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<b>Serial No</b>	
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<b>Title</b>	<b>Problems in Examining the Position of Women Cross-Culturally</b>
<b>Keywords</b>	
<b>Description</b>	<b>Problems in Examining the Position of Women Cross-Culturally</b>
<b>Category</b>	<b>Health Science and Technology</b>
<b>Publisher</b>	
<b>Publication Date</b>	
<b>Signature</b>	

# Problems in Examining the Position of Women Cross-Culturally

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It has been customary in anthropology in the past two decades or so, to assume (rather than demonstrate) certain universals and to record observations of other cultures and make interpretations that appear to confirm the (assumed) universals. The assumptions simply represent the generalized ideas we have about how people of societies are, based on the experiences we have had within our culture. Experiences in such a society create a mind set that organises thoughts, values and beliefs into categories that act as prisms through which other cultures are viewed. The mind set includes the conceptual framework that is used to organise and interpret such perceptions. In short, the experiences derived from our society are inappropriately projected into the institution and behaviours of other societies: dominance hierarchies and sexual stratifications are constructed where they do not exist; women are seen (or, more accurately, not seen) as subordinates and peripheral regardless of what they they are doing, since what women do, by definition, is unimportant. Such preconceptions are then reinforced by observing only what men do, since, again by definition, it is men who do the important things.

Most ethnographic reports have focused on data gathered from male informants, such

information being considered to represent the reality of the culture as a whole. Yet as Rogers (1978) has emphasized, two quite different and contradictory views or ideologies may, and indeed often do exist side by side within cultures. Male perceptions that male activities are predominantly important are not necessarily shared by the women whose cultural systems might give superior values to the roles and activities of women.

Another problem has to do with the concepts of «women's position». Careful cross-cultural comparisons have begun to document not only that there can be no simple statement of a universal «position» of women in society, but that even within most societies there is no such simple entity as «women's status». As Naomi Quina (1977) has emphasized, it is more useful to view women's in any culture as a «composite of many different variables, often casually independent one from another» (p.183). In any given society women may have what appears to an observer to be an inferior position with respect to some areas of life and an equal or superior one in others. It is important, however, as Atkinson (1982) warns, not to ignore the significance of sexual stereotypes or to presume «that women's influence in one context cancels out their degradation in another» (p.248). Thus, to understand women's position within any given society, it is necessary to examine the particularities of their experiences in the entire social context of their culture and not selectively use excerpts from it.

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Furthermore, within any area of a society's life, the «position» of women will often be variously affected by class or age or kin relationship, as well as by history of that culture.

The method of using selective examples from different societies in order to «prove» the existence of universals is one that one validly views with suspicion when it is used in other contexts. For example, we do not accept the sociological argument that all females are Coy because «Coy» behaviours may be cited in a variety of species. Not only does it remove particular behaviours from social and historic context, as noted above, but it uses different measures or definitions of the particular features being examined such as participation in religious rituals or office holding or deference gestures, as equivalent measures of position or authority. But while the method uses different measures, it imputes the same meaning or significance to the behaviours, whether or not they bear some resemblance to each others.

And finally, the method of citing specific behaviours from each of several societies as analogous indicators, for example, of women's subordination, ignores the possibility that the meaning and significance of the behaviour for the people involved may be (and probably is) quite different from the interpretations placed on them by outside viewers who have their own values, beliefs, and preconceptions. This is, then, an approach that fails to consider how the women themselves interpret their own behaviour (Collier & Rosaldo, 1981). We must recognize that measures we may choose for discussing women's position, such as autonomy, independence, or decision-making power are culture-bound. They may have relevance for women in Western industrial cultures but not necessarily for women in other kind of societies.

### **Universalists Assumptions about Women**

Traditional assumptions begin with the notion that there has always been a particular

sexual division of labour based on biological categories, namely, women's childbearing capacity and men's strength. From this basic division, it is assumed, all the other sexual divisions of tasks and responsibilities are derived, the sexual dichotomy in the temperament and behaviours, and the gender asymmetries in power, authority, and status with which we are familiar. From this point of view, it appears natural and inevitable that women have been eternally and universally subordinated to men. These assumptions construct an evolutionary scenario that sees women as physically constrained by pregnancy, lactation, and infant care to virtually immobility and evolutionary stagnation, and sees men as fundamentally unconstrained and creative, capable of bonding with each other, inventing weapons and bringing home the meat, each to his dependants domestic unit (Lovejoy, 1981). This point of view - a world view - interprets society as characterized by a particular set of dichotomies based on natural oppositions: women-man, nature-culture, private-public, domestic-political, and subordinate-dominant, with women residing, of course, in the sphere of the natural, the private, the domestic, and the subordinate.

### **Versality of Women's Productive and Reproductive Roles**

In all societies, we know about in recorded history, there has been some form of sexual division of labour, though the particular tasks done and rituals performed by women and men have differed radically among cultures; in some societies for example, only women build the houses; in others, only the men do; in yet others, women or men. With few exceptions among gatherer - hunter societies today, men are associated with hunting of large mammals and women with most of the collecting and processing of plant and small animal foods. Beyond that sexual division, however, societies vary in the tasks they perceive to be the responsibilities of men and women, including child care, or perceive to be

neutral with respect to sex.

In analyzing the ethnographic data describing the division of labour by sex in 224 societies, Karen Sacks (1979) shows the enormous range of economic activities that women perform. In fact, rather than finding women to be economically peripheral, she suggests that «men's tasks are largely determined by what women do not do» (p.93). Furthermore, Sacks found that in all societies women combine these physical activities of producing food and material objects with the function of childbearing and motherhood.

### **How Does Society Define Women?**

Traditionally the world over, different groups of people have formed different concepts about women. Central among these concepts, whatever the society, is the principle that «The Role of Women Is In The Home». In the past, the social, political, educational and economic role of the woman was based on this premise, with slight variations from society to society.

In Western countries before the 19th century, the woman was looked upon as a housekeeper, the helpmate of the man, a housewife and a mother (Encyclopaedia Americana, 1978). Her only way of rising in the society/world is said to be through marriage. In the Victorian day, in Great Britain, a perfect lady was not supposed to be involved in any purposeful activity. She was seen as a symbol of conspicuous consumption and leisure, a status which rendered her so completely useless that she was mistaken for an invalid (Delmol.& Duffin, 1978) and prevented from any serious participation in the society. The man on the other hand, was made her protector because, according to Alexander Walker (1830), the man possessed reasoning faculties, muscular power and courage to employ it.

The Oration ascribed to Demosthenes seems to shed some light upon the roles of women in Classical Greece. Here it goes. «Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure,

concubines for the daily care of our persons, but wives to bear us legitimate children and to be faithful guardians of our households».

The traditional India saw women «radically inferior» to men. She was treated accordingly. She dared not open her mouth in protest.

In China, women were relegated to a secondary role. According to history, women were subject to their fathers before marriage, to their husbands after marriage and to their sons should they become widowed. The traditional China would allow the husband to kill his wife if she was taken in adultery; the husband's adultery was taken as a matter of course. The tradition allowed him to strike or beat her. She the woman received 100 blows for striking back. He might sell his wife; she had no legal recourse.

The situation in Nigeria is not differed from these others, traditionally. The woman was equally looked upon as a passive receiver of instructions and others. She was to be seen but not heard. Therefore a revealing of her knowledge in public was considered unfeminine.

The African man sees the woman as a subordinate in all aspects. Married men expect nothing but complete subordination from their wives. The domicile of the wife changes soon after marriage, the surname and son on. Even in matriarchal societies, decision-making lies in the hands of the male - the mother's brother.

This dominance of men over women from time immemorial manifests itself in the effective use of culture and tradition. In Nigeria for example, the viewing of feminine gender as inferior to their male counterparts is expressed right from the time of birth. A baby boy receives a more grand welcome to the world. Everybody including the mother is happy that someone to carry the name of the family has been born. Birth of a baby girl cajoles the excitement. Another hopeless situation for a woman is constant bearing of girls without a male issue. The marriage for her is no more secured. She is either sent back home with her girls or a second wife married just for the purpose of

having sons.

Educationally, the training of a girl in many families is considered un-important and a waste because a girl grows up and gets married and the money spent on her education is never fully recovered from bride price. In other words, education is viewed as an investment from which material and monetary gains must be realized. The best way to ensure the success of the investment is to train only the male child who later through his earnings builds a house in his father's compound, sends money home and trains other male children. A woman on the other hand may be prevented by husband or by mere vanity from carrying out such responsibilities. Even in wealthy families, girls are still limited as to the amount of formal education they get. All encouragement is given to the hopes while the highest the parents do at times is to push the girl through school to learn how to read and write, and with minimum qualification she is forced to accept either nursing or teaching as a profession - nothing higher.

In funeral rights, when a man dies, the surviving wife is subjected to dehumanising funeral rites. The hair on her head is cleanly shaved; she is allowed the minimum of clothing to wear and she is made to sleep on the bare floor and to eat with broken plates. She is confined to the recesses of an inner chamber forbidden to see light of the day for some period prescribed by customs. On the death of a wife, the husband is not subjected to any of these sadistic and dehumanising experiences.

In many village communities, a woman cannot own land in her own right. She only has custody of any piece of kind the husband permits her to cultivate. Or else she holds any land in trust for her children - male children that is.

The Bride Price as the name implies, put nakedly is the money the husband pays to purchase his wife. Now anything purchased must have some utilitarian value. Here the value for the Nigerian husband is child bearing and home making, the failure of which leads to the end of the marriage. The husband may

demand the reimbursement to him of the bride price.

Pudah is a form of slavery imposed on woman by her husband in the name of religion. Pudah reduces a woman's personality to a zero level by depriving her of her fundamental or inalienable rights. The system deprives her of any freedom to move about and associate with other human beings especially the men except her close relations. When she is allowed to go out she goes like a masquerade and even then very often under an escort.

These are just but a few of the ways the society perceived and treated women. However, despite these dominant roles played by the male, the women were accorded a great deal of respect, prestige and status in some parts of Africa particularly in some African countries where agriculture was the main occupation of the people. The women, in addition to their role of housewifery and motherhood, performed the additional role of co-bread winners (Adiukun-Brown, 1992).

Bearing all the above in mind, one can then understand better the assortment of strong opinions both complimentary and insulting about women and their needs as prevented here:

- Woman is an evil, but a necessary evil (Latin proverb)
- Women hold up half the heavens (Chinese Proverb)
- Man was made when nature was but an apprentice, but woman when she was a skilful mistress of her art (Anonymous (1607)
- Women are the baggage of life: they are troublesome, and hinder us in the great match, and yet we cannot be without them. (John Suckling (1648)
- O Woman, lovely woman: Nature made thee to temper man: we had been brutes without you. Angels are painted fair, to look like you: There's in you all that we believe of heaven, amazing brightness, purity and truth, eternal joy and overcasting love. (Thomas Otway (1682).
- Women always run to extremes. They are either better or worse than men. (Jean de la

- Bruyere (1688)
- Nature meant woman to be her masterpiece. (G.E. Lessing (1772))
  - Where there are no women there are no good manners (George Eliot (1860))
  - Oh, the women: we must forgive them much, for they love much. (Heinrich Heine (1854))
  - A man must know how to defy opinion; a woman how to submit to it. (Mme, de Staël (1766-1817))
  - Woman inspires us to great things - and prevents us from accomplishing them. (Alexandre Dumas fils (1825-1895)).

This revelation of the reality of women's lives and their role in the house-hold and in the community has since changed. In the last few decades, the life of women has undergone a profound change. Some causes that have influenced this metamorphosis are industrialization, the passage from an extended family circle to a more nuclear unit in some countries, and women exercising a profession outside of the home more often than before. There is however a degree of variations from society to society in the extend of these transformations.

In Nigeria today, many husbands look at the education of their wives as an asset. Equal opportunities are given in the schools for the placement of boys and girls on the basis of merit. From primary to University institution, there is no restriction imposed by the society on the choice of subjects. The women are given a free hand to choose subjects despite the polarity noticed in our institutions of higher learning, whereby more women are found in the Faculty of Arts compared with the Faculty of Science. This polarization has been self-perpetuated (Adiukun-Brown, 1992).

Equal scholarship facilities abound in Nigeria for men and women wanting to go into school at any level, both at the Federal or State level. There is no law restricting women in her choice of career. Both married and unmarried women are therefore found in all sectors of the labour force. International Labour Organization (ILO), labour Force Estimates (1975-2000),

shows that the proportion of women classified as economically active reaches 35 per cent or higher in many African and Asian countries, while in the Arab States and other countries where there are still strong taboos against women working outside the homes, rates consistently fall below 5 per cent.

Politically, the Nigerian government has given the Nigerian woman a free hand to vote and be voted for into any elective post, including that of presidency. There has been thus direct participation of Nigerian women in government affairs.

From the last discussions above, it can be noticed that the Nigerian women actually enjoys a great deal of rights and privileges. Nevertheless, there is still within the society evidences of marked horizontal and vertical segregations in the labour force. Man is always regarded as a better manager, politician, scientist, etc. than a woman and would therefore be preferably given what could be called an «important post». The woman is still being seen as a weaker and an inferior sex irrespective of their contributions to the national development. And a woman must always be in her place. This therefore explains the attitude of men towards women's assertiveness and fight for liberation.

### **How Men Perceive Women in Relation to Self-Acceptance and Assertiveness**

When one looks at the vast revolutions through the world which has passed since 1945, one is struck by the fact that though the position of women in the society has improved greatly, many serious injustices - most of them implicit rather than explicit - still remain. Men are still convinced that because of the emphasis on women's maternal and domestic role as opposed to man's public defensive roles, women have no access to authority, prestige and cultural values which culture has assigned to men as their prerogative. One of the consequences of this bias is that «the exercise of power by women is seen as

illegitimate, deviant, manipulation, or at best an exception». Some men harbour the inevitable fear that, men being superior to women, if women reached the same level, they would fall from the exalted status they have exploited for so long. An article published in Sunday Times of 23 December 1973 by a Nigerian expresses this harboured fear well: «All this talk of women's liberation causes a lot of mirth. Does it really exist in Nigeria? Can such a movement ever succeed in Africa? How many Africans can agree to be bossed around by their women. It is an inborn trait in man to be the leader of his home.»

Some men even go to the extent of believing that higher education spoils the girl in many aspects, like a girl being swollen headed and difficult to manage and subdued as a wife. Most men want a docile, obedient servant as a wife, rather than a smart woman who knows her rights and many get too wise that her husband may not be able to fool her in many ways. Moreover, it is well known that women are more fertile when they are younger. It is therefore the belief of most men that women who have wasted time doing post graduate courses, etc. may not bear issues for their husbands. Hence highly qualified women are discriminated against in marriage.

When some men were interviewed on what their idea of an ideal wife is, the following are some of the responses given:

*First man:* She must be an obedient girl, the type that would not complain before obeying... She must be neat and ready to make the home a paradise for both of us... She must be a good cook, ready to give her best in cooking.

*Second man:* Not for my ideal wife. She must be ready to be a full-time housewife.

*Third man:* She must be educated and respectful, she should remember that the women are to adore and respect the man always. She must also be content with the bit of respect I give her... Above all, my ideal women should be able to devote her time to making my home an ideal one and making my children the joy of our lives. She must be

a typical African type..

*Fourth man:* She must be sociable... She must move with the time, and fit in well in this changing society of ours. She must be able to discuss any topic, especially current events at both national and international levels.

To tell a Nigerian man that he also has a responsibility to contribute to the care of the home is like an insult to him. «That is a woman's job» he would immediately declare. There is therefore that fear of being involved in homemaking if women get too involved in the labour force. The classic liberalist would of course assure everyone that he never objected one bit to his own wife's working and he is sure that most men don't mind having their wives work. The fact still remains that the women are left to fulfill alone the tripple stressful roles of childbearing and homemaking, community development, and occupation. The bosses in their respective offices are the extension of their husbands at home (Asegbu, 1992).

The simple denials attitude in men occurs when a man claims that he hasn't seen any unhappy women so why stir things up. At the departmental level, he insists that sexism is not now and never has been a factor in the hiring and promotion policies of his department because no one in it is prejudiced against women. The reason more women are not hired, of course, is that they simply couldn't find a qualified woman.

Most times a woman is kept off the ladder for high prestige jobs because she might leave the job when she marries or has a baby. The fact of allowing women their due maternity leave has been a serious point in keeping them off the job. This dual role of women appears to pose problems for employers who are worried that women will place greater emphasis on their domestic role and therefore prove «unreliable» workers.

Simple paranoia occurs when a man is convinced that any woman, however stupid, is getting a job at the expense of a competent male who has a wife and kiddies to support (Huber, 1975).

## **Factors That Affect Women's Conception of Self**

We live in a gendered society where not only are women's experiences different to those of man but these differences lead to discrimination and disadvantage. The fact that others have different expectations for each gender influences the manner in which boys and girls view themselves and each other.

Gendered socialization begins at birth and is powerfully reinforced during the preschool years. Children starting school at the age of five already have a gendered identity and stereotypical assumptions about the different gendered roles of adults as well as themselves (Maggie Coats, 1994). Primary school experiences reinforce these assumptions. The organisation and staffing of schools, the expectations of attainment and interest, the resources available, the attitudes of teachers and interaction in the classroom all demonstrate that girls receive different «messages» to boys (French and French, 1984). This continues and is enhanced through secondary schooling and university education, resulting in different achievements and expectations (Delamont, 1980). There are marked differences within that achievement, with more girls concentrating on arts, languages and biological sciences and more boys concentrating on maths, computing and physical sciences. With this kind of gendered socialisation, ended up with experiences of schooling that left many women feeling inferior to men and unimportant, moreover, having a lack of confidence in themselves to achieve, and in their ability to learn.

This feeling of women was clearly expressed in a newspaper article: «We generally are as oppressed group. Right from childhood, girls are made to feel they are inferior to boys while boys are helped to believe they are superior. So, the girls grow up underrating herself while the boy overrates himself. Tell me, does this give much room for women to hold their own against men? If given equal opportunity, women can do very well in

all fields. A woman can be President of Nigeria (Sunday Concord, October 2nd, 1988).

There is also a widespread ambivalence in our society about the roles of women. On the one hand, women are recognized as a wasted resource and as potentially skilled and able workers. (For example: «There is a close relationship between the status of women and the state of economic development in any given country. So long as countries regard women as chattels, their development will be slow and painful - Paul G. Hoffman, Former Administrator, United Nations Development Programme). On the other hand, there is a strong expectation that they should take full responsibility for all domestic and caring tasks. For women, the tension between the roles is very real. Trying to cope with two or more conflicting demands enhances feelings of guilt and stress; This is not helped by a society which takes no responsibility for child care whilst parents are engaged in other activities. A Senegalese Delegate at the First Congress of West African Women, making a reference to this commented that «We women must become aware of our responsibilities both with the family and socially. For this, we ask the valuation of our position and our participation in the life and progress of our people in a free and happy Africa (Ohieku, 1990).

Many women get considerable satisfaction from their domestic role, particularly while their children are small and more time consuming, but they reach a critical point when their youngest child starts school. Although the responsibility for child care does not disappear at this point, the daily duties do change. As children get older and independence is reached, many women who have devoted themselves to domestic duties and child care are faced with a problem. It is not unusual for such women to feel useless and unwanted even though they may have many potentially productive years ahead of them (Coats, 1994).

Changing standards and expectations about marriage and family life leave many women facing unforeseen disruption and



range of in their lives. Events such as unemployment, divorce and death place unexpected demands on them. Such is the 'tyth' of the contented «nuclear family» - male breadwinner, dependent wife, two children and dog - that many women do not anticipate disruptive events and do not prepare for them.

There is a lot of evidence to suggest that we live in a male dominated society, where power and control lies in the hands of men and decisions are taken by them. In mixed groupings, men tend to dominate, not necessarily by design but through custom. Women are less likely to challenge male assumptions in mixed company and are not given space to explore their own perspective. Thus, women feel more and more less active.

It was not until the 19th century that the woman began to understand herself as a person and her role both at home and in the society much better. She now saw challenges facing her specifically as a woman. The feminist movement of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries tried to take responsibility for the situation and to help solve the problem that resulted from this transformation. Its origin can be found in the thought of the enlightenment, which considered itself a logical consequence of the struggle for human rights, which were to be taken as exclusively for men. In accordance with this point of view, this movement fought to obtain more possibilities for the formation of women, which would permit them to develop their personality; to obtain equal rights, such as the right to vote; and for working conditions in accordance with human dignity. The present feminist movement, however, has very little in common with the earlier movement in their goals and objectives (this will be discussed later).

### Concept of Self

The concept of self is defined as an experience whereby a person conceives his or herself as an object. The individual uses this concept in the process of adjusting to his social

world.

Today, the society's perception of «woman» and woman's perception of herself stands as a testament to the cultural conditioning which down the centuries have shaped ways of thinking and acting.

It is in this context that a stirring cry has been raised, to alert woman to increased self awareness, to the knowledge of the deepest truths about herself to the awareness of her dignity, her potentialities - the «genius of woman»! Expressed either in great and famous deeds, important offices, or as ordinary women revealing the gift of their womanhood by placing themselves at the service of others in their everyday lives.

At birth everyone is granted a set of aptitudes and qualities for him to bring to fruition, to maturity. Man is endowed with intelligence and freedom and is himself responsible for this fulfillment. He is aided or sometimes impeded by those who educate him and those with whom he lives. But whatever the influences affecting him, each man remains the principal agent of his own success or failure. With the effort of his own intelligence and will, each man can enhance his personal worth, can become more a person.

There are things to be changed, things very wrong in our society often - times with respect to women. But to solve them, we must ask «Will this lead to the complete, integral, authentic development of every woman (and man)? In other words, does it promote the good of every man and of the whole man.

### How Does the Woman of Today See Herself

The presentation of self has increasingly become dependent on images created by the mass media which provides models that become ego ideals and are not necessarily related to the lived, everyday existence. This empties the self of real content and reproduces a standardized form which allows it to be more easily integrated into specialized, rationalized, organisation structures. The consequence is

chaos breakdown of community and authority and dissipation in everyday life. Ideology, religion and culture would seem to be important factors that influence women's conception of masculinity and femininity, and women's own self esteem and self perception.

For instance among the Carrier native Indians of Canada, it would seem that the patrilineal society and the religious tradition is inconsistent with formal political office for women. On the contrary, women are able to direct the affairs of their communities because they are mothers and grandmothers who have accepted the economic responsibility for the community at large through distribution of food and political organisation.

In interviews with women from different social classes, professions and age groups, most of whom were resident in Kenya or Zimbabwe, it was seen that they felt that with respect to education and employment African women are beginning to make inroads into traditionally male dominated fields and decision-making position. Although they still have a long way to go especially in the fields of politics and economics. However, the point I am making is that they stress that women's attitude needs to change first, to be more aware of the possibilities open to them. In other words her self awareness of her potentials in these fields is still pretty low even in East Africa.

Women in rural areas are yet to be convinced that literacy constitutes an advantage for themselves and for their families. Therefore in raising their awareness to this situation, providing literacy training should be structured towards their needs and problems and should improve their living and working conditions.

In China women are active agents in the public economy and perceive themselves as such, but can only express and activate this agency provided that doing so does not place them in competition with men. Male control outside the household is stronger than within the household. And it is argued that in the absence of strong women's organisations and

networks it is more advantageous for women to turn towards household-based enterprises than employment in even relatively well paid rural industry.

Women therefore feel that their rights to function as normal and able human beings have for too long been usurped by the male fold. They want to strive hard to develop their own leadership ability, to cope with the numerous challenges of contemporary society. They insist that men cannot claim an exclusive right to shape the future of our world. It is high time for them to accept the challenge and share with women in the decision-making process. It is high time to acknowledge that the denial of women's right and opportunities is at the root of our development problems and social economic ills.

They feel that the most underdeveloped of all human resources are women. In the opinion of Golda Meir (Former Prime Minister of Israel), «Women can be good rulers, good leaders... I think that women more than men possess the capacity to exercise this function. The capacity, that is, of going straight to the heart of the matter, of catching the bull by the horns. Women are more practical, more realistic. They don't lose themselves in mystification like men, who always beat about the bush endlessly to reach the core of a question (Ohiekue, 1990).

Women tend to believe that men all over the world find it difficult to accept the fact that women are imbued with the same level of intelligence and they feel threatened and overwhelmed by their wives or colleague's achievements to the extent that some women have had to make a heartrending choice between career and home. In reacting to this, Nigerian women accept the fact that combining the two professions is a great task, however, that women are coping because of the need to fulfil themselves as individuals and at the same time make the best of their homes. They therefore feel that the adage that says career women never make successful homes/marriages should be ruled out and that women should be given the opportunity to realize their

potentials as human beings as far as the woman knows her duties to the family and never allows them to clash with official or social activities. Women should therefore approach issues with absolute dedication in everything (Giwa, 1995).

When we talk of empowering women to make it their own decisions, to move forward, to challenge assumptions, we are equipping them to come to terms with new frameworks. This is not to assume that all women want to or need to make changes either in themselves or in their circumstances. There are women who though have always defended the dignity and equality of the sexes, still feel and rightly so that a woman is a human being who is specifically a woman. She is no less human than a man, but she is human as a woman. A woman's sexuality encompasses all of her being and actions and its not as though she can dispense with her sexuality according to whim. It is God who has determined the feminine vocation through creation - it is not an arbitrary decision on the part of each woman (Hutta Burggraft, 1987). These women therefore maintain the fact and rightly so - that there are some certain tasks and missions which are proper of women and which are different from a man's. They insist that the perfection of a woman's life is not to be found in a carbon copy of what perfects a man's life. All these attempts to compare women to men, more than enrich her, disfigure her. Their belief therefore is that the authentic promotion of the woman requires that the value of her maternal and family duties be openly recognised and appreciated.

But this by no means implies that a woman is constrained to act only in this realm. Domestic duties having the great dignity that they do, it cannot be forgotten that spiritual capacities and talents on one hand, intuition and an aptitude for understanding people; on the other, objectivity and universality of thought and capacity for organisation - can never be divided in an exclusive manner between the two sexes. The equal obligation and responsibilities of men and women fully justify the access women should have to public posts

and to any other work.

Burggraft (1987) concluded by calling on men to recognize and accept the capacities of women. These capacities do not diminish in any way the value of men but rather they promote the dignity of the human beings in his and her integrity. She equally called attention to the present feminist movement - which has little in common with the former movements in favour of women's rights. Today's feminists are not interested in the juridical and social equality of the woman - they seek a complete homogeneity of the sexes, or rather, the primacy of women with respect to men. They reject sexuality outright and, with it, maternity, marriage and the family. This rejection is evident in abortion on demand, in the insistence that men or society take responsibility for the education of children and - as a more remote goal - that pregnancy be suppressed - thanks to artificial reproduction. The goal of the feminists is a radical change of the human being and the traditional order. They seek a 'new' human being (androgynous), within a «new world».

Howe (1973:113) commenting on the activities of the feminist movement stated that if we aim at blurring all distinctions between the sexes, it might result in the destruction of certain bias against women but «I believe that it is foolish to deny their (difference) existence - among individuals or between classes, races, sexes, groups of any sort. I believe that we may learn from the study of differences as much as we learn from similarities».

In an article published in the Daily Times of February 1969, a Nigerian woman stated that «Women in their pursuit of equality are even borrowing their men's clothes adopting them for themselves. Of course, it is always heartening to know that women are no longer slaves; that we can choose the occupation or profession we want to, we can vote, we can drive a car; At the same time we still want the men to feel that they have to protect us and we want to be shown all the courtesies which make us feel feminine».(Ohieku, 1990). This goes to show that men and women are equal

in so far as their nature, but this same nature takes shape differently in one and the other.

## Enhancing Women's Self Esteem

There is need to heighten the awareness of the many contributions made by women to the life of whole societies and nations. Currently the literature on the role of status of women in many fields agriculture education healthcare, etc. is astounding. However, there is an even greater need to raise the level of the woman's awareness about her own potentials, and to the possibilities available to her, for, there is a direct relationship between peoples' level of awareness and their active participation in transformation processes.

It must be realised though, that their perception of the mechanism of social change also determines the level of participation in effecting the change. Therefore emphasis should be put on the quality of human relationships and personal effort in causing structural change.

Though there can be superficial integration into a majority culture ('culture' is here use in the wide sense of the word), the only way to develop a deep positive self image is to be aware of, and to accept one's own ethnic and cultural origins (not necessarily limitations).

Gender relations have affected and defined the development process in Africa because in terms of the conventional definition of development as a male centred concept, men are still assumed to, and still do control the decision-making structures and processes in all African societies.

Focus on women is limited to their reproductive roles. (The tendency for the new women's groups to put emphasis on reproductive roles of women and all such matters weaken the force of their appeal to power for the woman in decision making). This stresses the need for a new definition of power for women which moves out of the reproductive sphere and into areas of real and democratic power,

often located in the public arena.

People need to establish the legitimacy of the knowledge of themselves as a form of empowerment. An understanding of the richness as well as the shortcomings of local knowledge systems (pertaining to their resources, environment and values, based on experience and experimentation) can be used to create innovations in the development of solutions that will be sustainable both for the people (women) and for the state.

Enhancing self esteem via undermining the positive local knowledge and value systems will create a dubiously viable dependence. Moreover, the long term effects will of such an intervention will be seen in fragmented individualized lives.

The secret of making speedy progress in achieving full respect for women and their identity lies in an effective and intelligent campaign for the promotion of women, concentrating in all areas of women's life and beginning with a universal recognition of the dignity of women.

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