

# 4

---

## Who am I? Prescribing Women's Identities

The discourse of identity has focused on characteristics that all human beings share in common with certain other human beings, and the way in which individuals are unique (Kluckhohn and Murray, cited in Mennel 1994), leading to discussions on personal and collective identities. The three traditions that are represented in the discourse of identity – essentialism, social constructionism and deconstructionism – have their strengths and weaknesses, and they make an attempt to define personal and collective identities difficult. Even then, defining collective identity is easier than defining personal identity. Mennel (1994) refers to collective identity as:

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 Wiley (1994) refers to as "long term abiding qualities, which, despite their importance, may not be part of human nature as such" (p. 130)} which members of a group perceive themselves as sharing and in which they perceive themselves as differing from other groups (p. 177).

With respect to 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, 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.

Calhoun (1994) had indicated that a useful framework for the understanding of identity, and that is less problematic for theory and practice, is to draw from both essentialist and social constructionist approaches, and to the dualism, add the deconstruction and claiming of identities for persons and groups.

Also essential to the discourse of identity are the questions of the multiplicity of identities and the pressure that individuals face about favouring particular identities, and the negotiation/renegotiation and transformation of identities.

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 (Wiley 1994). 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) made the point when he said, '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 inevitably affects the way individuals see themselves, with the attendant doubts and tensions.

In reckoning women's identities and the implications of the identities for empowering and disempowering women, we return to the question of the self, that is, self-definition, self-recognition and recognition or non-recognition by others. Rogers (1998) had indicated that feminist theories 'postulate a dialectical selfhood, comprising close connections with other people as well as strong senses of who one is, what one needs and values and where one wants to apply her energy and devote her attention (p. 366)'.

This position of feminist theories, presented by Rogers, is an appropriate response to the problem that Calhoun (1994) had observed and raised as follows: 'there are too many challenges to the efforts of persons to attain stable self recognition or coherent subjectivity' (p. 20).

Also, given women's positioning in different social contexts and within different matrices of domination at different points in their lives, in reality, women have an identity that is a set of identities, and as such comprise inconsistencies and paradoxes that can result in resistances and creativity (Rogers 1998). Clearly, also, women do not retain an identity (or set of identities) throughout their lives, and so when they are confronted with new experiences and new realities, they may 'do a rethink of the principles they hold dear, they may transform their thinking and perhaps turn it into action; they may form new alliances, and they may not take an either/or position. They may look for a third space, where they may at times feel confused, or feel comfortable and thrive, or they may feel challenged' (Mejiuni 2005:296).

Realistically, then, in our analyses and discussions of women's identities in this work, we need to return to Calhoun's suggestion about drawing from the traditions that are represented in the discourse of identity, and then add to them, the deconstruction and claiming of identities. As we do this, we need to keep Rogers' (1998) position in view. She said:

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 (p. 374).

### Self-Definition

The four groups of female respondents in this study defined themselves in at least fifteen different ways (we can see Table 4.1 for details), and many defined themselves in more than one way. In other words, many inhabit multiple identities. Here are some examples of the ways women defined themselves, beginning with women in formal work settings.

Rebecca said of herself: 'I am a woman endowed with unique and rare qualities, full of virtues that will change my environment for the best. A lovely mother and, full of joy always'. Odunola described herself as, 'A woman, easygoing, industrious Lawyer. Married with children, Okun by tribe from Kogi State', while Esther said, 'I am a simple, intelligent, hardworking, committed and visionary woman who loves God and committed to his service' and Omolade said: 'I am a serious-minded, plain, God-fearing young mother of four who believes that I am to account for whatever I do and say to affect others around me'.

The female students included Banke who said: 'I am a woman. Created because there is a man out there that would not be fulfilled except he has me. I have a mission to accomplish, I am just the best for it'. Then there was Abosede who said:

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 standards of inferior and second class citizen, but simply a woman.

Ruth had this to say: 'I am a gentle lady but do not tolerate nonsense. I love good things and I always maintain peace with others and help others. I love and respect others and in return wants to be loved and respected'.

Women in the informal economy included Noimot who said: 'I am a good person, hardworking and I love doing business and, above all, I am trustworthy'; Feyi who described herself as, 'Outspoken, bold and I have confidence in myself'; Esther who told of her personality as follows: 'Just a human being, ordinary girl, gentle, simple, if anybody is in pain, I will help. I like my job, and I'm blessed with it. I will get married'; and Ruth who confided: 'I am a human being. I am a very jovial person and I am not troublesome'.

Female apprentices also told us who they were, beginning with Abike who said: 'I am a woman and I'm pretty'; Tanwa who was concise with: 'A woman, God-fearing, hardworking and a mother too'; Ireti who told us in Pidgin English: 'Quiet, I don't look for trouble but if you look for my trouble... mmm... I no go take am easy ooo';<sup>1</sup> and Mariam who said: 'I'm a Muslim, I'm a good person, I don't do bad things'.

The responses from literate women and semi-literate women appear to show that women identify more with their gender identity or their identity as women

Table 4.1: The Subjective I

	Literate Women In Formal Work Settings	Percentage	Female Students	Percentage	Semi-Literate Women in Informal Economy	Percentage	Semi- Literate Female Apprentices	Percentage
Ethnic	4	3.9	2	1.7	3	2.9	1	1.9
Religious	13	12.6	12	10.1	11	10.5	3	5.6
Gender	21	20.4	26	21.8	25	23.8	16	29.6
Character	18	17.5	23	19.3	38	36.2	25	46.3
Physical	2	1.9	13	10.9	5	4.8	4	7.4
Professional/ Vocational	9	8.7	13	10.9	3	2.9	0	0
“Feminine”	7	6.8	16	13.5	7	6.7	2	3.7
“Masculine”	2	1.9	1	0.8	0	0	0	0
Marital	8	7.8	2	1.7	4	3.8	0	0
Deconstructed Identities	5	4.9	3	2.5	0	0	0	0
Age	3	2.9	3	2.5	1	0.95	0	0
Mother/Natal	9	8.7	0	0	3	2.9	1	1.9
Activist	2	1.9	1	0.8	0	0	0	0
Co – curricular/ Other Interests	0	0	1	0.8	0	0	0	0
Human/Person	0	0	0	0	5	4.8	2	3.7
Total	103		119		105		54	

**Source:** Data generated from the open-ended questionnaires completed by (or for) all four categories of female respondents who provided information during fieldwork.

and their individual characters. Interestingly, if one ranked which identity came first and second for the two broad groups of women, literates and semi-literates, an interesting picture emerges. 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. What this means is that the two groups of women, particularly semi-literate women, defined themselves mainly in terms of their character and gender, or gender and character.

However, women in formal work and female students defined themselves in more ways and self-identified with a whole load of interests than the semi-literate women. Female apprentices were the ones who defined themselves through the least number of interests, that is, eight out of fifteen that have been identified by the female respondents in this study. The interests/identities are: ethnic; religious; gender; character; physical; professional/vocational; 'feminine'; 'masculine'; marital; identities that are deconstructions of feminine or masculine identities; age; maternal (natal); activist; co-curricular/other interests and human being/person.

It is helpful that we note how women defined themselves through identities other than gender and character. For women in formal work, after gender and character, they identified with religion, while their profession and their identities as mothers, followed immediately after religion. After gender and character, female students identified with their femininity, while their physical attributes and their professional identity (in this case, course of study) both followed identification as feminine. Religious identity then follows. For women in the informal economy, after character and gender, come religious identity, and their femininity. Female apprentices described themselves in terms of their character and gender and, to a lesser extent, their physical attributes. We ought to note that for both women in the formal economy and women in the informal economy, identification with religion came immediately after identification with character and gender or gender and character.

At a general level, women have described themselves, and shown/portrayed themselves to be confident persons who: are comfortable with themselves as women; are comfortable with their characters; draw lessons that are inspirational and so empowering (and the not so inspiring and disempowering lessons) from religion, and are also comfortable with being feminine. In addition, women in the formal economy appear comfortable with their identities as: professionals, married women and mothers.

One fact that has emerged from women's perception of who they are is that apart from the obvious fact of their being women by virtue of physiology and social construction, women have defined themselves from the point of view of their character. It is therefore important that one takes a close look at the specific character by which women have defined themselves.

Women have defined themselves as bold, aggressive, humble, gentle, patient, brooking no nonsense, hating cheating, and not feeling inferior to anybody, intelligent and so on. We note that one literate woman described herself as *flexible*. We can take a cursory look at the details of the characters of the different groups of women in this study in Appendix II. This is how women view themselves; and so, in this study, we assume that their self-definition is a reflection of who they think they are, irrespective of whether or not they had factored into their definitions the point about who others think it is valuable to be. One wanted to know how women saw themselves in relation to men and one also thought that it would be better that one finds out what characteristics men thought they share with women. That is, we attempted to find out what women and men thought they share and how they thought they differ from one another.

### **Women are Similar to Men**

Some women in formal work felt they were similar to men in terms of characteristics that are traditionally, socially, and in contemporary times associated with maleness/masculinity – aggression, courage, boldness, independent-mindedness, being pushy, daring and achieving. Other women thought they shared with men matters relating to their character, especially at work – diligence, discharge of duties and hard work. The women therefore saw themselves as performing well at work. Although one may be tempted to assume that because women in formal work, like men in formal work, earn a living and support the family, many women would cite earning a living as a point of similarity with men. However, only two women said: ‘I earn a living’ and ‘I fend for the family’, roles that are so often associated with men and which, to a large extent, are thought to be the reason men are leaders at home – that they solely provide for the material needs of the family. A few women identified their educational attainment/academic qualifications and the fact that they were human and thinking beings as points of sameness with men, while others indicated that they were similar to men because they were both created by a higher being (God). On the whole, most literate women in formal work alluded to equality with men in: their character; their work ethics and performance; their educational attainments; their source of existence (created by God); and, in their hopes for the future. Only two alluded to material provision for their families.

Female students, like literate women in formal work, also thought they were similar to men in the sense that they had character traits that were deemed masculine such as: strong-willed; courageous; aggressive and independent; strong-hearted; brave; and steel-minded. Not surprisingly, many female students identified: thinking, reading and reflecting; the same education; reading the same courses; and their intelligence as grounds of commonality with men. The students identified a few other characteristics that they share with men (leadership abilities

and male features), but also spoke on their hopes for: impacting on their community, achieving greatness, and realizing their goals and dreams.

The obvious differences in the similarities that women in formal work and female students identified with men is that women in formal work understandably spoke to their characters at work and the fact that they earned a living/supported family, because they worked, while female students did not do regular jobs as yet. Also, while women in formal work identified the source of their being and men's as God, female students did not touch the subject. Among female students, their statements of hope and possibilities as a point of similarity with men are clearer and more direct than women in formal work.

Most of the points of similarities with men that semi-literate women in the informal economy identified centred on material provisions for the family, work ethics and performance: I support/feed the family; I shoulder responsibilities that they shoulder; I work hard like they do. The semi-literate women identified other points of similarity with men – boldness, strictness, driving; and one woman said she went to the stadium to watch football and other male-oriented sports.

As for semi-literate female apprentices, many felt there were no points of similarities with men. The few that identified similarities put their fingers on hard work, and the fact that women are human beings like men. One woman indicated that she supported her family, while another said she worked like men and also repaired electronic equipment in the house.

While literate women attempted to deconstruct maleness by insisting that they also had attributes that were ascribed to men, which was a good way to proceed, semi-literate women were deconstructing male superiority by claiming and valuing the specific role (material provisions for the family) that supposedly makes men more important than women in present-day Nigeria, and which gives them the authority to claim superiority and leadership in the home.

Clearly, in our society, it is not just material provisions for the family that make men claim superiority over women. Patriarchy, made worse by our colonial experience, has established that. Patriarchy affects the ability of women to access resources – education and land, as some women have pointed out in this study – and so dictates the material condition of women, who are poorer than men in terms of material well-being. However, given capitalism, men and women have had to work outside the home and both are now breadwinners. In addition to breadwinning, society has ensured that women retain their ascribed roles of care-giving. The basis on which men can then continue to claim superiority (and insist on leading women) in their homes and the larger society is patriarchy, and recently, religion. That is, religion apprehended, not as liberating, but as an opium which powerful groups (in this case, men, supported by women) have successfully fused with culture, or long-held, institutionalized and conventional beliefs (patriarchy) to determine women's interests, their roles and their identities.

We also note that while many semi-literate women acknowledged themselves as breadwinners or co-breadwinners in clear and unambiguous language; and were, through that, deconstructing maleness, literate women did not strongly identify material provision as grounds for challenging male superiority. Also, more than the semi-literate women, literate women flaunted their marital and maternal identities. Clearly, most semi-literate women in this study were married, and had children whom they cared for, but they did not define themselves through their husbands and through their children like the literate women did. In her response to the question of similarities between men and women, Fehintola, a trader said, 'I support the head of the family. There are no husbands again, but father of children'. This is a refrain that has become entrenched among illiterate and semi-literate Yoruba women. Among these women, when a man is not a sole breadwinner, in the sense of picking the bills, he becomes – '*Baba omo*' – father of a child. This is more so if he does not pick the bills or is unable to pick the bills because he is married to other women or has informal liaisons that he funds. Whether or not men are breadwinners, however, today, among a lot of illiterate and semi-literate Yoruba women, there are many allusions to a man being '*Baba Omo*' once he pays attention to more than one woman, and or maltreats his wife. He becomes truly, not a husband but one who has fathered the children in the sense of providing the sperms for conception, not in terms of fatherhood. This way, this group of women distance themselves from the husbands, especially at a psychological level, and so they are not quick to define themselves through their relationships with the husbands.

The male respondents in this study used direct language of equality to describe similarities between women and men; and some also supported their views with religion in a manner that was potentially empowering. However, the similarities that literate men in formal work and students identified between women and men differed from the similarities that literate and semi-literate women pointed out. While literate women in formal work and students identified themselves as possessing characteristics that are traditionally and socially ascribed to men, such as aggression, boldness, being independent-minded, and pushy; and very few literate and many semi-literate women indicated they were breadwinners and co-breadwinners, men did not identify women as similar to them in these respects (we can see Appendix III for details). This is telling because apart from the male reproductive organs, one of the roles ascribed to men – the provision of material needs for the family – is what makes men the male gender.

### **Women are Different from Men**

In articulating the differences between women and men, literate women and semi-literate women stated the facts of how they differed from men, not just as they perceived it, or as it applied to them personally, but also realistically, even though at times, the realities have become real only through social constructions.

In addition, at times, women communicate their own beliefs and what they have learned (both positive and negative) as the truth/fact about how they differ from men. Some women in formal work said, for example, that women and men are physically and psychologically different. This is true. A woman said men and women have been ordained by God for different things. In this case, the woman is passing on her belief as what is. Another woman said: 'I exhibit the normal hormone of caring that every woman has'. Clearly, this woman cares, but she assumes that because women are thought and taught to be nurturing, then caring is normal for every woman and, perhaps, caring is not normal for all men?

Female students appear to court less controversies in their engagement with differences between men and women than literate women in formal work and, much of the time, they spoke to facts as they saw them. They stated for example that: they have breast and they can get pregnant; they differ from men by physical features; men have XY chromosomes and they have XX chromosomes and that they do domestic work which men do not do. One female student said the difference is in each person's individuality, not maleness or femaleness. Another said she has a womb and motherly affection, and yet another said the experiences of women differ from those of men. This is a statement of fact, corroborated by a male respondent who said women carry pregnancy and are vulnerable to humiliation, discrimination and attack.

While some semi-literate women believed they were not just similar to men at all, some said they were just women, and yet others could not see how they differed from men. There were statements of fact such as: 'I manage the home front, they don't'; 'I give birth, he can't'; 'men are seen as head of the family' and, 'they will be able to get up and talk in some places, while I will not be able to'. There was a denigrating remark, obviously a lie that one woman had imbibed: 'women's brains are smaller than men's'. This is unfortunate, coming from a woman, because only a few male respondents in this study did not believe that women and men are similar in intelligence and ability to think rationally. Clearly, we ought not to lose sight of the fact that semi-literate men were not respondents in this study, so we may not have a clear enough picture of how (all) men assess women's intellectual capability. Another semi-literate woman said if she were to trade places with men, she wouldn't maltreat them the way they maltreat women.

From among semi-literate female apprentices came the view that men are more intelligent than women. The common factor between the two groups of women (women in informal economy and female apprentices) is that their educational attainments are low or at times non-existent and they both work in the informal economy. The semi-literate women in the informal economy are the teachers of the female apprentices. If an instructor holds the view that a woman's brain is small, she would most probably pass this on to the learner. None of the literate respondents gave an indication that they thought men were

more intelligent. In fact, as has been earlier observed, intelligence was one of the grounds in which literate women claimed equality (sameness) with men, even if at times, they did not say so in many words.

On the part of literate male respondents, their responses to what differentiates them from women can be categorized into the following: statements that are true; statements that are true as a result of social constructions; statements that apply to a few, but are then generalized to all, because that is what men would rather be; make-believe and self delusion, and unfortunately too, outright lies (we can glean these in Appendix IV).

We take the view that men are assigned the presidential role in their families and the macro-society. This is true, although it is so as a result of the construction of men's roles and women's roles. The views that: men are emotionally stable; have ability to withstand pressure more than women; are more mentally stable; and are better leaders, are make-believe and self-serving. A lot of men in this study, in responding to questions about political participation, have actually acknowledged that women are better managers of resources; more suited to discharging official functions; will not be partial in taking decisions; organize people better; are meticulous; and are responsive and attentive, etc. What attributes do men who say men are better leaders require of a leader which women do not already have?

In addition, there is already a response from literate women and semi-literate women to the assertion that men are less flexible than women. Women had said: 'when a woman is in an office, her yes would be yes, and her no would be no' and 'will not condone nonchalant attitudes to duties and indiscipline'. This indicates firmness, definitely not flexibility, in the sense in which the men in this study would like us to believe. As a matter of fact, Daniska had indicated that he would not vote for a female as President/Governor because according to him, 'if given a chance and probably win the election, men are in trouble, they would whip the arse of all men and oppress men and their fellow women'. A female respondent who is a school teacher, and whose principal is female had said she would not vote for a female President/Governor because, according to her, women are too harsh. In this study, only one literate woman characterized herself as 'flexible'. Clearly, expectations that women be flexible can be deduced from the ways some men have characterized women. One male respondent explicitly stated that women in public should be obedient to their bosses and be more flexible than men.

The point, actually, is that men would rather have women believe women are flexible, because that accords with femininity – being unable to make up one's mind, pliable, indecisive, etc. Given the way socialization, nurturing and social construction of identities of persons work, when men continuously tell women that they are flexible, women begin to believe they are, and they begin to act flexible, especially if they get 'rewarded' for being flexible. When one stands by

ones words, especially in the socio-economic and political context of our country today, one gets sanctioned for not being pliable. One of the sanctions for a woman is to be denied the opportunity to be voted into office (Ibrahim and Salihu 2004). So, she is taught what is valuable to be, which is, being flexible.

One other interesting difference that some literate men pointed out between women and men is that men provide, and women are caregivers. Semi-literate women in the informal economy had, in their responses to women's similarities with men, faulted this position; and they had deconstructed the view that only men are breadwinners. Perhaps at some point in our history, in the era of colonialism, this was the case. To hold on to this view today is not only fruitless, but the height of self-delusion. If we were to take a survey, we are likely to find out that many of the men in this study, who are lawyers, journalists and civil servants, and many of the men in higher institutions got or get most of their material needs for their education from their mothers, not their fathers. It appears men have to continue to hang on to the view that they are the sole breadwinners in order to claim leadership at home, and in the larger society.

Given, then, the identities of women that have emerged from this study, which are that women are persons who: bother about their character and how they relate to other people in public and private; can be aggressive, bold, pushy and independent-minded; care – have feelings, are nurturing and loving; are breadwinners and co-breadwinners, and bother about work ethic and performance and so are effective managers with plenty of organizational and social skills, what women do, in both the private and public spheres of life is that they humanize leadership and they humanize their actions, and thus they are not flexible.

### **How Men See Women**

An individual's perception of who she is, is often shaped by who others think she is, and who others have taught her that it is valuable to be. It is difficult for individuals to achieve objectivity in a situation where they are constantly told who they ought to be, and are constantly shown the benefits that will accrue to them for sticking to identities that others would rather have them favour. Given the identities of the women in this study, we tried to find out how far their knowledge and understanding of who others think they are have influenced their self-definition, or their identities that have emerged from this study.

It is interesting that there are a lot of points of convergence between the differences between men and women that men pointed out, and the way women thought men perceived women. To a large extent, all women do not think that all men see women the same way. Given this, women used phrases such as 'some see', 'some think', 'others think' and 'it depends on'. Similarly, all men do not view the differences between men and women in the negative. Some pointed out, for example, that women are patient, careful, more sensitive and not dubious.

However, most of the differences that men believe exist between men and women were stated in the language of superiority. It is therefore not surprising that many women understand men as believing that women are: senseless, inferior beings, chicken-hearted, housemaids and men's subordinates. Although women were at times contemptuous of, or condemned some of the behaviours of men, they did not claim superiority over men. They stated facts as they saw them. Perhaps they are unable to claim superiority over men because they are indeed in an inferior social position to men. We note, however, that when women responded to questions of civic-political participation, they did not only claim equality with men; they sometimes insisted that they were superior to men. Apparently, those responses were aimed at challenging men's claims to superiority over women and, by extension, men's claim to sole leadership, especially in the public sphere. Interestingly, men who believe that women should aspire to political offices, including the highest in the land, also used the language of superiority of women over men to articulate their position. Some of the responses of women in respect of how they thought men view women are contained in Box 4.1.

We note the responses of Abebi, Toun, Ibukun, Rukayat, Amina, Labake and Abike in Box 4.1. They are the ones who are of the opinion that how men see women depend on how women portray/project themselves or behave. Whereas their position could be understood as a call to women to exercise their active agency, one is aware that some women feel that other women elicit bad behaviour from men by the way they behave. Much later in this work, the flaw in this kind of thinking will become evident. The respondents appear unaware that if a man has taken a position that women are inferior to him, he is not likely to change his view because she 'behaves well' or 'comports herself'. The man will probably not behave badly to a woman only if she behaves well or comports herself according to his own understanding of good behaviour and comportment at a particular time, on specific issues.

Again, as always, we take a look at the negative views because they matter, especially in the way they shape behaviours, actions and people's identities. Women (and men) come to conclusions about themselves and one another through: day-to-day interactions, experiences, myths, lies and educative influences. In the following paragraphs, we take some of the experiences of women, which have definitely led some of them to believe that men hold negative views of women. Precisely, that men think they are superior to women.

### **Women and Feelings of Inferiority**

As we had indicated above, in the process of pointing out differences, men made: true statements; statements that are true as a result of social constructions; statements that apply to a few, but are then generalized to all, because that is

**Box 4.1: How Men See Women****Women in Formal Work**

'Not all men are the same. Some men think women are inferior, because they don't understand why God made women or they have their own deep-seated psychological problem' – Banke

'Most men have a chip on their shoulders, and think that the female gender is somehow inferior' – Adetutu

'They see women as a set of inferior beings whose ability to think proper is affected. I have met with men who had no single regard for women. I am blessed with a husband who knows the value of women. These crude men will not get to the limelight of their potential because there is a role a woman has to play in their lives' – Esther

'I think men generally see women as second rated group. Inferior, fragile and a set of beings who have come to compete with them. Though they have to come to agree that we are important, they still believe that we are a necessary evil' – Omolade

**Female Students**

'They believe women are the weaker sex and don't really have a mind of their own and those that do would be "Margaret Thatcher" in their respective homes, and thus, avoid them.' – Enitan

'If it had been in the past, I'd say men think women are fickle and only fit to be relegated to the background (having nothing to contribute); but now, I think men think highly of women (especially educated women) and are more careful of the way they treat and address them' – Modupe

'I think it depends on the way we put ourselves to them. If we put ourselves to them as responsible and someone that needs to be respected, they would take us as such; and if it is otherwise, the reverse too would be the case. So, it depends on the individual' – Abebi

'Men generally see women as the softer side of them. But then, there are different views about women. What then determine the view is the women themselves. As a woman, what you project gives men what to think about you' – Toun

'Men see women as people you woo, fell, get them and then you can treat them anyhow. No matter how much a man says he respects a woman, there is always that dictatorial tendency in his relationship with her, and the belief that she is the one that should give way and that men's ideas are always better than women's' – Ajoke

'If you respect yourself, they respect you; and if you flaunt yourself, they might end up abusing you' – Ibukun

'Men see women as their helpmate. They (men) believe women should be restricted to domestic work, odd jobs and not challenge their views or probe into matters they have concluded on. The women are believed to be back benchers' – Chinyere

'Some of them see women as factory producing children, human beings without a right of their own but dependent on men, cooks and househelp. Only a few see them as soul mate, and or source of inspiration' – Rolake

#### **Women in the Informal Economy**

'It is the way a woman behaves that the man will see her; so it depends, because we have different types of women' – Rukayat

'Indecent dressing has made men not to see us as good vessels, men look at us as tattered rags i.e. we don't mean anything to them anymore unlike the olden days' – Lanre

'They don't really have any regard for a woman; in fact they don't normally like giving birth to female children though the females are achieving much more than men' – Fadeke

'Men see women as the weaker vessel that cannot do without them. But I don't believe in this because women are turning up as the breadwinner in houses nowadays' – Egunola

'Men are good, women are good too. Even when they don't like women, they say they do. They deceive women' – Wunmi

'As men see women, na im make dem dey spoil their life'[2] – Amina

'Women are slaves to them and that is not so' – Margaret

#### **Female Apprentices**

'As the weaker sex and as their mothers. They are afraid of women o' – Tomiwa

'It all depends; if you comport yourself very well a man will see you as important but if not, then he will see you as worthless' – Labake

'Some see women as rags to be used and dumped and some see women as good beings; but to me it also depends on the way you the woman behaves' – Abike

what men prefer and are comfortable with; there were make-believe and self-delusions and, sadly too, outright lies. Unfortunately, all the differences that men pointed out are reflections of what men believe about women, and these get reflected in men's behaviour towards women. All the women that took part in this study were asked to indicate whether or not they had at any time felt inferior to men, and whether or not men had tried to make them feel inferior. Their responses are contained in Table 4.2; while some of their voices, and/ or the examples they cited are in Box 4.2.

In the following paragraphs, we take a look at women's experiences of discrimination, sexism and violence in different spheres of life – in the home/family circle; in educational institutions; in workplaces, and in public places – and how their experiences have challenged, subdued, irritated and, perhaps, affected them positively and negatively.

One could categorize the responses of some of the women who said they had no reason to feel inferior to men into two. The first are literate and semi-literate women who feel equal to men, for they have excelled at work, they occupy or had occupied positions of leadership at work, in governance and in civic groups and they think they do what men are supposed to do. Given this, they just do not feel inferior to men. Esther and Ruth among women in formal work, and Rukayat and Oreoluwa among women in informal work represent this category. The second category is women who feel comfortable with patriarchy and the way things are, especially in terms of accessing resources like education and land. We interpret this as indicating that such women are comfortable with their subordinate position to men. Anike, Caroline, Alaba and Idowu's responses put them in this category. Interestingly, they sometimes justify their position by appealing to religion in a way that can only be deemed fatalistic. They display what Friere (1973) referred to as 'magic consciousness'. We should examine, once again, the responses of Anike, a semi-literate woman in informal economy and Idowu, a female apprentice.

We note that although both literate and semi-literate women said they did not feel inferior to men, apparently because they feel equal to men, only semi-literate women did not actually feel inferior to men because they were comfortable or appeared comfortable with the way things are. The semi-literate women, whose opinions are represented above, felt comfortable with the experiences of sexism and discrimination because they thought: that is the way things are, or, that is the way God wants it. The only literate woman who did not indicate that she does not feel inferior to men because she feels equal to them still expressed her irritation with the demands that social engagements place on women's time (Mejiuni and Obilade 2006).

It would appear that women in formal work do not or did not have a lot of experiences of discrimination or sexism; so, only two of them said they ever had a feeling of inferiority, while two said not all the time. It may also be that the literate women do not just feel inferior to men, or that they have decided to be silent about it. I think the former is the case, for when they were then asked whether men had tried to make them feel inferior, at least one-third of the women said yes. The women in formal work cited their experiences of discrimination while in school, and at work. Debo and Jumai who were female students cited their experiences of rejection in school politics. They are from Ibadan and Lokoja respectively. Arinola and Tundun cited what appeared to be discomfort with their own level of performance, relative to their male counterparts.

Table 4.2: Women and Feelings of Inferiority

	Have you ever had a reason to feel inferior to men?						Do men attempt to make you feel inferior?								
	Yes			Not at all time			No			Yes			No		
	Frequency	Percentage		Frequency	Percentage		Frequency	Percentage		Frequency	Percentage		Frequency	Percentage	
Literate Women In Formal Work (42)	2	4.8		2	4.8		37	88.1		16	38.1		23	54.8	
Female Students (46)	10	21.7					31	67.4		16	34.7		27	58.7	
Semi-Literate Women In Informal Economy (56)	18	32.1					38	68.0		18	32.1		27	48.2	
Semi-Literate Female Apprentices (39)	15	38.5					24	62.0		14	36.0		17	44.0	

**Source:** Data generated from the open-ended questionnaires completed by (or for) all four categories of female respondents who provided information during fieldwork.

**Box 4. 2: Have You Ever Had a Reason to Feel Inferior to Men?****No Reason to Feel Inferior*****Literate women in formal work***

'No except for societal demands that limit a lady to certain social engagements and time' – **Grace**

'Not at all, after all, I am heading a school where several men had failed and God has given me the enablement to do well' – **Esther**

'Throughout my school days I have performed better than majority of men. I have performed well as a sole administrator/caretaker chairman and in the office I am very competent and dedicated in my duties' – **Ruth**

**Semi-literate women in Informal Work**

'No. No man can do that to me because I am bold and strong, In fact I've been the Chairperson of Tailors' Association for the past six years'- **Rukayat**

'I don't mind because I think it is what God wants me to be' – **Anike**

'No. as a woman, I do what a man is supposed to do so no regret' – **Oreoluwa**

'Women bi human beings, but boys get leg for im parents house pass girl. Dem no go any where. Boys bi owner for im papa house and im no dey go anywhere and he go help everybody when he dey work, but the woman husband go take am away. For education, if crises dey, I go ask the girl make im stop. If she sabi pass the boy, I go ask am to continue' [3] - **Alaba**

'Men are better than women. In the next world, I'll be a man' - **Wunmi**

'In my place in Anambra state women don't inherit land or property and I am comfortable with it. This is because you are married to somebody else' – **Caroline**

***Female Apprentices***

'I can't say that because I have to accept the way The Lord has created me as a female, if I say I'm inferior or that I don't like it that means am blaming God' – **Idowu**

**No Reason to Feel Inferior*****Literate Women in Formal Work***

'When it comes to the matter that woman cannot handle' – Theresa

'In primary school, men's names were first called on the register before women. They were also given their meals before us. Men were always in the class while most of us went to cook or perform domestic chores for our teachers' – Adedigba

**There are Reasons to Feel Inferior*****Literate Women in Formal Work***

'As a worker, discrimination at my place of work, when my boss doubts my capability and prefers that a male handles certain schedule of duties' – Itunu

***Female Students***

'When I have to rely on them for some solutions in terms of relationships, I just had that inkling that he/they had the upper hand/ say in the matter being discussed' – Enitan

'I wanted to contest for the post of president in my department and I was rejected' – Debo

'That was when I was admitted in my former school into the Dept of Elec/Elec. Eng, I felt every guy knew most things about the course except me' – Arinola

'In my department a boy called ... is the one leading. Any time he is talking pertaining to our field I look at myself and feel inferior to him' – Tundun

'During the last Association election when I was informed that no woman qualified to be the President of NAPAS' – Jumai

***Women in Informal Work***

'Men tend to shout one down even when you want to advise them on certain issues. They see women as not having a good sense' – Fehintola

'When men see you as not possessing a type of brain that can equal theirs e.g. when trying to suggest a way out of a family problem, they don't buy your idea instead they see it as an affront "I am talking you are talking"' – Adunola

'A woman cannot be as powerful as a man, so men tend to take one for a ride sometimes; and since am not as powerful as they are, I can't beat them' – Asake

'An example is that of my younger brother and I before we got married. While we were still young, my younger brother can bring his girlfriends home without my parents raising an eyebrow but I did not have the audacity to do such. If I ever tried it, hell will be let loose even though I am older than my younger brother by many years' – Alake

'An example is my father. He refused to send us girls to school while we were young. His argument was that girls are not serious and that we will get ourselves pregnant by unseriousness, thus putting a stop to our education, and wasting his money. So he didn't see any reason why he should send us to school' – Toun

'My father refused to train me in school, because I am not a man. He instead wanted me to get married, so I ran away from home' – Yime

'The way my husband treats me especially when we quarrel makes me wish that I am a man. He even behaves as if he is my father' – Nkechi

'I once had a misunderstanding with my husband, even though he is the one that was at fault, I was told to go and apologize because I am a woman' – Chioma

'In my village, as a woman, I can't follow masquerade like boys my age. Then, my step brother who is older than I am beat my mother and I when our father was sick, and told me to shut up that I am a woman' – Nwanneka

'When my husband doesn't take care of me and I am experiencing bad market, I wish I were a man because they don't go through it' – Omoregbe

#### ***Female Apprentices***

'The boys carry girls but we cannot' – Farinde

'My parents did not deem it fit to send me to school because I am a girl. Though there was no money then, they looked for money to send the boys to school; so, I ended up being an apprentice' – Toluhi

'My former boyfriend impregnated me and denied; so, I had to abort the pregnancy and I left him alone' – Rosaline

'Because I was overpowered by a boy and he beat me up though he was at fault' – Chinedu

'I once lost a close friend and was not allowed to see him immediately until about two hours later because I'm a woman. Also this idea that women can't be president' – Stella

'My four elder brothers go to school. Two are in the Polytechnic and two in Secondary School. But I am not because my parents felt it was waste of money since I always ran home from school while I was in primary school. So when I wanted to go to sec. school, they refused' – Olaitan

'When they make advances and you refuse, or they have taken you to bed, when in a group, they talk rough and bad about the person' – Koripamo

'I don't like the way they took our property especially land after my mother died. If I were a man, I would have reacted. But because I bi woman, I no get order, say make dem leave' [4] – Temi

'Because some boys feel proud and they don't do a lot of house work like girls at home' – Iyadunni

'Because I once witnessed a man beating his wife and I thought to myself that I wished I were a man' – Feyisara

Women in informal work and female apprentices, who are the semi-literate category of this study, cited experiences of discrimination, sexism and violence: in relationships with husbands and boyfriends; in family life and this includes domestic work; in public places, and in accessing resources – land and education. The women appeared really irritated when they spoke about their relationships with husbands/boyfriends, and the way they were denied access to education. The women said their spouses thought they were senseless, and Chioma said she was asked to beg her husband after a quarrel, even though he was at fault. Women's inability to access education while they were young because of patriarchy is also a sore point. In addition, one female apprentice, Koripamo, spoke to the condescending behaviour of men towards women because they deem women to be objects of desire. So whether or not women have gone to bed with them, they throw disparaging remarks at women. It appears like a no-win situation.

Within the experiences cited, we note outright discrimination, sexism and violence that left women feeling inferior to men. However, we also note that there were women who played into the hands of patriarchy and, so, men took advantage of their errors. Examples are Olaitan who played deviant while she was in primary school, and gave her father an excuse not to send her to secondary school, and Rosaline who was impregnated. There were women who felt inferior not exactly as a result of (overt) discrimination or sexism, but because of the feeling (and the fact) that they fell below the achievements of the men who were their counterparts. Two female students, Arinola and Tundun fell into this category.

There were those who were both victims of economic depression and patriarchy. Persons close to them resolved what appeared like economic dilemma with patriarchal norms. We know that many girls who have had problems accessing education have actually been affected by the problems of poverty and patriarchy.

We also note the experiences of Alake and Farinde. Their experiences are similar to those of many young women, and the thinking among older persons is that they frown at girls receiving male friends at home to protect their daughter from abuse and also protect the integrity of the family. However, the same groups of parents allow girls to pay visits to their male children. Perhaps this ought to be interpreted to mean that they are not worried about their boys abusing other people's girls, and that when boys receive female guests does not mar the integrity of the family, since the boy will marry a girl, and would have to, at least symbolically, bring the wife to his father's home. At any rate, women have pointed this out as a privilege that men enjoy that they do not enjoy.

Finally, we note the responses of Wunmi who said she had never felt inferior to men but that she would come to the world the next time around as a man, and Feyisara, who had a reason to feel inferior to men. Feyisara said she felt that way after watching a man batter his wife. These two women would like to trade places with men; and Feyisara is presently, obviously, uncomfortable with women's position relative to that of men. Wunmi appears comfortable with the way things are, for she does not feel inferior. However, the fact that she would like to trade places with men may be an indication that she is actually uncomfortable with the way things are. It may as well be that she appears comfortable with patriarchy because to challenge an obviously oppressive structure, such as the one she is comfortable with, is to have painful confrontations with a structure too huge for her to take on (Hooks 1998; Cranton 1994).

### **How Men Have Attempted to Make Women Feel Inferior**

The paragraphs below represent women's responses to the question that asked that they cite instances of how men have attempted to make them feel inferior, while the preceding paragraphs sought to know whether women have indeed felt inferior as a result of their experiences. To some extent, for the purpose of argument, and also in reality, the responses in Box 4.3 represent part of the processes of construction of women's identities, while the preceding paragraphs indicate how successful the processes of construction of identities have been. In considering the experiences of women that ought to have, and that have, shaped women's views of who they are and what they (should) believe, we should remember how men understood the differences between themselves and women, and women's apprehension of who men think they are. In Box 4.3, we cite some of the experiences of women who are of the view that men have tried to make them feel inferior, and also cite the responses of those who said they have never had that kind of experience.

## Religious Leaders on Women's Identities

### Islam

Female Muslim Leader (FML) Ibadan: Women are creatures of the Almighty Allah, created to coexist with menfolk, to be their wives, helper, confidant, mothers of their children and daughters of their own parents. Women should be dedicated to their creator and obey God in totality.

### Christianity

Female Christian Leader (FCL) Lokoja: Women are the female sex. Biblically, the first woman was created as a helpmate to her husband. We are helpers to our husbands, helpers to our relations, helpers everywhere. If you look at Genesis 2:18, it says and the Lord God said it is not good that a man should be alone, I will make him a helpmate.

Women have various interests. Generally, women like to look beautiful. They love to be neat. Women care about their appearance. Women like to have a home. Any reasonable woman, religiously, will like to have somebody as her husband. Somebody that people can call her by, whether or not she is a doctor or a professor. She would like to be called Professor (Mrs) or Dr (Mrs) so and so, as a shield, an umbrella, so as to give her protection wherever she is, so that she looks responsible. Women don't want to be idle. They are caring, loving, and because they care for others, they want to be cared for. They want somebody to support them and they like to have people around them. They want to share ideas and feelings with others and would also like others to share with them. They like to share experiences with other women.

There are those who have other interests. Some like to put their thoughts into writing. Some like to go for excursions, dance, listen to music, and some like to read the Bible. They want their children to attain higher heights in future, so they want to commit the lives of their children into the hands of the Lord. Some have had visions of schools, and they have established the schools. There are two women like that in Lokoja here, and they have standard institutions.

Male Christian Leader (MCL) Ibadan: Biblically, women are equally created by God. The Bible makes us to understand that when God created man in Gen. 1 vs 24, he said male and female did he create them. So women, just like men, were created by God.

Olutoyin Mejiuni (OM): Did he create them equally?

**Box 4.3: Women's Experiences of Discrimination, Sexism and Violence****No Experience of Discrimination, Sexism and Violence*****Literate Women in Formal Work***

'I actually attended an all girls school and while in the university, my class was more of female students than male students' – Banke

'I went to a mixed school, where the standards were high and the female child was treated exactly like the male child' – Adetutu

***Semi-Literate Women***

'No. Men do respect me a lot, maybe because I am big and bold; and they call me Iron Lady. I've never been messed up, except for a policeman that harassed me, but he later came back to beg me' – Modinat

'I don't care about what they say or do' – Alake

'Normally, I don't go out of my way to engage men in anything; at least, my work does not relate to men' – Olaiya

'No! because the Bible says men are the head. Sometimes my husband jokes about hair dressers being prostitutes' – Morenike

'Since I have married, my husband has not maltreated me. If he did, I would have been having such experiences' – Caroline

'I ignore them' – Tanimola

**Some Experiences of Discrimination, Sexism and Violence*****Literate Women in Formal Work***

'When my step brother told me that I do not have a say in the family matter; that I am just a woman and should not talk when they, the men, are talking' – Tiwa

'One good example was the election of our Union president. The men folk said it was only men that were capable of being a Union president' – Medupin

'An example was when I was made a fee collector and coordinator in my former school. Our male counterparts felt it was an all men affair and they thought they could do it better' – Idiat

'Because my GPA is always above their own, they will now turn to use of abusive words' – Atolagbe

'While in school, there was this boy who always felt I had done more to get my high grades' – Aanwo

'If a captain were to be chosen, they prefer a male student' – Temitope

'When I was in primary school, some of the boys in my class would come around and threaten that it was no longer possible for a girl to lead them in examination. Some would go and barb their hair and come to show me that if I didn't understand, they had taken the position from me. Most of the time I would just smile. Sometimes they would tamper with my books or seize an exercise book. Well, I led them always, except in the final exam in primary school, I was beaten to the second position'

– Esther

'When I was in school, boys always felt there were positions meant for boys and not for girls' – Theresa

'When they don't care to know 'bout the level of your intelligence and by the constant phrase that what does a woman know and that our role is in the kitchen'

– Itunu

'In the front seat of a bus, men would rather seat at the edge and not women as one told me one day to come down from the edge for him to seat there' – Rebecca

### ***Female Students***

'Yes! those who are close to you i.e. husband or boyfriend act and speak in a domineering manner at times' – Segun

'Male colleagues say what do you think you can do after school rather than become a full housewife. They do not see women as aspiring further than the first degree certificate qualification.' – Teniola

'One of my classmates is big and tall, he thinks whatever he says in the class is the final, he is so domineering. His voice is so loud and he does this at times when we have to do assignments, he likes intimidating everyone' – Kehinde

'One particular lecturer seems to think we girls are in school simply to distract men from their studies and we make them unserious human beings e.g. a girl and a boy were talking in class, it was the guy he caught talking, he sent him out and asked the girl after a moment if she was the one distracting him even though it was the boy he caught. He sees all girls as dressing naked' – Ajoke

'My maths lecturer walked up to me on this day (I went to a vigil the night before, so I was stressed up) and said "You, you will fail this course, why are you frowning, can't you pretend?" (I know he's a womanizer)' – Debo

'In my practical group, I'm the only female among four guys, they hardly allow me to participate in the practical, they have the feeling that they will be more accurate in taking readings than me' – Chigozie

'For instance, some male students believe that they are better than you are and if you score more than them, they thought you are being given extra marks' – Folarin

'During our last field trip, the males in my group protected the ladies from excavating when the trench was going deeper. The males excavated while the ladies sieved and sort out finds' – Aramide

'For example, all the department in school, it is only male student that are been voted for as the President. We can contest for any position, if not that they are claiming superiority' – Tundun

'Several times, my course mates (male) say women can't compete with them academically. As the best student in my class, they make me assume it will end in the kitchen, I never gave in.' – Rolake

'When you perform better than them, they look at you with contempt as if you have used your body, not your brain' – Ngozi

'In the area of choosing or electing the class captain, they feel that women or ladies are not competent enough to oversee the affairs of the whole class.' – Olaore

#### ***Women in the Informal Economy***

'I felt like that with my brother, because he took my land that I had already put blocks on. He said that if I talk, I will see what he would do to me. Why should he take what belongs to me, when it is not family land? I was given the land while I was young, then he took it and sold it off. If I were a man, I would have gone to any length to retrieve the land back' – Hassana

'When I first got to Lokoja, I thought I needed to get close to a man. After we went to bed, he gave me N200. I got thinking, and I wept, because I thought I had just sold my body' – Niniola

'Yes, as we dey so, e hard make woman be governor, e hard make woman be president. If a woman contest, people will not vote for her because she's a woman. I pray that a woman gets there'<sup>25</sup> – Nkechi

'If I were a man, no man would have forced me to cook for him and at the same time abuse me when the food is late.' – Chioma

'My father told me and my sister that we could not inherit any part of his house because we are girls.' – Nwanneka

#### ***Female Apprentices***

'Sometimes they just talk to ladies anyhow' – Bimpe

'My younger ones are boys; they don't behave like a lady. They play football and I'm busy working, helping with the cooking, washing plates and fetching water. They wash plates at times, but they don't cook and fetch water' – Farinde

'Some men throw banter at women when they are passing by, you know that they can't do that to a male like themselves so it always makes me feel inferior.' – Rosaline

'Since men believe they are the head, They do things that suit them.' – Beyeruka

'Especially when boys talk to girls and they refuse their proposal, they will sit together and talk about it and make uncomplimentary statements.' Chinedu

'When my father refused to send me to school, I knew that if I were a man, he would have still sent me to school even if I did not want to' – Olaitan

'My father loves my two brothers more than we the girls. Whenever they request for anything he gives them without complaining but the reverse is the case for us girls.'  
– Ireti

'Like the case of a quarrel that got to court and the woman withdrew the case because she did not have the money to continue with the case.' – Temi

'There is usually family meeting in my family but we ladies do not attend because they say we are women and not strong' – Mary

MCL: It depends on the way you look at it. He made a woman out of a man. The Bible makes us to understand that the man had a deep sleep and God took out of his ribs, and then created a woman. The man then acknowledged that the woman was taken from his ribs and he called her a woman. A woman is a man with womb. So when you ask whether they were created equally, a woman is a man too. A man is created without a womb. You still see man in every woman. There is manhood in every woman.

Female Christian Leader (FCL) Ibadan: I have passion for women. I believe the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. Without women, there is no humanity and womanhood is mysterious. If you check the problems we are having in the world today, of course a lot of people said it was caused by a woman. But thank God that everything was restored also by a woman, because I am talking from a religious perspective. If you look through the Bible, women raised generations and impacted on their communities. No one can afford to underestimate the power of womanhood. A man can be head but the spirit of the woman rules the home, rules the world. For instance, at the conception of Jesus, Mary said 'Waoh! from now henceforth, all generations will celebrate me' Although God was not happy with what Adam did, he used a woman to bring salvation back to humanity.

OM: How then are women different from men?

FCL: If you look at the scriptures very well, women are not different from men. I say women are better than men. Look at the scriptures very well, God made the man to sleep, made the woman from the rib of the man,

and when the man saw the woman, I believe the atmospheric condition of Eden changed, and the man said this is a man with a womb. That is, a woman is a man with a womb. So, there is no difference between a man and a woman. The Bible said it was in the image of God that he created them, that is, both male and female. It was the man who actually called the woman a woman. God actually called her a help. What was lost in the man, God put in the woman – the breast and the womb. A woman is awesome. If I have to come back to life again, I will still come back as a woman.

In spite of the confusing signals from the female Christian leader in Ibadan, in respect of women's civic-political participation and roles of women in the private and public spheres, she appeared very clear about the question of the identity of women. In one of her sermons, recorded on video tape, she said: 'if the devil wants to oppress, he will oppress you with your identity ... know who you are. You're not a foolish girl because you're married to an unbeliever who tells you you are worthless'. She insists that tradition and relationships oppress women, but that women who are 'born again' should not continue to struggle with identity, for, according to her, 'when your maker picks you up, your value increases'. She cited the example of Mary the Mother of Jesus to buttress the point. She urged women to straighten up, tell themselves they are gems and are uncommon. She says it is not about pride; it is just about celebrating oneself. When I put it to her that her views about women's identities do not seem different from those of feminists on the issue of women's identity, she said it is just that she has found liberation in Jesus. She makes it clear that she is biased in favour of women, and she would not have held the interview with me at the time she did, if I were a man.

### **Yoruba Traditional Religion – The Worship of Sango**

Female Traditional Religious Leader (FTRL) Ibadan: Sango loves women. Oya, Sango's last wife, is the goddess of windstorm. When Sango wants to act, his wife (through windstorm) precedes him, and then he acts through thunder. Given this, Sango loves women. There is just one category of women that he is unable to tolerate – the witches. Don't also forget women plait their hair. Of course Sango plaits his hair too.

### **Overview**

The identities of women that have emerged from this study can be summarized as follows: first, is the individual character of women that influences, and is influenced by, their relationships with other people, their work ethic and performance at work. Second, is claiming and valuing those qualities and ascriptions that make men the male gender – some of their character and their roles as breadwinners. Third, is the acceptance of the socially constructed female, one that is subordinate to and inferior to men. The last is the acceptance of

what is deemed feminine – care, feeling, nurturing – but which has the potential for being put to productive use.

Christian and Muslim leaders acknowledged women as creatures of the Almighty, created to coexist with men as helpers. The female and male Christian leaders in Ibadan said a woman is a man with a womb and the female leader argued that this makes women superior to men. They all seem to want us to assume that they believe that women are indeed equals of men. Women had apparently taken and rejected cues from the position of religious leaders on women's roles in the private and public spheres. So, in spite of seemingly positive lessons from religious leaders about women's identities, most women's perception of who they are reflected in their acceptance of some of the teachings of religious leaders about their roles in the private and public spheres of life; that they are care-givers, and are subordinate to men. Some women rejected these lessons. They asserted that they are breadwinners/co-breadwinners; bold, courageous and aggressive.

### Notes

1. Translates to: I don't look for trouble, but if you step on my toes, I will not take it lightly.
2. Translates to: men ruin the lives of women because of their understanding of who women are.
3. Translates to: women are human beings, but boys are more influential in their parents' house than girls. Boys don't go anywhere and they own their father's house/or they would inherit their father's house, and they will help everybody when they start work/earn a living. Whereas a girl's husband will take her to his house.
4. Translates to: because I am a woman, I do not have the power to make them leave.
5. Translates to: Yes, the way things are now, it is difficult for a woman to become Governor or President ...