumatoid arthritis and multiple sclerosis which affect women and men differently, she stressed that the imperative of precision and personalized medicine requires that clinicians/scientists take account of variability in genes, environment and lifestyle for each person.
- Stefanick also asserted that medical studies relied heavily on men or male animals in the past, which slowed progress in women’s health care. Although researchers are finally improving the mix, women and female animals are still in the minority. Parity is needed because many illnesses affect women differently than men. Women often respond differently to treatments as well (Stefanick, 2017).

## Conclusion

- An understanding of gender matters for those who study, research and practice medicine, those who administer health care infrastructure and services, and those who access health care services.
- The patients who present in doctors’ clinics and those who refuse to, or are unable to, provide qualitative data to support the need to centre gender as a social determinant of health.
- Therefore, in medicine, gender matters.

Thanks for listening!

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# 2

## **The Reconstruction of Patriarchal Traditionalisms and Their Effects on Women's Rights in Nigeria<sup>1</sup>**

### **Outline**

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- Opening: The Key Questions/Issues
  - What We Hear and What We Do Not Hear About 'Our Culture'
  - What is 'Culture', What is 'Tradition', and What is 'Custom'
  - What is 'Our Culture' and 'Our tradition', and What is Not
  - When Does the Discourse Around 'Culture' and 'Tradition' Become Prevalent
  - Whose Interest Does the Discourse Serve
  - The Implications of the Discourse of Culture and Tradition for Women's Rights in Nigeria
  - What Should We (Self-Identified Feminists) Do
  - Which Cultures and Traditions Ennoble and Enable, and Which Ones Disable and are 'Dead Hands'
  - Conclusion
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### **Opening: The Key Questions/Issues**

- What we hear about 'our culture' and what we do not hear about 'our culture'.
- What is 'culture', what is 'tradition', and what is 'custom'?
- What is 'our culture' and 'our tradition', and what is not?
- When does the discourse around 'culture' and 'tradition' become prevalent?
- Whose interest does the discourse serve?
- The implications of the discourse of culture and tradition for women's rights in Nigeria.
- What should we (self-identified feminists) do?
- Which cultures and traditions ennoble and enable, and which ones disable and are 'dead hands'?

### **What We Hear and What We Do Not Hear About 'Our Culture'**

We usually hear that:

- It is not in our culture for a woman to decide she does not want to marry, or she wouldn't have more than a child or a certain number of children;
- It is not in our culture for women to contest for top leadership positions in organizations/institutions that have male and female members;
- It is not in our culture for women to lead some Christian and Muslim congregations;
- It is not in our culture for women to expose certain parts of their bodies, or 'dress indecently'; and
- Feminism is not part of our culture.

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<sup>1</sup> I presented this paper at the 1st Convening of the Nigerian Feminist Forum (NFF) as a panellist at the plenary session on Feminism and Transforming Lives on 26th January 2008 in Abuja, Nigeria.



We usually do not hear that:

- It is not in our culture that men should beat their wives;
- It is not in our culture that men should rape women and children;
- It is not in our culture that individuals should misappropriate or better still, steal what belongs to the collective;
- It is not in our culture that adults should consistently behave badly and yet insist that children exhibit exemplary/good character.

### **What is ‘Culture’, What is ‘Tradition’, and What is ‘Custom’**

- The *Oxford dictionary of sociology* (edited by Gordon Marshall, 1998) provides the information that social anthropological ideas of culture are based to a great extent on the definition given by Edward Tylor in 1871. He referred to culture as “a *learned* complex of knowledge, belief, art, morals, law and custom” (p. 137).
- We note the word *learned*. This is supposed to show that culture is socially, rather than biologically determined.
- The archeological usage of the term culture separates material culture (artifacts) from the non-material (practices and beliefs) or what is called the adaptive culture.
- At some point in human history, cultures of groups of people/communities/ societies were studied and then ranked. At a later stage, cultures were compared and contrasted. For some other scholars, it is thought that the concept of culture can provide ways of explaining and understanding human behaviour, belief systems, values and ideologies, as well as particularly culturally specific personality types (Marshall, 1998).
- It is known that culture is dynamic, it changes either voluntarily (in order to adapt) or by coercion, as it happened to us Nigerians after the arrival of colonialism, Christianity and Islam.

- We know that there are cultures within larger cultures – sub-cultures.
- There are knowledge, belief and value systems that result from particular historical, socio-economic and political circumstances. When these systems become established ways of thinking and acting (custom) among particular groups within societies/communities, then we refer to them also as cultures.
- We can talk for example, about the culture of giving, the culture of impunity, the culture of violence, the culture of silence, etc.
- Tradition is a set of social practices which seek to celebrate and inculcate certain behavioural norms and values, in the attempts to connect with a real or imagined past, and is usually associated with widely accepted rituals or other forms of symbolic behaviour (Marshall, 1998).

### **What is ‘Our Culture’ and ‘Our Tradition’, and What is Not**

Given the preceding explanations, we observe as follows:

- Some of the traditions and cultures of Nigeria prior to the colonial experience and the influences of Christianity and Islam are still somewhat well denominated.
- However, one suspects that many of the people who shape and mould opinions and lives in Nigeria today do not know those traditions and cultures.
- Many of those who confuse the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions with Nigerian cultures (the way we were), pull the argument about culture and are very vocal about it.
- But we also have to admit that in the face of the dynamic nature of culture, and the fact that many Nigerian knowledge systems, beliefs, arts, morals, laws and customs now reflect Christian and Islamic influences, our cultures have changed (perhaps many times) and we now have relatively new cultures.

Can we then say that those who say it is not in our culture to grant women their rights as persons are

correct from the point of view of Christianity and Islam?

### **When Does the Discourse around 'Culture' and 'Tradition' become Prevalent**

The discourse of culture and tradition become prevalent (like a disease) and heightened when:

- Women push for the democratization of political, economic, religious and social space;
- Women talk back (hooks, 1989); and
- Women, whether as individuals or as a collective, resist physical, verbal, and emotional violence.

So men, and women, but often men, recourse to the position of 'our culture' and 'our tradition' to ***seal the argument, or place a ceiling on the rights that women can and should demand for.***

### **Whose Interest does the Discourse Serve**

- The discourse of culture and tradition as it is being presently carried on in our country can only serve the interest of patriarchy.<sup>2</sup>
- Because *power is preservative in nature* (Mejiuni, 2006), persons who are privileged and occupy positions of power in different spheres of life hold on to their own conception of what constitutes the, or, a Nigerian culture.
- By carrying on the discussion about culture and tradition in different learning centres/institutions, they impose their own conception of Nigerian cultures on us, and their conception of Nigerian cultures and traditions become our knowledge of and belief about Nigerian cultures and traditions.

### **The Implications of the Discourse of Culture and Tradition for Women's Rights in Nigeria**

- The discourse of culture and tradition define our identity(ies) – who we ought to be, and often too, who we are, our beliefs and values,

our interests and what we believe to be our needs and our priorities.

- The recourse to 'our culture' usually limits the rights and resources that women can access, and the scope of possibilities that are open to us.
- In addition, apart from limiting the potential of Nigerian women, the discourse of culture and tradition, will institutionalize even more violations of women's rights, and the violation of women's rights will become, indeed, 'our culture'.

### **What should We (Self-Identified Feminists) Do**

- As feminists, we have to define ourselves. We have to re(create) and also co-create new knowledge about whom we are in spite of culture.
- We have to participate actively in shaping the discourse of culture.
- We have to dig deep, and seize upon those positive aspects of our indigenous knowledge and cultural practices that affirm women.

### **Which Cultures and Traditions Ennoble and Enable, and Which Ones Disable and are 'Dead Hands'**

- It is our business to continuously sieve through the discourse of culture and tradition, and what men and women, institutions and organizations do in the name of culture and tradition, and determine which ones limit the potential of women and the range of possibilities that are open to Nigerian women.

### **Conclusion**

As I end this presentation, I urge us to keep this excerpt from Mary Rogers (1998) in view. In her discussion of women's identity, she said:

The projects of selfhood and identity invite us, in sum, to demonstrate the possibilities

<sup>2</sup> See for instance, Wilson (2005) for an exploration of the interface of culture and power and the repressive ends to which culture could be directed.

buried under what culture has deemed impossible or inconceivable ... To secure ourselves and enact our identities in liberated ways requires bringing to the cultural surface what lies buried beneath its institutionalized sedimentations ... In lieu of seizing those challenges, we can remain queued up in the lines of society's matrix of domination. We can remain what culture has named us rather than what we name ourselves (pp. 373-374).

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# 3

## Religious Fundamentalism, Globalization and Women's Emancipatory Learning<sup>1</sup>

### Outline

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- Introduction: Some Core Concepts
    - Religion
    - Spirituality
    - Religious Fundamentalism
    - Globalization
  - How Religious Fundamentalism Intersects Globalization to Affect Women's Rights and Women's Learning
  - Resistance to Fundamentalism and Violence – The Role of Globalization
  - The Imperative of Spiritually Grounded Emancipatory Pedagogies
  - Conclusion
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### Introduction: Some Core Concepts

In this presentation, I argue that although religious fundamentalism and globalization constrain women's rights and women's learning, they can also be triggers for the transformation of gender identities and women's emancipatory learning. I begin by exploring the concepts that are central to my engagement with the theme of this presentation.

#### Religion

- Religions, according to Bowker (1997) "are a constant force for change, despite the fact that they are also, as systems, necessarily conservative" (p. xxi).
- Religion is therefore complex.
- It has been estimated that three-quarters of the world's population identify with at least one religion at different times (Bowker, 1997).

- In my study of how formal education (especially higher education), religious teachings and practices and informal learning interface in the construction of women's identities, 68.1% of highly literate women (in formal work settings); 69.6% of female students in higher education institutions (HEIs); 91.1% of semi-literate women (in the informal economy); 39.5% of female apprentices; 31.03% of highly literate men and 37.5% of male students in HEIs made obvious references to religion in their responses to questions I asked about women's roles in the private and the public spheres; women's civic-political participation; women's identities; women's experience of violence and the education of women (Mejiuni, 2006c<sup>2</sup>). One hundred and eight-three (183) women and 61 men drawn from Kogi and Oyo States participated in the study which I carried out in 2004.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the edited version of the paper I presented at the BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights National Discussion on Women's Human Rights and Religion held between 24th and 25th November 2006 in Lekki, Lagos.

<sup>2</sup> This is Mejiuni, O. (2006c). "Women are flexible and better managers": The paradox of women's identities, their educational attainment and political power. *JENDA: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*, 9, 1-46.

- In the same study, I found that the women sampled identified themselves in about 15 ways, but they typically identified themselves first by their gender and character. After gender and character, women in the formal and informal economies defined themselves in terms of their religious identities. Some identified themselves first by their religious identities and flaunted their religious identities.

What might this tell us about how women engage their religious beliefs and how religion, in particular, the fundamentalist hue, may impact them? We would attempt to answer this question in the sections that follow.

### **Spirituality**

- Refers to an awareness of something greater than ourselves. A sense that we are connected to all human beings and to all creation (English, 2005) by something or somebody greater than ourselves.
- Spirituality has always been in the domain of religious groups, which are charged with meeting the spiritual needs of humans (English, 2005).
- At some point however, it was thought that there was a need to distinguish religion from spirituality, and so spirituality was thought of as the giver of meaning, while religion was thought of as the giver of rules. The thinking now is that it is better to embrace the intersection of spirituality and religion (English, 2005), the fact that persons can find spiritual fulfilment in religion.
- There is an increasing realization that persons are always in search of spiritual guidance and growth, and so when we omit the spiritual dimension of an adult's life we ignore the holistic approach to the development of the human person (English, 2005).
- While many search for meaning (understanding the world and our relationship with

it<sup>3</sup>) in the established/organized religions, some look to their history, others look to native education, and some consider that the spiritual ideals of justice, service, caring, cooperation, and dignity of the human person give meaning (English 2005), while others look to fundamentalism.

### **Religious Fundamentalism**

- Is a description of those who return to what they believe to be the fundamental truth and practices of a religion (Bowker, 1997).
- Some thinkers have suggested that fundamentalism is a religion of the marginalized.
- Others think otherwise. They think it is the religion of people caught off balance. It is said that fundamentalist groups often arise in situations where social, cultural and economic power is up for grabs, and many arise in post-colonial situations.
- Karen Brown (1994) indicated that fundamentalism is the religion of the stressed and the disoriented, of those for whom the world is overwhelming. It is the religion of those at once seduced and betrayed by the promise that we human beings can comprehend and control our world.
- She averred that, bitterly disappointed by the politics of rationalized bureaucracies, the limitations of science, and the perversions of industrialization, fundamentalists seek to reject the modern world, while nevertheless holding onto its habits of mind: clarity, certitude and control.
- Brown added that at the root of fundamentalism is a failure of nerve in the face of the complexity of life, and a decision to make things cleaner and clearer, no matter the cost.
- "The fundamentalism project", a project of the American Academy of Arts and Science (<https://www.amacad.org/project/fundamentalism-project>), observed that those who belong to

<sup>3</sup> To gain an understanding of "meaning making", see Hunt, C. (2005). Meaning making. In L. M. English (Ed.), *International encyclopedia of adult education* (pp. 391-395). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

what might be described as movements of reaction against modernity “no longer perceive themselves as reeling under the corrosive effects of secular life: on the contrary, they perceive themselves as fighting back, and doing so successfully.”

- What makes fundamentalism problematic, and in some cases, dangerous is the tendency to aggressively defend truths, and this is manifested in different kinds and degrees of violence.

### **Globalization**

- Finger (2005) defined globalization as: “a movement of economic integration, of cultural homogenization and technological uniformization” (p. 269). It has long historical roots, but, as a large-scale phenomenon, it is said to be the product of the past 20 years.
- The question for scholars and activists especially in the Economic South is: whose interest does globalization serve/ who stands to gain more from globalization?
- For fundamentalists, globalization is the extreme form of modernity.

### **How Religious Fundamentalism Intersects Globalization to Affect Women's Rights and Women's Learning**

- Fundamentalists are known to be consistent in one respect, and that is the maintenance of strong and clear social boundaries. They are concerned with social order and social control. Given the patriarchal nature of their religions, the battles that fundamentalists fight in defense of fundamental ‘truths’ and practices of their religions are fought mainly around and on women's lives and bodies.
- And so the Christian right in the United States opposes women's rights to the choice of abortion, and so they murder women and doctors to stop abortion (or as they put it, stop women from murdering unborn babies).

Also, some Muslims make an issue of the need for women to cover their bodies, including wearing the full-face veil.

- Fundamentalists, like many men (who will not identify themselves as holding fundamentalist views) have a need to preserve male privilege, and so they appeal to the extreme ecclesiastical model of meaning-making in their attempts to hang on to power. Globalization provides them with a fresh reason to control and abuse women, and it is the new weapon with which they control and abuse women.
- By promoting the extreme ecclesiastical models of meaning-making, fundamentalists foreclose discussions around women's identities, their roles in the private and the public spheres of life, their reproductive rights, and their civic-political participation.
- Given that many women in Nigeria turn to religion in their search for meaning, fundamentalists would always have a ready constituency that they can exercise control over. We would recall that I had indicated that over 68.1% of three of the four categories of the women I sampled for my study, earlier cited, referenced their religion or religious beliefs in their responses to the questions I asked about women's roles in the private and the public spheres; women's civic-political participation; women's identities; women's experience of violence and the education of women
- Now, religions are cultural systems and are therefore powerful educational agents (Mejiuni, 2006<sup>4</sup>). So when fundamentalists constrain women's potentials through their teachings and practices and violence, women learn to do what they are told. They internalize their oppression, and at times, they even justify their oppression. Women who are not submissive are taught to be submissive through battery and the ones who batter them justify their actions with quotations from the Holy Books. Now, when

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<sup>4</sup> This is Mejiuni, O. (2006a). Confounding and empowering women through non-formal and informal education? ...



a woman has been battered because she is not submissive, some other women then tell her that she was battered because she was stubborn.<sup>5</sup>

- Because the consequences of fundamentalism and violence are grave, they have also resulted in resistance from others.

### **Resistance to Fundamentalism and Violence – The Role of Globalization**

- Fundamentalism and fundamentalist-induced violence against women are trigger events for resistance and women's emancipatory learning, and women must seize the moment to foster emancipatory learning.
- I recall the outcry that greeted the decision that a victim of rape (Bariya Magazu – <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/fr/node/186342>) should be flogged under the Islamic legal code in Zamfara state, the role of BAOBAB and how globalization – specifically information communication technology (ICT), the Internet, brought the law and the social structure (patriarchy) that spurned it under scrutiny.
- The outcry that greeted her sentencing and the sentencing of another woman in Katsina state<sup>6</sup> was resistance against an unjust law that supposedly has its roots in religion.
- Women oriented non-profits should therefore provide the triggers (discussions, resource materials, insight, etc.) that will lead women to critically reflect on what they have been told are God's will, women's roles in the world and women's worth.

### **The Imperative of Spiritually Grounded Emancipatory Pedagogies**

- Emancipatory education is education that helps individuals and social groups develop new forms of knowledge that will lead to

their own greater freedom or emancipation in the world (Tisdell, 2005).

- According to Tisdell (2005), within the field of education in general and adult education in particular, the term “emancipatory education” is “associated with discourses that specifically challenge power relations based on social systems or structures of race, gender, class, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, age or disability, in adult and higher education, and in popular education” (p. 206).
- Given the way religion has been used to dominate women, there is a tendency to advocate secularism in many spheres of life. I suspect this will be unrealistic because we have shown that spirituality matters, and that women try to make meaning through their religions. This is why it is being advocated that persons who work to improve the social status of women should adopt spiritually grounded emancipatory pedagogies.
- Emancipatory education that is rooted in spirituality uses religion (or any other belief system or form of knowing) to create knowledge that will enhance commitment to community or activist work that seeks to help people to free their potential and put their potential to full use in different spheres of life.
- I am not therefore advocating a continuation of the overt display of religious beliefs such as we have now. I would rather we have those meetings in the universities for example, without the prayers! I worry, like many other women (and men) that the prayers and worship in public places are often performed to confuse people, they are hypocritical.
- Examples abound in both Christianity and Islam, of how women have used religion or ‘witnessing and testifying’ to fight for their rights, and I think we should explore this

<sup>5</sup> See for instance, Mejiuni, O. (2006b). ‘Some women are stubborn’: Power, violence against women and the challenges of religion. *CODESRIA BULLETIN*, 1 & 2, 38-40.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/09/26/world/facing-death-for-adultery-nigerian-woman-is-acquitted.html>



option some more, focusing attention on the central theme of the 2 religions – LOVE, and imploring religious leaders to privilege the transformative aspects of their religions.

- By way of example, when Christian leaders (and Muslims too) emphasize submission of the wife to the man, and they (especially their followers) cite lack of submission (or as they say, lack of humility) of women to men as the reason some women are battered, we should let them know that God actually demanded a greater sacrifice from men when he asked that men should love their wives as Christ loved the Church. When Muslim leaders (and Christians too) make a fuss about women's dressing, and their followers then use this as a justification for rape and sexual harassment, we should let them know that in the Qur'an, the Holy Prophet actually implored all men and women to lower their gaze and safeguard their chastity. He was actually talking about self-restraint and discipline.
- It is important that we let women know that it is the knowledge constructed and privileged by the powerful that becomes the norm<sup>7</sup>, and that is what has happened in the cases of the oft-quoted parts of the Bible and the Qur'an that men and women, especially fundamentalists, use to control women.
- We must not abandon the churches and the mosques (and our traditional religions). We need to work more within those structures, through women's organizations for example.
- We have to note and expose the inconsistencies in the stance of fundamentalists. Now, we have noted that fundamentalism is a reaction to the failed promises of modernity, yet, fundamentalists show ambivalence towards modernity. They condemn modernity, yet they use products of modernity (ICTs) for

mobilizing support for their own efforts. They also use the ICTs to constrain women's potential, insisting for example that women ought not partake actively in the public sphere because that is not God's/Allah's will for them. They insist that women's active participation in the public sphere is a product of modernity!<sup>8</sup>

- Those of us who work with women should clarify our position. Do we wish to improve women's condition, or do we wish to cause fundamental changes, for example, undermine patriarchy and all other structures that constrain women? I am not saying that it is not important that we help women earn a living or have better health. My point is that so long as patriarchy remains in place, women will continue to face fresh health challenges such as those posed by the Human Immuno Deficiency Virus /Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDs) pandemic. In addition, the economic gains that we think they have made from improvement in their earning power will not be invested in profit-yielding ventures because men will ensure that they spend such on the family. Investment is what moves the economy, and it determines production.

## Conclusion

- We have to help women to work at the habits of questioning, of reflecting critically on their experiences and those of others. This should not be about picking quarrels, it should be about knowing why things are the way they are and understanding how they became what they are.
- In addition, if we cause women to challenge the status quo and fundamentalisms, we must prepare them for the pains that may result from such. Fundamentalists step up violence when they are challenged.

<sup>7</sup> See for instance, Alvin Gouldner (1970) cited in Marshall (1998). He averred that "Power is, among other things, the ability to enforce one's moral claims. The powerful can thus conventionalize their moral defaults" (p. 520).

<sup>8</sup> See for instance, some religious leaders and male students' position on women's civic-political participation in Mejiuni, O. (2006c), "Women are flexible and better managers": The paradox of women's identities, their educational attainment and political power. *JENDA: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*, 9, 1-46.

- On a final note, we also need to address the flip side of globalization because of the way it affects our economy and because it has provided impetus for fundamentalists to attack women.
- I congratulate BAOBAB for the good works she has done in her ten years of existence, and I thank you all for listening

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# 4

## Constructing Feminine and Masculine Identities<sup>1</sup>

### Outline

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- Understanding the Notion of Identity
    - Sex
    - Gender
    - The Notion of Identity
    - The Notion of Collective Identity (Habitus and Natural)
    - The Notion of Self/Individual/Personal Identity
    - The Notion of Gender Identity
    - The Discourse of Identity: Three Traditions
    - Women's Self-Definition
    - The Notion of Multiplicity of Identities
    - Definition by Others: Who We are and Who It is Valuable to Be
    - The Politics of Identity and the Politics of Gender Identity
  - The Processes of Identity Construction
    - Sex-Role Socialization
    - Informal Learning
    - Identities Can be Used to Either Empower or Disempower Women
    - What Should We Do
- 

### Understanding the Notion of Identity

Given that our focus is on understanding how feminine and masculine identities are constructed,

we begin by trying to understand the concepts of sex and gender.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the edited version of the material which I used to facilitate the module entitled Constructing Feminine and Masculine Identities, at the July-August 2018 session of the Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University's Bespoke Residential Certificate Courses (BRCC). The module comprised two topics: "Understanding the notion of identity"; and "The processes of identity construction." I had presented the frameworks of this facilitation material at the 1st Ekiti State Gender Summit held in Ado-Ekiti in November 2011 as a paper entitled How Gender Identities are Constructed and Used Across Generations. Overall, this facilitation material was shaped by two major primary research studies that I carried out, and my scholarly writing on and engagement with the phenomena of identities, informal learning and women's status. The full report of my first primary research study on women's identity is included in this book as Chapter 16 while the full report of the second research has been published as the book, *Women and power: Education, religion and identity* (2012 & 2013; UPPLC & CODESRIA).

**Sex**

- Sex refers to the biological differences between men and women, or male and female, which are universal and do not change.<sup>2</sup>
- Rice University (2013) modified by Little and McGivern (2014) provided a slightly expanded definition of sex. They defined sex as “physical or physiological differences between males and females, including both primary sex characteristics (the reproductive system) and secondary characteristics such as height and muscularity” (p. 366).
- They wrote that because the term sex refers to biological or physical distinctions, characteristics of sex will not vary significantly between different human societies. For example, all persons of the female sex, in general, regardless of culture, will eventually menstruate and develop breasts that can lactate.

**Gender**

- Gender is a term that refers to social or cultural distinctions associated with being male or female (Little and McGivern, 2014).
- According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), (2001), gender refers to social attributes that are learned or acquired during socialization as a member of a given community. Because these attributes are learned behaviours, they can, and do change over time. Gender therefore refers to the socially given attributes, roles, activities, responsibilities and needs connected to being men (masculinity) and being women (femininity) in a given society, at a given time, and as a member of a specific community within that society. Women’s and men’s gender identities determine how they are expected to think and act as men and women.
- Whereas the biological features that set a person apart as a male or female are the same

regardless of culture, this is not the same with societal expectations, norms and cultural dictates which inform the classification of persons into male or female gender.

- In her exploration of the notion of identity, Rogers (1998) wrote that West and Zimmerman (1987) emphasize that gender is “a routine, methodical, and recurrent accomplishment” (p. 371). It grows out of acts that get gendered when people use the frames or schemas culture offers as sense-making resources. Cultural communities “cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine ‘nature’ and members act and interact in ways that routinely reflect these understanding.”
- Rogers further indicated that West and Zimmerman concluded that gender is not part of what one is, but something that one does, and does recurrently, in interaction with others. Rogers held that West and Zimmerman’s work on ‘doing gender’, holds insights into not only how femininity and masculinity get done, but also how people do their identities while going about their daily business.
- Concerning gender identity, Little & McGivern (2014) wrote that a person’s sex, as determined by his or her biology, does not always correspond with his or her gender. Therefore, the terms *sex* and *gender* are not interchangeable. Citing Diamond (2002), they wrote that gender identity is the extent to which one identifies as being either masculine or feminine.

**The Notion of Identity**

Let us examine what identity means, with a view to understanding it.

- Identity is sameness, continuity, and, in some sense, it implies difference.

<sup>2</sup> As simple and as unproblematic as this appears, West and Zimmerman (2002) theorized that the determination of a person’s sex is made “through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males” (p. 43). Well, this ‘social agreement’ regarding the biological criteria for classification of the sex of persons, has been transhistorical, transnational, and transcultural.

**EXERCISE 4.1**

**These two questions** should help us understand the notion and issue of identity.

1. Who are you (self-definition) and what beliefs do you hold true and dear about women and about men?
2. Who do others perceive you to be or think/believe you ought to be? Who do others believe it is valuable to be?

Clyde Kluckhohn and Henry Murray's (1948) dictum (cited in Mennel, 1994) provides a good framework for thinking through the question of identity.

- **They provided the dictum:** Every person is in certain respect, (a) "like all others"; (b) "like some others"; and (c) "like no other."

This dictum shows that there are certain characteristics:

- (a) That all human beings share in common;
- (b) That all human beings share with certain other human beings; and it shows
- (c) The way in which individuals are unique, leading to discussions on personal/individual and collective identities.

Mennel (1994) referred to the three ways of thinking about social habitus and identity as levels (a), (b), and (c).

- Kluckhohn and Murray's *Level A*: Wiley (1994) somewhat explicated Mennel's position when he posited that "there is a universal human nature, characterising all human beings in the same generic way, at all times and places" (p. 130). And identified some of the distinguishing features of human nature as being rational, symbolic, abstract, semiotic, linguistic, etc.
- Kluckhohn and Murray's *Level B*: "Draws attention to the characteristics which all human beings share in common with *certain* other human beings in the particular group to which they belong" (Mennel, 1994, p. 177).
- Kluckhohn and Murray's *Level C*: Seeks to recognize that there are ways in which every

individual human personality is unique (Mennel, 1994).

### **The Notion of Collective Identity (Habitus and Natural?)**

- Mennel informed us that Pierre Bourdieu popularized the term "habitus" for dealing with Level B.
- Habitus is employed in reference to the dominant modes of conduct, taste, and feeling among members of particular groups, even if they are unconscious of the fact that they share these traits with members of their group.
- "Habitus", when translated to the English expression ***second nature***, means, an acquired tendency that has become instinctive. Mennel (1994) thus considered that habitus is closely related to the notion of identity. However, he differentiated habitus from identity by showing identity to mean:

A higher level conscious awareness by members of a group, some degree of reflection and articulation, some positive or negative emotional feelings towards the characteristics which members of a group perceive themselves as sharing and in which they perceive themselves as differing from other groups (p. 177).

- Again, Wiley (1994), kind of apprehended the *characteristics* in Mennel's submission as "long term abiding qualities, which, despite their importance, may not be part of human nature as such" (p. 130).
- The most common forms of identity in the literature are gender, ethnic/racial, national, religious, sexual, generational and worker identities.

### **The Notion of Self/Individual/Personal Identity**

Theorists have put forward key arguments with respect to personal identity and they are:

- Personal identity exists and can be, when thought of in relation to personal accountability (from Descartes to Locke to Kant and Hegel);

- The individualistic conception of identity without reference to the social relations that produce it is wrong headed (from Marx to Mead); and
- Personal identity is a fiction (Hume, Nietzsche, Freud, Lacan, Strauss and Foucault) (Larrain, 1994, pp. 143-149).

These arguments are the three traditions that are represented in the discourse of identity.

Little and McGivern (2014) wrote that George Herbert Mead advanced a detailed sociological approach to the *self*.

- They wrote that Mead held that “the self, as a person’s distinct identity, is only developed through social interaction.” (p. 144). Mead further noted that the crucial component of the self is its capacity for self-reflection, its capacity to be “an object to itself” (Mead, 1934 cited in Little and McGivern, 2014). On this basis, he broke the self down into two components or ‘phases’, the ‘**I**’ and the ‘**me**’.
- “The ‘me’ represents the part of the self in which one recognizes the “organized sets of attitudes” of others toward the self. It is who we are in other’s eyes: our roles, our ‘personalities’, our public personas ...”
- “The ‘I’, on the other hand, represents the part of the self that acts on its own initiative or responds to the organized attitudes of others. It is the novel, spontaneous, unpredictable part of the self: the part of the self that embodies the possibility of change or undetermined action ...”
- “The self is always caught up in a *social* process in which one flips back and forth between two distinguishable phases, the I and the me, as one mediates between one’s own individual actions and individual responses to various social situations and the attitudes of the community” (p. 156).

Given the array of theorists and the arguments they have put forward about personal identity, the position that is becoming widespread, noted by Mejiuni (2005), is that:

- Although self-definition and assertion of individuality are essential to empowerment, the self here, is, self-in-relation (Rogers, 1998), and so the masculinist psychological model of selfhood is rejected. It is therefore thought that it may be worthwhile to avoid a sharp split between personal identity and collective identity (Mejiuni, 2013, p. 79).

This is an important point in considering the notion of gender identity.

### **The Notion of Gender Identity**

In philosophy, identity refers to at least 2 separable questions:

- First, what gives a thing or a person its essential nature, i.e. its *eidōs* or *form* and thus its continuity through time? And second, what makes two things or two persons the same? (Zaretsky, 1994, p. 199).
- Wiley (1994) appeared to have answered the questions Zaretsky asked when he said: “identities individuate and allow us to recognize individuals, categories, groups, and types of individuals” (p. 130). He averred that identities are “nested within and express qualities of selves and collection of selves” (p. 130).
- Mennel (1994) and again, Wiley (1994) supplied answers to one of Zaretsky’s questions – what makes two persons the same? Wiley identified characteristics that are common to all human beings at all times and places, while both Wiley and Mennel called attention to the phenomenon of *habitus* (or second nature).
- Wiley points out that identity may also imply habits *in* various senses, including Pierre Bourdieu’s “habitus” (that is, *second nature*, being “modes of conduct, taste and feeling which predominate among members of particular groups” {Mennel, 1994, p. 177}). These, then, are characteristics that are peculiar, and are to be found among particular groups; a kind of sameness.
- Let us adopt Wiley’s (1994) conception of identity, which he considers to be “some



long-term, abiding qualities, which despite their importance, are not features of human nature as such" (p. 130), and based on this, try to show what gender identity or women's identity means.

- To Wiley's conception of identity, I add that a person's identity can also be the person's essential nature. That is, those qualities that are natural to the person, not second nature.
- In the case of a female human person, those features that are natural to her, are features that are present at birth (biological – the entire reproductive system including hormones and the birth canal), and which are expected to grow and mature as the female human person matures with age.
- In addition to this, *some long-term, abiding qualities* can be found (or are thought to be present) in female human persons, but, such are either non-existent or are second nature, acquired tendencies, which are then thought to be transhistorical, transnational, 'inherent', 'innate' and 'natural'.
- *Such qualities* are those relating to women's interest in keeping family units together, and in being more interested than men in nurturing the child after her birth. They are also about the perception that women possess emotions not reason, and so do not have the will to make key decisions regarding religious, economic and political issues that are matters of public concern. Also, because they lack will, they are incapable of making decisions about their sexual desires (Fashina, 2001).
- When we talk about women's identity or gender identity, the only long-term abiding quality that is indisputable is the female human person's reproductive system. The other 'long-term, abiding qualities' are products of social processes that are politically determined.
- If female human persons in Nigeria can be gendered, either as 'men' or 'women' by social

processes, although most are gendered as 'women', then, gender norms and values are not natural<sup>3</sup>; they are not women's essence or essential nature.

- In other words, apart from the reproductive system which gives the female human person her essence, the category called 'woman' is a construction, achieved through what Butler (1990) called a performance that is repeated.
- Even as the construction is achieved through repeated performance, there is the element of compulsion which helps both the achievement, the retention and the reproduction of the construction. Compulsion is achieved through a system of punishment for not agreeing with the 'facts' of the 'necessity' and 'naturalness' of the qualities of 'real' women.
- However, although a construction, the category 'woman' exists in the hearts and minds of people, and is therefore a reality that we have to contend with.
- This notwithstanding, a woman's identity or gender identity, cannot be a stable identity because it is fictitious. In Butler's (1990) words it is "an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through stylized repetition of acts" (p. 140); what West and Zimmermann (2002) referred to as "doing gender."
- The changes (brought about by colonialism) in who performed what economic roles (specifically trading) in the eastern part of Nigeria, which in part led to the "women's wars" (Mba, 1982) shows that gender identity cannot be a stable identity.
- *The identity of the female human person that is not tenuous is her reproductive system, and so, political interests, and political actions can be taken on the basis of the facts of this, and on the issues around it, because they have implications for women's practical gender needs and their strategic gender interests.*

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 1 of this book for examples of how men and women are gendered differently in different cultures around the world; that is, how communities 'do gender' and how individuals fit themselves into gender categories.



- No doubt, political interests and political actions are also needed to deconstruct constructed identity and value those identities that are natural to women, but, which were formerly diminished. It also happens that some women define their political interests by, and struggle based on identities that have been constructed for them.

### **The Discourse of Identity: Three Traditions**

**Three traditions** are represented in the discourse of identity.

- **Essentialism** which holds that identities are given, naturally, and are fixed. Usually, for all times, and places (they are transcontextual and trans-historical)
- **Social constructionism** rejects the view that there is an identity that is given naturally. Social constructionists believe that whatever nature gives is mediated by society – that society forms, builds, moulds, delineates, interprets and explains.
- **Deconstruction** holds that the subject of identity should be decentered, such that neither nature nor society will confer identity, and there are limitless opportunities and possibilities that can be explored (Larain 1994: 143-149).

### **Let us revisit those two questions we posed at the beginning of the session:**

- Who are you (self-definition) and what beliefs do you hold true and dear about women and about men?
- Who do others perceive you to be or think/ believe you ought to be? Who do others believe it is valuable to be?

### **Women's Self-Definition**

Below are the results of the analysis of the data I collected in Lokoja and Ibadan, Nigeria, during my study of how formal education, religion and informal learning construct the identities of women.<sup>4</sup>

Literate and semi-literate/illiterate women in Ibadan and Lokoja defined themselves in 15 different ways, and most defined themselves in more than one way.

- They defined themselves through their ethnicity, religion, gender, character, profession/vocation, natal roles, marital status, age, femininity, masculinity, etc.
- However, the two categories of women identified more with their gender identity or their identity as women and their individual characters.
- For literate women, gender identity ranked first (was most frequently mentioned), and character ranked second, while for semi-literate women, character came first, and gender came second.
- Examples:
  1. "Outspoken, Bold and I have confidence in myself" – **Feyi**;
  2. "A woman, God-fearing, hardworking and a mother too" – **Tanwa**;
  3. "A woman, easygoing, industrious Lawyer. Married with children, Okun by tribe from Kogi State" – **Odunola**;
  4. "I am a girl who believes in equality and that whatever a man can do, a woman can do, not better or anything but simply can do. I am a, should I say, a woman and proud to be one and treated like one not according to societal standard of inferior and second class citizen, but simply a woman" – **Abosede**; and
  5. "I'm a Muslim, I'm a good person, I don't do bad things" – **Mariam** (see Mejiuni, 2013).
- These responses show that women inhabit multiple identities.

### **The Notion of Multiplicity of Identities**

- In real life, people are not just women, or Muslims, or Hispanics, or aboriginals, gay or poor. They would inhabit two or more identities.
- However, social relations are complex, and so are the networks of interactions between and within groups.

<sup>4</sup> See Mejiuni, O. (2013). *Women and power: Education, religion and identity*. Dakar, Senegal: CODESRIA.

- Therefore, it is not unusual to find individuals making the decision to favour one identity over another.
- The discourse of multiplicity of identities addresses the constant pressures that persons are under to favour particular identities – categorical identities (Mejiuni, 2005).
- Allied to these are concerns about negotiation, renegotiation, and transformation of identities.
- It is thought that these are unavoidable, given: that persons inhabit multiple identities, given the tenuous nature of most identities, and given unequal relations of power within groups and between groups, which leads to skewed distribution of rights and resources.
- People rethink principles, transform their thinking, form new alliances, or stand back from an either-or-position when confronted with new experiences or new realities.
- Given different contexts, experiences, realities, interests and goals, women and men do not favour one identity or two throughout a lifetime. They can drop some identities and pick others; they can renegotiate and also transform their identities.

### **Definition by Others: Who We are and Who It is Valuable to Be**

Again, let us return to those two questions and how women defined themselves in my study, cited above.

- For persons who are interested in the issues of identity, the question they would probably ask is: are the women's self-definition a true reflection of their subjective 'I' or are those responses reflections of who others think they are or are valuable to be?
- A number of scholars have observed that there are too many challenges to the efforts of persons to attain stable self-recognition or coherent subjectivity (Brown, 1994; Calhoun, 1994; Rogers, 1998).

When men in formal work settings and male students were asked to define women, when they were asked about women's roles in the public and

private spheres, women's participation in politics and violence against women, they said women:

- Should not handle tedious roles because of their fragile nature.
- Are too tender, their decisions will be influenced by men, they are too uncertain, and can easily change decisions with little pressure.
- Are better managers of resources and good listeners.
- Are human beings like men.
- Are equal to men in intellectual capability, more suited to discharging official functions than men.
- Are more dedicated to their jobs than men, not easily influenced to perpetuate evil, they are mothers, have love for all.
- Are not mentally and emotionally stable.
- Can hardly undergo the rigours associated with certain offices and the dangers there in, and are often unable to harmonize certain key/very demanding offices with private/domestic responsibilities.

When persons define themselves in particular ways, they expect to be recognized as such. Let us return to women's self-definition – how women defined themselves in Mejiuni (2013).

We would note similarities and discrepancies in how men and women defined women on particular issues, thereby pointing our attention to the fact that self-definition and self-recognition, definition by others and non-recognition by others is at the core of politics of identities.

- For instance, whereas some women, especially among semi-literate/illiterate women defined themselves as breadwinners or co-breadwinners, no man defined women that way.
- And whereas many men believe women are 'flexible' and ought to be 'flexible', only three of 183 women thought women were flexible.

There are several reasons individuals and groups will wish to recognize certain characteristics in others, and refuse to recognize or devalue other characteristics in others. Power and the interests that it can serve is a major reason.

- According to Wiley (1994), identities become political and problematic when certain characteristics are attributed socially and institutionally to individuals and groups, and such define their rights and duties, and affect their quality of life.

### **The Politics of Identity and the Politics of Gender Identity**

- Once identity becomes political, subjectivity (the self-conscious perspective of the person or subject or the “I”) is possible only through the individual’s agency.
- Calhoun (1994) posits that there are too many challenges to the efforts of persons “to attain stable self-recognition or coherent subjectivity” (p. 20). There are interrelated problems of self-recognition and recognition by others.
- Craig Calhoun makes the point that: “it is not just that others fail to see us for who we are sure we really are, or repress us because of who they think we are”, we are constantly confronted with discussions of “who it is possible, or appropriate or valuable to be” (p. 20).
- This affects the way we see ourselves, with attendant doubts and tensions, resulting in deconstructing certain identities and making strategic claims to others.
- Identity politics is therefore about seeking recognition, legitimacy, autonomy and power, and it is about resistance.
- When persons and groups give expression to their beliefs about who they are sure they are, when they make demands and take action, they are inviting others to respond (Mejiuni, 2005). They employ strategies which range from non-violence to violence and outright wars. Those who they are inviting to respond also respond with the same range of strategies; strategies which reflect different dimensions of power.
- Also, as groups press their demands and take actions, they are refusing, diminishing or displacing the identities that others wish to recognize in them and claim values for those qualities that others have either refused to acknowledge in them or which others have devalued in them. In identity politics, groups deconstruct certain identities, and lay claims to others (Mejiuni, 2005).
- The claims and resistances to identities appear sensible, only against the background of other claims and social valuations (Calhoun, 1994, 24).
- The attempts by women to deconstruct some and claim other identities are borne out of the fact that, in the first place, politics gave women the identities (the second nature, not essence) through social processes that are supposed to prepare persons (in this case the female human person) for adult life.
- This is not then to suggest that the claims to recognition by ethnic, gender and religious groups have the same standing. The identity politics of women for instance, is different from those of ethnic and religious groups because it focuses attention on identity politics as it relates to *both personal/family life and the public sphere*, within religions (the demands of women to Zamfara State Governor), within ethnic groups (Ogoni women), and the national life (proposed amendments to the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria<sup>5</sup>).
- In addition, whereas identity politics of ethnic and religious groups can be about “equivalent standing with others” (Calhoun, 1994, p. 25), that is, having access to the same sort of thing that “they” have access to, identity politics of women cannot be seen this way alone. In addition to this (that is, having access to the same sort of things that they, “men”, have access to), it also has to be seen from the point of view of *a need to be treated differently*, because of her essential nature. Her essential nature makes her able to menstruate, conceive and give birth to a baby. Men don’t do these, even though they facilitate the conception of babies.

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<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 16 of this book for details.

- We return to the fact that the identity politics of women focuses attention on both the private and public spheres of life. This is an indication that *within the identity politics of ethnic and religious groups, there will be different layers and types of struggles over the essential nature of women and the social and institutional qualities attributed and applied to women* (read constructed for women) within their ethnic and religious groups and in national life.

Participants should explore the links of politics of gender identity to:

- Religious fundamentalisms.
- States legislating marriage and organizing wedding ceremonies.
- Dress code and women's ability to access resources.
- Rape of women after their husband's death: Catching the spirit, etc.

### The Processes of Identity Construction

In the second part of our exploration of the subject of the construction of identity, we would examine how the processes of sex-role socialization and informal learning are central to how women and men, but women in particular, become 'women' or acquire their gender identity. Central to these processes are teaching and learning processes. Mejiuni, Cranton and Taiwo (2015) situated socialization at the beginning of the continuum of informal learning.

#### Sex-Role Socialization

- Little and McGivern (2014) wrote that "socialization is the process through which people are taught to be proficient members of a society. It describes the ways that people come to understand societal norms and expectations, to accept society's beliefs, and to be aware of societal values. **Socialization** ... is a sociological process that occurs through socializing" (p. 147).
- They averred that human activities, including the most basic are, learned. Without sociali-

zation, a person cannot learn the material and non-material culture of her context.

- Little and McGivern (2014) wrote that socialization is essential to society, both because it trains members to operate successfully within it and because it perpetuates culture by transmitting it to new generations. And, without socialization, a society's culture would perish as members die off.
- However, critical sociologists would argue that socialization reproduces inequality from generation to generation by conveying different expectations and norms to those with different social and biological characteristics. For example, individuals are socialized differently by gender, social class, and race.
- Just as an interactionist studying socialization would be concerned with face-to-face exchanges and symbolic communication. For example, dressing baby boys in blue and baby girls in pink is a way that messages are conveyed about differences in gender roles (Little & McGivern, 2014).
- Concerning sex-role socialization, the problem is not that girls and boys are often socialized into playing specific and different roles, and that society's beliefs about and expectations of the different sexes are different (that is, being gendered into 'woman-feminine' and 'man-masculine'), the problem is that the roles assigned to the boys/men (man-masculine) are considered more important and superior to the roles assigned to the girls/women (woman-feminine).<sup>6</sup>

Let us look quickly at the agents of socialization that Little and McGivern (2014) categorized into social group agents and institutional agents and how they engage in sex-role socialization. It is the socializing processes, intra-relations and inter-relationships within and between these groups that constitute the socialization process.

- The "family is the first agent of socialization. Mothers and fathers, siblings and grandparents,

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 1 of this book for an exploration of how gender roles signify hierarchy.

plus members of an extended family, all teach a child what he or she needs to know. For example, they show the child how to use objects ... how to relate to others ... and how the world works” (p. 150). However, sociologists understand that families do not socialize children in a vacuum; race, social class, religion, and other societal factors play an important role in socialization.

- For town, city and literate people, in preparation for the birth of a child: the names that we would give and the colours of the clothes we buy have feminine and masculine associations.
- In the process of nurturing/socialization: female and male children are continuously told what a person of their gender should and should not do and how they should or should not behave; and what roles they should or should not and ought not to play within the household and in the public sphere.
- Through peer influence and societal/community codes, ethics, disciplinary processes and pressures, women and men are told who it is appropriate to be.
- In schools (and other learning centres) through the formal curriculum – what we teach and fail to teach and how we teach; through non-formal education; and in informal learning processes (including the hidden curriculum), we tell women and men, girls and boys: what they should believe about themselves, about others, and their world; and who they are/should be, and who it is best to be. Most children and young people, then, internalize what they have been taught. Some resist roles, beliefs and values that are being foisted on them, at times, causing disruptions to themselves and others in the process.<sup>7</sup>
- In religious institutions: through preaching (read teaching); informal learning and non-formal education programmes, women are told who it is valuable to be.<sup>8</sup>
- Through rules, regulations, policies, the codes of conduct/ethics in formal (and informal) workplaces and in governmental structures, people are taught how to behave in and navigate these systems. These structures are usually male-centric, and they have had difficulties adjusting to the needs and interests of women when they have admitted women into those institutions.<sup>9</sup>
- In the old media (TV, radio, satellite broadcasting, newspapers, magazines, and films); and the new media (The Internet and social media), stereotypical views of the identities of women and men are prevalent, they are continuously being reinforced and they persist.<sup>10</sup>
- And, in all the above, through a system of rewards and punishment, society ensures that women become the ‘real women’ that they are expected to be.
- As we would see in this second leg of our exploration of the construction of feminine and masculine identities, the processes of socialization, teaching, learning, unlearning and transformation of beliefs about women and men do not stop when humans become adults. They continue to learn (pick-up skills, acquire knowledge, attitudes and values), through formal, non-formal, but mainly through informal learning, in their entire life course.
- According to Butler (1994, p. 37), the result of (sex-role) socialization process is that

<sup>7</sup> See Fashina 2001 and Mejiuni, 2013 for how different learning processes construct women’s identities. See and read Chapters 6 and 7 of this book, as some of the fall outs of those processes. See also, Chapter 19 of this book for an exploration of feminist discourses of how education can empower women.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 3 of this book; Mejiuni (2006). *Confounding and empowering women ...*; and Mejiuni (2013a). *Women and power: ...* for how religion shapes women’s identities.

<sup>9</sup> See Chapter 14 of this book for an exploration of the gendered nature of the workplace.

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter 13 of this book for the examination of conscious, unconscious and hidden bias in the representation of gender issues in the media.



culture, figured as male, active and abstract, determines how the “raw nature” of women is to be “cooked” or gendered, in order to have a real woman.

- *Once the real woman is obtained, she becomes an ‘object of desire’, ‘can’t think’, ‘too weak to partake in key political affairs’.* What she becomes through the social process then determines her right to give or withhold consent in sexual relationships, her right to partake in decision-making processes that affect her life, etc. and thus her quality of life.
- In my study of how formal education, religion and informal learning construct the identities of women, referenced earlier, when the participants in the research were asked how they came about their views regarding women’s roles in the private and public spheres, Folarin said:

Firstly, my mother’s way of life has greatly influenced my view of the expected roles of women in making the home. While in public, people like Prof. (Mrs) ... has tremendously changed my view about women’s role outside the home. A Woman has to be fearless, diligent, hardworking and contribute greatly to the development of her community.

- Ajoke, a female student said one is scolded for not learning particular skills (cooking and cleaning) and invites negative responses for expressing views that deviate from societal expectations of women’s roles.
- Almost all the participants cited their experiences, upbringing, and religion as influences on their views about the roles of women in the public and private spheres. Female students, women in the informal economy and female apprentices also alluded to ‘the way things are’. A handful of literate female and male participants referred to culture, tradition and socialization. And a male participant said it was “by carefully watching women over time.” This means he had learned by observation.

### **Informal Learning**

- Informal learning is central to our lives and it is pervasive. We engage in it, right from birth (when we suckle at the breasts of our mothers or the silicone nipple of feeding bottles for the first time) until our last moments on earth, that is, from cradle to grave.
- How did we learn before we got into pre-schools? Through our parents, families, friends and neighbours and through socialization some would respond. How did we learn after high schools or universities when we stopped schooling? Many people will quickly remember the adult and non-formal education programmes and courses they attended; the adult basic education programmes, continuing professional education in colleges and universities, and the workshops, conferences, seminars, retreats, and so on they had attended.
- Others might remember it was through reading a novel or a newspaper, listening to a conversation at the sideline of a conference, or on the metro, visiting a museum, learning through their participation in the activities of an advocacy group, watching programmes on TV, and just surfing the net.
- Yet others may remember lessons they picked up when a teacher in the civic class in their high school referred to certain groups of people in a particular way, how the teacher in another class paid attention to the needs and progress being made by certain categories of students in her class, the way their parents, and the friends they met on the football field referred to persons who were of a different colour or creed; what they learned from watching a film, participation in some community festivals, or in marking the remembrance day for their countries’ fallen heroes, and what they had learned from shopping in the open markets or supermarkets.

### **What then is informal learning**

- Mejiuni, Cranton and Taiwo (2015) wrote that: “Informal learning is thought of as

experiential, incidental and or unstructured, non-institutional learning.” Citing Hrimech (2005), Livingstone (2000), and Marsick & Volpe (1999), they wrote that it is the construction, co-construction, or acquisition of new knowledge, understanding, skills or attitudes, which people undertake whether consciously or unconsciously.

- They stated that “when it is a conscious process, the control of what, how, where, and when to learn rests with the learner. When it is an unconscious process, the locus of control is diffused and the process, usually does not involve *teaching* by persons specially designated as facilitators, instructors or teachers” (p. 24).
- Mejiuni, Cranton and Taiwo (2015) identified the types of informal learning that have been documented in the literature as: tacit and explicit informal learning, self-directed learning, auto-didactic learning, and the informal learning that occurs within formal and non-formal teaching-learning interactions, but is not a part of the curriculum, usually called the ‘hidden curriculum’.
- Informal learning also takes place within the context of formal and non-formal educational interactions when the learning is outside of the actual course or workshop.
- Schugurensky (2000) provides a typology of informal learning, broadly based on the criteria of intentionality and awareness, and from his typology and the different forms of informal learning identified in the literature, Mejiuni, Cranton and Taiwo (2015) identified four types of informal learning – tacit learning, incidental learning, explicit learning and self-directed learning – that they posited as occurring on a continuum, ranging from the tacit, which is unconscious and diffused, to the most explicit form, which is self-directed learning.
- They defined tacit learning as:

The most ubiquitous form of unconscious informal learning. It unfolds mostly through living, socialization, and spontaneous apprehension of knowledge and information as part of everyday living. It is

how we pick up much of our outlook on the world both good – kindness to strangers – and bad – racism, homophobia, sexism. It is possible for persons to pass through life, from cradle to grave and not notice, pay attention to, and reflect on their tacit knowledge (p. xliii).

- They posited that “incidental learning is learning that we are not aware of when it occurs but is acknowledged later on reflection upon incidents, practices, and processes, that we have participated in or witnessed. It is a form of unconscious informal learning” (p. xliii).
- They defined self-directed learning as: “learning in which individuals make decisions about their own learning; it can take place in formal (where students are asked to participate in decisions within a course, or where they make decisions about which courses to take within a program), non-formal (where students contribute to the decisions), and informal contexts (where individuals initiate and engage in independent learning projects)” (p. xliii).
- Finally, they described explicit learning “as another form of deliberate learning but not marked by the same level of deliberative intensity as self-directed learning” (p. xlii).
- The first two forms of informal learning the authors identified are unconscious informal learning while the other two are deliberate forms of informal learning. They made the case that it is possible for an individual to move from noticing and becoming aware of an informal learning incident, to engaging in explicit or self-directed learning to deepen the understanding of an issue or clarify the tacit learning.
- The figure of the continuum of informal learning Mejiuni, Cranton and Taiwo (2015) provided (see Figure 4.1) shows different shades of the same phenomenon and the possibility of moving to the right on the continuum, between the different types of informal learning.



<b>Tacit Learning</b> Socialization Part of everyday experience	<b>Incidental Learning</b> Learning is unintentional Retrospective recognition of learning	<b>Explicit Learning</b> Characterized by some degree of intentionality	<b>Self-directed Learning</b> Characterized by a high degree of intentionality
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**Fig. 4.1:** Forms of informal learning on a continuum

**Source:** Mejiuni, Cranton & Taiwo, 2015, p. xxvi

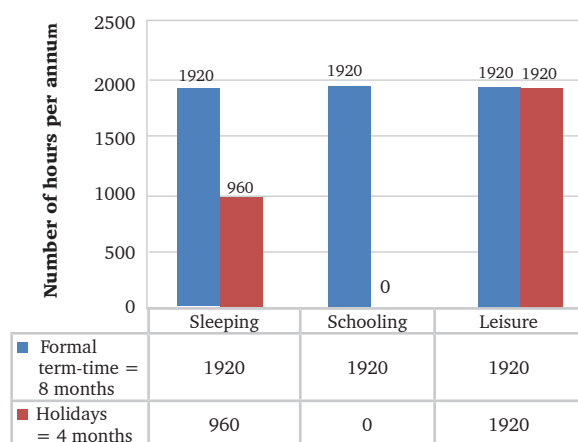
- There is also an important point they made, and it is that while informal learning is a distinct type of learning, it also interacts with, and it is present in organized and structured teaching learning interactions and contexts in the formal school system and in non-formal education. Therefore, it is an important part of the education network/system, albeit a beggared cousin.
- The contexts of informal learning**
- In the literature on informal learning, it has been recorded that individuals, who are also members of groups acquire attitudes, values, skills and knowledge and gain new insight when interacting with family members, friends and neighbours (Avoseh, 2001); during income generating activities or work (Marsick & Volpe, 1999; Livingstone & Eichler, 2005); during household, leisure, voluntary and community activities (English, 2002; Findsen, 2006;); in social movements (Hernandez, 1997; Lander, 2003; Obilade & Mejiuni, 2006; Gouin, 2009); during formal learning activities and in formal educational contexts (Coffield, 2000; Jamieson, 2009 & Mejiuni, 2013a); in markets (Jubas, 2011; Mejiuni, 2008; Akinsooto & Mejiuni, 2014); and as they reflect on their own experience and those of others.
- Persons learn through travelling, in libraries, through the mass media, the Internet, in zoos and museums, through socialization and informal relationships and structures, such as in supervisor-employee, mentor-mentee, master-apprenticeship and seller-buyer situations and relationships.
- From their reflections on and analyses of contributions to their volume on informal learning, Cranton, Taiwo and Mejiuni (2015) identified diverse locations, spaces, conditions, and relationships, as the contexts of informal learning that authors in the 17 chapters in their book recorded. The contexts include formal workplaces and formal education institutions comprising healthcare contexts and helping professions, public administration, the army, childhood and middle childhood and higher education, and not-for-profit youth organizations.
- Authors reported participants whose learning happened during online conversations and online courses; during non-formal education activities such as adult literacy classes, and an educational program designed to help establish and enhance self-reflective practice among mental health practitioners.
- The other contexts were: learning in the contexts of relationships, specifically, relationships of trust in the private and public spheres; learning in the context of the human body, specifically, a woman's breast – the diseased and healing states of a woman's breast (in the context of the diagnosis, treatment and other experiences associated with breast cancer), and the functional and nurturing role of a woman's breast or breastfeeding (in the context of limited support and, at times, hegemonic discourses that resulted in negative attitudes to breastfeeding). In the context of the human body, adversity resulted

in learning, and being a woman was central to the learning.

- The spaces in which different forms of informal learning have occurred were educational, and in the main, non-educational contexts; economic spaces, social spaces, cyber spaces, physical spaces, and spaces where persons with shared interests meet.
- These contexts are important factors in the informal learning reported by authors because there is often a direct link between the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are learned or insights gained, and the interests and needs of the learners (or the interest and needs of significant others) in those contexts.
- If informal learning occurs in these contexts, it means it is linked with living, it is linked with day-to-day activities, and so it means persons learn as long as they live. The key point that we need to take along is that in the case of tacit and incidental learning, it is not a conscious process, whereas, in the case of explicit and self-directed learning, the learner deliberately seeks knowledge, skills, attitudes or hopes to change or reinforce beliefs and values, albeit outside organized structures and institutions.
- However, our tacit learning is very important because that is where unconscious and hidden bias which are learned processes, are formed.<sup>11</sup> The unconscious and hidden bias then become our frames of reference<sup>12</sup> which may be noticed and changed or may never be noticed, and so there is no possibility of changing it. Our frames of reference could also be noticed and reinforced, including through explicit and self-directed learning.
- It is within these teaching-learning processes that the construction and internalization of gender identities take place.

The forms and the contexts of informal learning we have highlighted should sensitize us to the possibilities of a wide range of influences on children, youths and adults' identities in an entire life course. Within patriarchal contexts and institutions, the implications for the continuing feminization of girls/women and masculinization of boys/men are apparent. Just the same way, these same forms, processes and contexts of informal learning offer possibilities – they could be locations for resisting oppressive, restrictive and discriminating identities, and laying strategic claims to others.

If we have doubts, let us reflect on the number of hours of informal learning that children and students may experience while schooling (during term) and while on vacation, so we can explore the implications of the number of hours for what they might learn and the impact of their learning on the formation of their identities. See Figures 4.2 and 4.3.

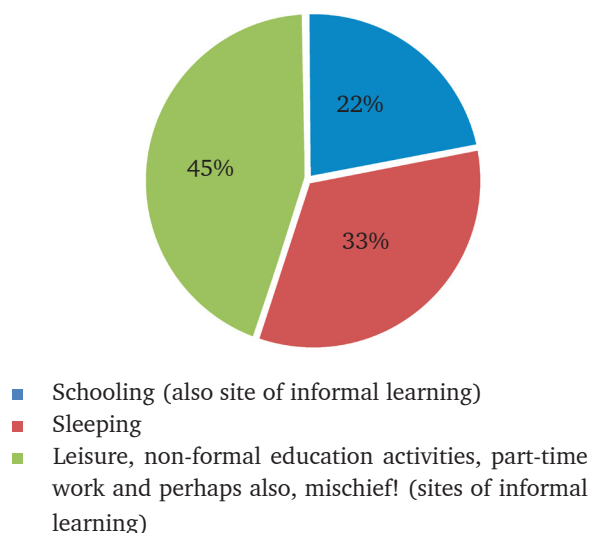


**Fig. 4.2:** Probable number of hours pupils and students spend on sleeping, schooling, and leisure per annum

**Source:** Author's reckoning

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter 13 of this book for discussions on the role of unconscious and hidden bias in how we form attitudes and behave.

<sup>12</sup> Those assumptions and expectations that help us to understand our world and our relationship with it (that is, make meaning of our world) (Mezirow & Associates, 2000; Cranton, 2005).



**Fig. 4.3:** Probable percentage of hours per annum spent by pupils and students on sleeping, schooling and leisure during formal term-time and holidays

**Source:** Author's reckoning

#### EXERCISE 4.2

##### Questions to ponder

1. How do physical/geographical location, individual biographies, and cultural, social, institutional and historical locations influence identity/identity construction?
2. How crucial is women's identities to their empowerment or disempowerment?

#### Identities Can be Used to Either Empower or Disempower Women

Identities can be used:

- To deny women some rights and to grant women some other rights.
- To lower women's self-esteem.
- As the basis for and justification of violence against women.
- To deny women's participation in politics and the public sphere.

This means that on the basis of gender identities, women may/will be able to, or they will be unable to participate in sustainable development.

#### What Should We Do

##### We need to:

- Deconstruct identities that disempower us
- Make strategic claims to certain identities
- Use the processes through which identities are constructed to achieve these.

Finally

- I urge us to keep this excerpt from Mary Rogers (1998) in view. In her discussion of women's identity, she said:

The projects of selfhood and identity invite us, in sum, to demonstrate the possibilities buried under what culture has deemed impossible or inconceivable... To secure ourselves and enact our identities in liberated ways requires bringing to the cultural surface what lies buried beneath its institutionalized sedimentations ... In lieu of seizing those challenges, we can remain queued up in the lines of society's matrix of domination. We can remain what culture has named us rather than what we name ourselves (pp. 373-374).

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# 5

## Cent[e]ring and Decent[e]ring Gender<sup>1</sup>

### Outline

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- The Concepts of Difference, Diversity and Social Justice
  - The Notions of Difference and Diversity
  - The Concept of Social (In)Justice
  - Cent[e]ring Gender: Difference and Diversity as Assets, Strengths and Opportunities
    - To Centre Gender ...
  - Decent[e]ring Gender: Rethinking Difference and Diversity as Sources of Discriminatory Practices
    - To Decentre Gender
- 

### The Concepts of Difference, Diversity and Social Justice

Let us begin our exploration of these inter-connected concepts by first examining the notions of difference and diversity.

#### The Notions of Difference and Diversity

- According to Hill (2005), the notion of diversity implies dissimilarities, multiples, discontinuities and difference; so multiculturalism and diversity include the celebration of difference. Citing Young (1991), Hill wrote that the post-modern notion of difference means “specificity, variation, heterogeneity” (p. 190).
- Marshall (1998) wrote that the term “difference” was first used by ‘Second

Wave’ feminist writers, who defined the term politically. Harris and White (2013) averred that whereas ‘Second Wave’ feminists “emphasized the sameness of those within the category ‘woman’ and their difference from men, ... later, feminism moved towards exploring different and distinctive women’s voices, and emphasized the differences of and intersections between age, class, disability, ethnicity, race and sexuality” (p. 148).

- Black feminists, including Audre Lorde, bell hooks, etc. have objected to the misleading universalism of feminism, stressing “the deep differences existing between women at all levels, especially with regards to access to scarce resources and power as a result of

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<sup>1</sup> This is the edited version of the material which I used to facilitate the module entitled Centering and Decentering Gender, at the July-August 2018 session of the Centre for Gender and Social Policy Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University’s Bespoke Residential Certificate Courses (BRCC). The module comprised three topics: “The concepts of difference, diversity and social justice”; “Centering gender – difference and diversity as assets, strengths and opportunities”; and “Decentering gender – Rethinking difference and diversity as sources of discriminatory practices.” I had presented some sections of the first topic as one of the topics in the module entitled: Sensitization to Gender Issues within Discourses of Development and Social (In)justice, at the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) – Ebonyi State University (EBSU) Gender Training Workshop held between 4th & 5th April 2018 in Abakaliki.



ethnic differences and divisions based on class and sexual orientation (Marshall, 1998, p. 159).

- So, whereas some feminists (Kate Millett and Shulamith Firestone, for instance) hold that women's difference from men is a principal manifestation of women's oppression by men, others (Mary Daly for instance) hold that difference refers more to the fact that women have different experiences of work, love and family, and a different psychology from men. They view difference as a cause to embrace and celebrate (Marshall, 1998).
- According to Hill (2005), Jean Francois Lyotard's position on difference contests "totalizing narratives and regimentation because such narratives minimize, devalue, deny and erase difference" (p. 191). Thus, within discourses and movements for social justice, "recognizing and valuing difference has become the central component of anti-oppressive practice" (Harris & White, 2013, p. 148).
- The challenges scholars have pointed out in regard to the notion of difference are that:
  1. It could be used as a means of 'othering' by those who wish to distribute power unevenly. According to Hill (2005), the processes of marginalization are also enacted through discourses of difference;
  2. Concentrating on individual differences can obscure shared interests, thereby weakening the potential strength that could be drawn from uniting against common sources of injustice and oppression (Harris & White, 2013); and
  3. Politically neutral or uncritically held notions of difference could disguise social inequalities both between men and women, and among women.

### **The Concept of Social (In)Justice**

We shall explore social justice from the point of view of non-discrimination, honouring and respecting difference and diversity; identity; and egalitarianism.

### **Social justice as non-discrimination and honouring and respecting difference/diversity**

- Social justice means non-discrimination on the basis of sex, class, race, ethnicity, creed, age, sexual orientation, disability/able-bodiedness, and so on; it means inclusion and respect for and honouring difference; and it is central to discourses of identity.
- One could also read social justice as non-discrimination on the basis of difference or identity, be it natural or constructed.
- Marshall (1998) wrote that to discriminate is to treat unfairly. Social injustice or discrimination includes *minimizing, trivializing, and non-recognition* of the issues, concerns, experiences, interests and needs of individuals and groups who are minorities; that is, those who are different from the majority or mainstream.
- The values, beliefs, cultures, and needs of the minority have not been normalized so they are on the edge or the periphery. However, minimizing, trivializing, and non-recognition of the issues, concerns, experiences, interests and needs of the individuals have a negative impact on the well-being of those concerned. It shows contempt for the persons or people who are different from those in the mainstream.
- Discrimination also includes attribution of characteristics to individuals and groups (stereotyping), characteristics, which, when socially and institutionally applied to groups of individuals, define their rights and duties, which then affect the quality of their lives (Wiley, 1994).
- Stereotyping/prejudicing (preconceived opinion or bias against or in favour of a thing or a person), could be positive or negative, but it is usually negative. It is usually negative or unfavourable attitude towards a group or its members. Prejudice is characterized by stereotyped beliefs that are not tested against reality, but rather have to do with a person's own feelings and attitudes. It is inherently unjust.



- Discrimination also involves *unequal opportunities to access resources* (usually stemming from social and institutional(ized) prejudices), and *unequal and unfair distribution of rights and resources*.
- Finally, *to discriminate is to dominate*: to insist on prioritizing the interests and needs of a group over those of others, by fiat. Such prioritization would usually not have a rational basis; it is usually steeped in unconscious or hidden bias (prejudices) and subsequently, explicitly enforced through subtle or overt exercise of power.
- The group that dominates and prioritizes its interests and needs, would then usually also *go on to enforce its own values, beliefs, moral precepts, and moral defaults*. The dimensions of social injustice therefore range from the seemingly innocuous to abuse and outright violence.
- Marshall (1998) informs us that two key texts that explain prejudice are Theodor Adorno et al.'s *The authoritarian personality* (1950) which provides detailed personality foundations of prejudice and Gordon Allport's *The nature of prejudice* (1954) which synthesizes research findings attempting to integrate the psychological, structural, and historical foundations of prejudice.
- In *Thinking sociologically*, Zygmunt Bauman (cited in Marshall, 1998, p. 522) said prejudice results in double moral standards.

### EXERCISE 5.1

#### Questions to ponder

1. Have you ever sighted social injustice that emanated from difference? Can you cite the social injustice you sighted?

#### Social (in)justice from the point of view of identity

The preceding section viewed social injustice or discrimination from the point of view of difference.

It is important to consider social (in)justice from the point of view of identity. When social justice or injustice is viewed from the point of view of identity, a slightly more nuanced perspective on the phenomenon emerges.

- Identity is sameness and difference, who we are, and what we believe in and value, which often also includes who others think we are, what they think we believe or should believe, and value.
- Kluckhohn and Murray's dictum, cited in Mennel (1994), which is that: every person is, in certain respects: "like all other[s], like some other[s], and like no other[s]" is a good way to understand the notion of identity. The dictum focuses on characteristics that all human beings share in common, characteristics which human beings share with certain other human beings, and the way in which individuals are unique, leading to discussions on personal and collective identities.<sup>2</sup>
- If one examines the point about *sameness*, that is, what all human beings share in common, or our homogeneity, that is a good point from which to provide equal opportunities to access rights and resources.
- The point about *group difference* is that it compels us to attend to difference in beliefs, values, and needs.
- *Individual difference* impels us to pay attention to the peculiar socio-historical circumstance of individuals.
- However, from the same lens, we will notice that there are inter and intra-group values and beliefs, and prejudices that could perpetuate social injustice.
- Beliefs, for instance, about women's inferiority to men cut across creeds/religions, abuse in children-adult relationship cuts across racial and ethnic boundaries, and the same applies to attitudes towards persons with disabilities.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 4 of this book for a more detailed explanation of the notion of identity.

### **Social justice as egalitarianism**

- Social justice is egalitarianism, a doctrine which sees equality of condition, outcome, reward, and privilege as a desirable goal of social organization.
- Marshall (1998) contended that, the basis of this belief is both religious and secular and that most academic debates about the concept of justice start with John Rawls' famous 'difference principle' written in his book, *A theory of justice* (1972), which asserts that *inequalities in the distribution of scarce goods (for example, power, money, or access to healthcare) are justified only if they serve to increase the advantage of the least favored groups in society*.
- Flores et al. (2014) wrote that scholars are in agreement that social justice refers to *a society which values diversity by providing all people and groups with respect, dignity, fairness, basic rights, and opportunities*.
- They contended that the key difference in definitions of social justice rests on whether scholars include *internal or psychological resources* (for example, psychological health, critical thinking, and/or awareness) in the definition *alongside the typical external socio-political resources* (for example, economic, legal, political rights).
- Citing Adams et al. (1997), Sumner (2011) said social justice includes an *equitable vision of society*, one in which "*all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure*" (p. 64).

### **Solutions to social injustice**

- Theorists, scholars, policy makers, practitioners and activists who are concerned about social justice, address the concern from the dimensions earlier identified; that is, difference/diversity, identity and egalitarianism. These dimensions interface and are, at times, different stages/phases of the problem.
- The solutions either address or do not address (enough) historical injustice and

the structural issues that led to injustice and measures to ensure that the injustice stops/ does not persist.

- Such measures include paying attention to difference/identity, and to the issues, concerns, experiences, interests and needs of individuals and their groups and improving the well-being of those who had been affected by a lack of attention to difference.
- The measures also include giving all people equal opportunities to access resources and ensuring fair distribution of rights and resources, including power resources in a way that would assist historically disadvantaged persons in specific contexts to benefit.
- For instance, education, broadly conceived, is a key factor in individuals' and/or groups' capacity to gain access to power resources.
- The power resources that Marshall (1998) identified are wealth and control over jobs, competence, expert knowledge, control of information, organizational capacity, control of instruments of force, and occupation of certain social positions. And, Mejiuni (2013) added "participation as equals in decision making processes" to the list of power resources.

### **The role of policies and laws in ensuring social justice**

Many scholars, theorists and activists will quickly point to the role of policies (governmental or organizational/institutional positions, strategies, and course of action, which also stipulate structures for their implementation and usually backed by a legal framework) and laws in ensuring social justice. Let us take a few examples.

- The United Nations (UN) has been in the forefront of nudging member states to secure the rights of their citizens, promote inclusion, and non-discriminatory policies in regard to the education and health of children, women, persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples; their employment; and stemming the tide of violence against these groups.
- In the US, there are laws protecting persons against discrimination on the basis of race

and gender in workplaces; Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII), prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, gender, or national origin.

- The Equal Pay Act of 1963 (EPA), protects men and women who perform substantially equal work in the same establishment from gender-based wage discrimination.
- The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA), protects individuals who are 40 years of age or older.
- Title I and Title V of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended (ADA), prohibit employment discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities in the private sector, and in state and local governments. Sections 501 and 505 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, prohibit discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities who work in the federal government.
- Title II of the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA) of 2008, prohibits employment discrimination based on genetic information about an applicant, employee, or former employee; and the Civil Rights Act of 1991, among other things, provides monetary damages in cases of intentional employment discrimination.
- In Nigeria, the Federal Character Commission is the agency that is charged with addressing the issue of balanced employment opportunities for Nigerians of different ethnic backgrounds in Federal Government establishments.
- Nigeria has the National Gender Policy (2006) which is premised on the principles of commitment to gender mainstreaming as a development approach; recognition of gender issues as central to and critical to the achievement of national development goals and objectives; and promotion and protection of human rights, social justice and equity, among others.
- Nigeria also has a Child's Rights Act (CRA), which is yet to be domesticated by all states. Although

the 1st Session of the 8th National Assembly refused to domesticate the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) or pass laws protecting women's rights broadly (rejecting the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill in March 2016), the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) was passed into law in May, 2015.

- In rule-governed societies, policies and laws ought to work for social justice. But even in those societies, negative attitudes to 'others' and prejudices remain fossilized in many minds and institutions.
- For instance, the perception that the recent killing of Black persons in the US was racially motivated, led to the huge protests against the killing of Black persons in American cities, leading to the 'Black Lives Matter' movement. Also, the allegations of sexual abuse that were brought up by women against the then candidate Mr Trump after the 'access of Hollywood' tape was made public, also fed the #metoo movement, resulting in series of allegations of sexual abuse, misconduct and impropriety, being brought against public officers and rich business men. Some of them have had to resign their positions or were forced to do so.
- So in spite of policies and laws against discriminatory practices, negative attitudes and prejudices remain. One then wonders, is it that attitudes lag behind the laws, where they exist? Why do discriminatory practices persist in spite of the policy and legal measures for addressing discriminatory practices?

***Policies that promote difference alone or singular identities can go wrong***

- Plakhotnik and Delgado (2008), in reviewing Sen's (2006) book entitled *Identity and violence: The illusion of destiny*, wrote that Sen warns against the reduction of affiliations to a singular identity and a redefinition of identity into a bellicose term.
- Sen also questions plural monoculturalism, which is often now referred to as

multiculturalism (where different groups co-exist but do not mix), overemphasizing difference.

- He indicates that persons could honour their identity, and yet “open up to see others and ourselves beyond singular categorizations that are often polarizing. It involves opening up to the idea that we have more in common than we would like to believe” (Plakhotnik & Delgado, 2008, p. 341).
- Others suggest critical multiculturalism, which are forms of multicultural (education) that challenge systemic discrimination; that is, challenge power relations based on social structures of race or culture, gender, class, etc. (Tisdell, 2005).

***From the points of view of difference and identity, or difference and sameness, it is possible to forge ahead with workable social justice initiatives***

- In the literature, it is thought that the corollaries of fair treatment and fair share of rights/benefits are fair and just share of responsibilities and burdens.
- State actors, persons in leadership positions and positions of influence (such as those who work in cultural institutions, including educational institutions), have a responsibility to ensure social justice, whether or not they have been affected by social injustice.
- Similarly, those whose interests are being protected by measures aimed at redressing social injustice have a responsibility and a burden to protect persons who belong to other minority groups, who are being unfairly treated or could be unfairly treated.
- This is where attention to critical multiculturalism and informal learning are key.

### **Cent[e]ring Gender: Difference and Diversity as Assets, Strengths and Opportunities**

This topic should help us to think of the implications for development and wellbeing, of focusing on ‘gender’ as a category; that putting

gender at the centre of policies, laws, budgets, planning, research and practice is not just necessary, it is central to the achievement of social justice, empowerment and development.

#### **To Centre Gender ...**

- Is to acknowledge the specific features that differentiate the bodies of women from the bodies of men, and also accept that in reality, the characteristics ascribed to women and men have become **second nature**. *To centre gender is therefore to account for the practical implications of the reality of gender identity.*
- Is to recognize and acknowledge that although gender is a construction, the persons women and men become or are expected to become as a result of the process of ‘cooking’ is real in *the hearts and minds of persons.*
- Is an acknowledgement that although the assumptions society makes and the expectations each society has of women and men, their interests and needs, the roles they are expected to play, the responsibilities they are expected to take on, are, in fact, habitus, **second nature**, they [those assumptions, expectations, interests, ...] *have shaped behaviours, actions, knowledge production and dissemination, and they powerfully impact the well being of women and men in the private and public spheres.*
- Is to acknowledge the position that women and men occupy in the *continuum of power and how unequal power relationships disadvantage the two sexes differently.*
- Is recognizing and acknowledging women and men’s *differential access to resources, rights, privileges and opportunities.*
- Is to recognize and acknowledge *the roles of culture*, religion, the socialization process, informal learning, and the old and new media in shaping the identities of persons especially women and their contexts.
- Is to recognize the differences in women and men’s biology, the differences in social roles and responsibilities, differences in

assumptions and expectations, differences in needs and interests and *the implications for women's economic participation, women's health, women's political participation, violence against women (VAW), policies and laws, development planning, formal workforce participation, etc.*

- Is to recognize how the real *biological/physiological differences* between women and men, and women and men's features/characteristics that are **second nature** are *thought of in the negative and or the positive.*

The preceding is our attempt to explore the implications for development and wellbeing, of focusing on 'gender' as a category. Exercise 5.2 below, should support our examination of the [probable] positive features/characteristics of the biology/physiology of women and men (the uniqueness of both sexes), and the [probable] positive features/characteristics of the traits ... women and men exhibit, that are actually **second nature**.

### EXERCISE 5.2

**Features, characteristics, traits, feelings, sensibilities, knowledge systems, beliefs, and norms about gender that are assets, strengths and opportunities**

Question 1:

- In the context of the foregoing, what would 'gender blind', 'gender neutral' and 'gender sensitivity/insensitivity' mean? Cite specific practices, processes, laws and policies from your environment that exemplify these terms.

Question 2:

- Read Mejiuni (2013). *Women and power: Education, religion and identity* (pp. 251-253 & pp. 258-259). Write out the features attributed to women or that women attributed to themselves that you would consider a strength, an asset/a positive trait or an opportunity to empower the self and others.

### Decent[e]ring Gender: Rethinking Difference and Diversity as Sources of Discriminatory Practices

When women and men were asked whether they would vote for a woman who is contesting for governorship/presidency or head of a group with female and male members, a semi-literate/illiterate woman, Oreoluwa, wondered why men thought women could not do what they could do, and she added:

After all, there is no special role for the penis in those jobs, and some women even attain higher than men (Mejiuni, 2013, p. 24).

Women and men were asked this question among others, in Mejiuni's study, which explored the processes through which formal education, especially higher education; religious teachings and practices; and informal learning construct Nigerian women's identities; and the implications of the resulting identities for women's civic-political participation, their experience of violence and their capacity to resist violence.

#### To Decentre Gender

- To decentre is to displace from the centre or from a central position. To decentre is to break down into separate parts, in order to understand its meaning differently, from how it was previously understood.
- For our subject of interest, gender identity is to be decentered, so that neither nature nor society confers identity. This means our reproductive organs and hormones would not confer identity or essence or make us who we are, just as our *second nature* (including societal assumptions and expectations, and also ascribed roles and responsibilities) would not confer identity.
- This is because, according to Calhoun (1994), cited in Mejiuni (2005, p. 295), deconstructionists hold that "there is no categorical truth in unmediated nature,



neither is there an absolute truth in the mediation of society.”

- However, even those who believe that gender identity is to be deconstructed, also make strategic claims to certain identities. Resistance-postmodernists for example, would see the deconstruction and reclaiming of various aspects of one’s individual and group-based identities as an important part of challenging power relations.
- Yet, others want to go beyond single, categorical identities, and reckon *the connections* between social structures and individual identity, and how social structures of race, gender, class, religion, national origin, and sexuality inform our identities.
- One of the key reasons for deconstructing identities, and in our case deconstructing gender identities, is to ensure that women’s identities, their collective identities and the way women are different from men (even though women are not a homogenous group) do not become sources of discriminatory practices.
- Women’s biology/physiology should not become the sources or reasons for discriminating against women.
- Societal assumptions and expectations, and the roles and responsibilities ascribed to women should not become sources of discrimination against women.
- A few illustrations are in order:
  1. Let us examine Oreoluwa’s position, which serves to counter biological determinism
  2. Examine the issue of pregnancy (and child care) at the work place or while seeking employment; how do persons handle the biological fact of pregnancy and the issues that arise there from in workplaces? Consider surrogacy? Delay giving birth to children or even abstain? Grant paternity leave to men or parental leave to both women and men? Revisit the practice of wet nursing (practiced centuries back), etc.?

3. Consider an anecdote: The case of the university professor who said the most qualified candidate for a faculty position is not suitable because she may have to take ‘bed rest’ every time she is pregnant. What does this mean for social justice?
4. Discuss the position men and women take that women of childbearing age and women with young children should not participate in party political activities
5. What does the belief that women are objects of desire mean for social justice?
6. Discuss how women’s bodies are thought of in different cultures, in beauty pageants, and the beauty industry.
7. Examine: the objectification of women in hip hop/rhythm and poetry (RAP) music; women’s involvement in hip hop music and their seeming self-objectification; and hip hop feminism.

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