

Waning Cultural Values and Adolescent Chastity: A Study of Arugba in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT:

The rapid increase in moral decadence among adolescents has become a recognized social problem in Nigeria. The study focuses on the role of cultural values and how it has helped to promote chastity. It examines the perception of female adolescents and their parents towards chastity and also the role media play in upholding the value. Survey and in-depth interview were employed to gather data. 160 Respondents are drawn from Osogbo Local Government in Osun State, Nigeria. Findings reveal a decline in cultural values and practices over time and this is linked to the impact of westernization on value placed on female adolescent chastity. The study revealed that the media has really not helped by portraying pictures or videos that encourage adolescents to remain chaste. As much as culture influences our way of life, the role of the family in maintaining moral sanctity cannot be over emphasized as the family is the primary agent of socialization.

Keywords: Chastity, Adolescents, Waning Culture values

Background to the Study:

Nigeria is faced currently with a major identity crisis due to the destruction of her cultural heritage, bastardization of her traditions and reckless distortion of her values (Tunde & Olukoya, 2008). Taking a critical look at our Nigerian society today, we realize that there is a dearth in the Nigerian culture. A long standing virtue in which the Yoruba people uphold in marriage is that of virginity. In olden days, virginity of the female at her marriage called for a great family celebration whereby appropriate gifts are given and also pleasant visits by the in-law. People are beginning to imitate the westerners and the female adolescents have no respect for culture and chastity. Future problems are bound to occur because our moral values are gradually declining. Moral degradation in Nigeria is traceable to Western civilization (Jubril, 2006). Nigeria had its way in the maintenance of social order and also in preserving culture making it have a distinct role in the lives of the younger generation.

Fidelity boosts a society's moral standard and also reduces sexual transmitted diseases especially in a continent like Africa where HIV/AIDS is prevalent and a few STDs been discovered to be dangerous to women. A good example is the Human Papilloma Virus which can cause cervical cancer in women. Fidelity guarantees security against unwanted pregnancy and STDs. In Nigeria, the HIV prevalence rate among adults (15–49) is 3.9 % of Nigeria's population and Nigeria has the third-largest number of people living with HIV. Parenting is very crucial at the adolescent stage but parents now have become so relaxed and oblivious of the immoral practices of their children. We see squalor and a very high rate of moral degradation. Our cultural practices are waning and the major reasons they existed are coming to null. The society is having a very high increase in problems. This is why we have issues like out-of-wedlock births, widespread sexually transmitted diseases. We therefore realize that truly, a very enormous problem exists in Nigeria and hence, the need for this study.

Culture in its simplest form can be defined as the way of life of a group of people. Whatever we do is done in a certain way so as to measure up to our cultural context. What we tag as our reality comes from what we have learnt through the process of socialization. This tells us why Landis (1974), believes that culture guides humans continuing interaction with others. It involves patterns of behavior and thinking that people living in a group learn, create and share. Cultural and social values are of great importance to the society. A people's culture is their life, living and dying (Dare, 2008).

Nigerians are known to be a people with a distinct culture and values they hold as very germane and of great interest to them. Some of these include greeting, value placed on children, education and so much more. Respect for elders, family members, and the husband is expected and highly regarded among the Yoruba (Tunde & Olukoya, 2008). They have held on to this over time. This has been very important in shaping their way of life. No society can exist without culture. It is an index of growth, civilization and development. It connotes

traditions, customs, beliefs, morals and values of the society. This shows that culture does not only influence our ideology or how we perceive things but rather it influences the things we do and also our practices. This is why in certain cultures there are certain days allotted to the celebration of certain remarkable events and legends. In traditional times, the privilege of learning culture formally was restricted because it basically involved word of mouth and everyone played an active role in the socialization of the younger ones and through this process, values have been passed down from generation to generation. Values according to Haralambos & Holborn (2009), involves the non material shared judgments about what is desirable or undesirable, right or wrong, good or bad. They express the basic ideals of any culture. Values entail what we term as very dear and important. It is shared by a group of people. It shapes our thoughts and guides our actions.

One major attribute of culture is cultural practices. Practices are an established way of doing something, especially one that has developed through experience and knowledge. Our cultural practices inform us of exactly what to do at a particular place and time. It informs how we relate with one another. It is termed as a cultural manifestation. Cultural practices don't just exist in isolation. They are a part of culture which is formed based on a general consensus and is practiced and given a high esteem. It is recognized with people from a particular culture or ethnic group. It has its origin and its meaning as well. It has its origin in historical times as it has been passed on from generation to generation.

Adolescence is the period between childhood and adulthood. United Nations (2011) describes this age gap between the age group of 10 and 19. Female adolescents numerically constitute an important component of Africa's population (Alfred, 2003). Nigeria's adolescent health policy has defined the adolescents' age group as falling between the ages of 10 and 24 years. Adolescents constitute a fifth of Nigeria's population and young people constitute almost a third of the total population. According to the 2006 population and housing census, adolescents aged 10- 24 constitute 31.7% of the total population of the country with nearly equal proportion of males and females (50.1% males versus 49.9% females). This shows the importance of the female adolescents in Nigeria. It is very necessary therefore that these groups of people are paid much attention.

Fidelity refers to pureness, cleanliness, transparency. It is one's abstinence from sex until marriage. In the olden days, culture had a very solid root and influenced every aspect of life as people saw it as a necessary obligation to ensure that the members of the society aligned with the laid down values of the society. This research is very important to the society at large as it looks at the concept of fidelity and how waning cultural values have influenced this act of fidelity among female adolescents as we know adolescents to be a distinctive age group that always wants to experiment out of curiosity.

The media is very explicit when it comes to sexuality. It portrays nudity in a very clear and obvious way. A very great amount of information which we sometimes overlook its quality and authenticity of its content is now very much easily available to adolescents as advertisers use sexual images as a means for consumer attention

Since only very little is known in this area, the findings will help to fill the gaps in the area of cultural values and practices in relation to female adolescent fidelity. This study is significant for many reasons. First, it will bring to the fore the relevance of upholding the virtues and values of adolescent chastity that is gradually being eroded in the society. Second, it will assist Nigerians especially adolescents that are non-compliance to adjust and embrace their culture with every sense of pride in addition to the responsibility of adult members (parents and guardians) in ensuring that members uphold and align with societal values and practices such as purity and chastity. Finally, findings from this study will assist female adolescents embrace fidelity as a means of maintaining societal order and stability.

This study therefore, is very important as it seeks for ways to emphasize cultural practices and values so as to curb infidelity.

Theoretical Background

For the purpose of this research, particular emphasis is placed on the contributions of Charles Horton Cooley- The looking glass self and also McCandless' Drive Theory.

The Looking Glass self helps to understand how the self is developed. Self is seen as a social product which is shaped by the interaction with others right from birth. The looking Glass self is a reflective process based on our interpretation of the reactions of others. Cooley sees this process as involving three (3) principal elements which re

We imagine how we appear to others

Others judge our appearances and respond to our actions.

We experience feelings based on our interpretation

Through this process, we actively try to manipulate other people's view of us to serve our needs and interests. This is one of the major ways in which we grow to be boys and girls. The image that is reflected back to us lets us know if we have behaved in ways that are socially acceptable according to what is expected of our gender. As females, we know that society values chastity and therefore, we should uphold this value because it is socially accepted and I believe that when we find adolescents who do not promote this value, Societal, institutions should frown at them making them adjust their behavior.

The McCandless' Drive theory is also very useful as it is a nurture theory of adolescent development and it suggests that there is a functional relationship between stimulus and response (Bijou & Baler, 1961). This theory stresses the fact that all human behavior is based on drives which could be hunger or sex and the direction of a behavior is also based on the consequence attached to a drive. Over time, people believe that while some behavior is rewarded by the society, others are punished (McCandless, 1970). The process of social learning therefore involves the acquisition of such drive reducing behaviors that will likely attain rewards and reduce or eliminate that drive reducing behavior likely to end up in punishment.

This theory is very relevant to the study of adolescent behavior because during adolescence, we realize that a new drive which is the sex drive emerges. Due to this emergence, adolescents therefore have to learn socially acceptable ways in which they could reduce this drive. We realize the fact that we cannot control the sex drive in adolescents as this is a normal and in built tendency in adolescent but this can be regulated by the culture of the society. We continue to reward fidelity of females who have kept themselves even till their wedding night and this will serve as a general deterrent to other adolescents also motivating them to remain chaste till their marriage.

Methodology/Research Design

The study utilized quantitative and qualitative research methods. It adopted a survey design complemented by in-depth interview. In relation to the quantitative aspect, structured questionnaire which contains both open and close ended questions were administered to the study population. Interview schedule was employed as the qualitative research instrument to elicit further information. A total of five respondents were purposively selected and interviewed. This was intended to give the respondents ample opportunity to express and share in detail their experiences. The data elicited were transcribed and analysed in line with the research objectives.

The Study Population

The study area is Oshogbo, Osun state, Nigeria and the study population majorly consists of the adolescents in the area within the age group of 10-24. According to 2006 census, Osogbo has a population of 754,694 .Osogbo is the population of study because the *Arugba* role is practiced only in Osogbo and the study is narrowed to the *Ataoja* palace and secondary schools in Osogbo town. The palace was used because the *Arugba* has to be chosen from a royal family.

The *Arugba*

This is a princess who is usually chosen through divination by the *ifa* priest. She is to carry the calabash from the palace to the Osun River during Osun osogbo Festival in Osun State Nigeria. It is compulsory for the *Arugba* to be a virgin and must remain so until she gets married legally. The *Arugba* is the most important person during the festival. Without her, the festival cannot be held. She carries this calabash to Osun Deity as it must be accepted. It is her purity that determines the worth of her sacrifice. The ritual calabash is usually covered with a red cloth. *Arugba* is usually unconscious through these periods and is supported by the chief priest, *Aworo* (osun priest), *iya osun* (osun priestess) and devotees. She is prayed for during the rituals because it is forbidden that the *Arugba* should hit her leg against a stone or fall.

Arugba and her chaperones are dressed in white attires which symbolize purity. When the sacrifice is carried to the river by the chief priest for offering, *Ataoja* (King of Osogbo) moves back to his seat and people move to the water to take out of it in the belief that the water can solve their problems. After the celebration, the king leaves the shrine with other dignitaries. *Arugba*, osun priest and priestess are the last to leave the shrine. However the *Arugba* enters the palace first before the king. She symbolizes purity, so she enters into the palace first to cleanse it for the others. After the calabash has been taken off her she goes to sleep immediately. This festival serves as means of paying vows to osun deity because the entire people of Oshogbo and others come together to pay their vows as a means of appreciating what osun deity has done for them and the land. *Arugba* celebrates the chastity of the African woman.

Methods of Data Analyses

This comprised of a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analyses. Quantitative methods include frequent distribution and percentages which are very well utilized essentially for the cultural, demographical and social data of respondents. It is expected that these statistical tools will yield significant results that will bring to light, the major findings in this research. Data from in depth interviews which are pre-recorded in *Yoruba* language the local language of the interviewer were transcribed and interpreted to suit the purpose of the research. Data from content analysis also complimented this research.

Discussion of Results

From the qualitative data collected, The *Yeye Osun* (*Osun* Priestess) made it clear from the interview that in recent time, adolescent girls hardly take the advice and instructions from their parents. She also explained further that for parents to talk to their children, it is very necessary for them to call them and caution them but nowadays, a girl who is wise should be able to call herself to order and parents will advise them telling them that it is a thing of shame for a person not to be met at home. She also made us understand that it is left for parents to advise their children telling them that they should not go to the wrong places, walk with the wrong friends or give in to the temptations of men so that on one's wedding day one will be found as a virgin.

In relation to the role of media in curbing infidelity among youths, The 'Arugba Agba' interviewed lamented seriously about the media regarding most of what young people watch is not pleasant and wish she was wealthy, she would barn such programmes. 'Arugba Agba' is also of the opinion that government should have a way to regulate such programmes.

From the qualitative data, the result shows that our cultural values emphasize chastity but due to 'modernization', 'westernization' as used by the respondents, these values has declined over time. Most of them emphasized the dressing of women nowadays who now wear highly exposing clothes which was not found in those times and men will definitely react to these things. They stated that westernization has destroyed a lot of things. The chief made it clear by saying:

"Our cultural practices and values from the onset is one that doesn't teach people rubbish and nonsense practices"

When asked about the role of the *Arugba* in curbing infidelity, most of the respondents saw it as a means of advising young girls to remain as virgins till they get married. Due to her purity and selection, she succeeds in all she does even people she prays for; receive solution i.e. if they were more enlightened, this world will be a much better place." *Arugba* is a very good means of curbing infidelity among female adolescents because it is a cultural value that has respect as a major benefit and is a cultural practice as well.

Summary of Major Findings

From the study, research findings revealed that a larger percentage of the respondents value fidelity and see this as due to the fact that they are still young and at this stage, are still growing and under the direct tutelage of their parents. The perception of parents was also harnessed through the process of an in-depth interview. Findings revealed that traditionally and based on religious belief, parents saw virginity as a thing of great value. It gives woman esteem and her parents as well.

Secondly, in the bid to also find out the role of the parents in emphasizing chastity as a social value, findings revealed that the level of communication between adolescents and parents is not very effective and most adolescents are not encouraged by their parents to abstain from sex as students. Additionally, most of the parents interviewed are of the opinion that the responsibility of emphasizing chastity is that of the parents saying that chastity is a 'characteristic of how parents train their children. Majority of the respondents suggested the need for parents to advice their children on a regular basis and caution them from time to time. Also, it is important for parents to engage in heart to heart talk with their adolescents about the places they visit clothes they wear and most especially, keeping their virginity as overtime, we have deviated from this practice. From our traditional perspective, virginity is more of a family culture value and pride.

On the role the media in emphasizing chastity, findings show that television was most of the respondent's major source of information. From the media, a large population believes that chastity is sometimes shown but not very often. All of the respondents interviewed which constituted parents and adults were not happy with what is being

showcased by the media saying it's destroying the lives of the adolescents. The films, music videos, dressing most especially do not preach abstinence culture in anyway.

In addition, most of the respondents affirmed to the fact that our cultural values have truly waned over time and it is largely due to the negative influence of Western Culture on virginity and their major lament was in relation to the chastity of women and even the types of clothes women wear nowadays. They believe that our values do not teach people 'rubbish'. The way the Westerners have been of great advantage is the same way their influence has also been negative on our cultural values. The practice of sending materials to the family of the girl has also waned over time.

The research also revealed that prestige remains a major traditional benefit of chastity. Many of the respondents believe in prestige being a major benefit of chastity and they have at one point or the other been encouraged by the benefit of fidelity. It has in it, a lot of prestige because the man will boast of her and vouches for her and is usually a thing of celebration. It even gives respect to the parents of the girl as a way of saying they have taught her well. Virginity is seen as a means of buying respect, love and trust in a family

The study revealed that *Arugba* is still a means of curbing infidelity among the people of Osogbo because the *Arugba* role is first seen by a large proportion of respondents as a good cultural practice and because it involves a young and unmarried girl, it's a good one for the target audience and the *Arugba* finds favor in all she does because of her 'purity'. It is an eye opener for girls in Osogbo especially those from the royal family.

Conclusion/ Recommendation

No matter how much we try to bury our culture and give supremacy to another man's culture, we will continue to live in a state of anomie. Our culture remains supreme in all we do. We should embrace it. Westernization has its two sides. It is both positive and negative. We cannot totally speak of the great benefits of westernization in our society but then, still, we should learn to appreciate our very own because no man ever develops with another man's scheme. If we seek development and orderliness, we should embrace what is particular to us and just like a respondent said "*Awon asa ibile wa o ki n se eleyi to n ko yon ni kokuko*" (Our values don't lead us astray) Even if it does, it is very limited. Westerners have developed because they have embraced their Western culture and it is just be the same for us as well. Fidelity is a value that cannot be compromised if we want decency in our society, we have to embrace it and every arm of the society has to work together in emphasizing this value.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are raised: there is the need for parents to establish a stronger pattern of relationship with their children, overtime family structure have changed, with the advent of dual-earner career parent, single parenting among others. Parents need to seek for ways to maintain a good relationship in the home with their young ones especially mothers. Truly, we can never over emphasize the role of the family in maintaining the chastity value..

Nigeria culture on marriage refer to it as a sacred thing that involves a lot of detail findings and procedures. Chastity before marriage is a great honour to a young lady and her family. This Value has been ignored over time. The study also recommends that *Arugba* should be made public, it should be published and well circulated because if young people have an in-depth understanding of who the *Arugba* is, the role she has to play and the benefits she stands to gain, it will be a turning point in our society. *Arugba* festival will also encourage young ladies to understand how important chastity is to not just women and her family but the society.

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Table 1: Social Demographic Data

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	48	36.4
Female	84	63.6
Total	132	100.0
Age		
12 years	8	6.1
13 years	7	5.3
14 years	15	11.4
15 years	21	15.9
16 years	34	25.8
17 years	19	14.4
18 years	21	15.9
19 years	3	2.3
20 years	4	3.0
Total	132	100.0
Marital status		
Single	127	96.2
Married	3	2.3
N/A	2	1.5
Total	132	100.0
Class		
SS1	33	25.0
SS2	36	27.3
SS3	63	47.7
Total	132	100.0
Religion		
Christian	65	49.2
Muslim	63	47.7
Traditional	3	2.3
N/A	1	0.8
Total	132	100.0

Description for the above table

The result of this analysis shows that the majority of the respondents were females and in total, 34.4% were males and 63.6% females. The above analysis reveals that most of the respondents are 16 years old and which constituted over a quarter of the total population with a percentage (25.8%). However, 6.1% were 12 years, 5.3% were 13, 11.4% were 14 years, 15.9% were 15 years, 14.4% were 17 years, 15.9% were 18 years, 2.3% were 19 years and 3.0% were 20 years of age.

A total of 96.2% were single and 2.3% were married. Altogether, class distribution of the respondents reveals that 25% of people are in SS1, 27.3% are in SS2 and 47.7%, SS3 students. Majority of the respondents are SS3 students. The analyses also show that 49.2% and 47.7% were Christians and Muslims respectively and 2.3% were traditionalist.

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