



The Effects of Modernity and Changing Perception on Yoruba Cultural Ethics and Biblical Moral Perspectives on Sexuality

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Abstract

The present-day research works have revealed that there has been an increase in premarital sexual affairs. In fact, about 85% of adolescents engage in one sexually wrong and deficient intercourse or another. Similarly, also established is the fact that younger people in Nigeria involve in untimely sex activities (Oguntola, 2006). In the primitive Yoruba societies, sex was considered sacred, ordained in the context of marital engagements which was set aside as a legal union and solemn cleaving between a mature woman and man who mutually agreed to live together. Within this understanding, the Yoruba people and the advocates of biblical ethics place immense importance on the virginity of a newly wedded bride, which appears to be socially bond for everyone, irrespective of status, in social and cultural setting. Conversely, this tradition is not commonly visible in contemporary societies. This study specifically explores the deplorable situations in the present societies where premarital sex is prevalent and virginity is of no value. The work objectively aims at delving into traditional biblical and Yoruba ethical perspectives to address the issue, using historical methods to elicit the findings.

Keywords: Modernity, Sexuality, Yoruba Ethics, Biblical Moral, Perspectives.

Original Research Articles

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I. Introduction

Every community has elements of culture, regardless the social, economic and political achievement. This makes culture universal, but differs from a society to another one. Being a noble heritage, culture is the entire or holistic way of life identified with certain people, a socially bond together group of people (Etuk, 2002). It has been a taboo to engage in sexual intercourse before puberty stage in many African communities (Amoponsah, 1974). In communities where larger or extended families remain the basic units, marriages are usually conducted by the family. This is to ensure cordial relationship in the union and among the two families. Some cultures allow their

young people, male and female, to temporarily form a union in which sex can take place. Others, like in the Yoruba communities, in which virginity of those who have not yet married is considered to be virtuous, particularly the girls severe punishment is given for violation. Premarital or extramarital sex is no commonly taken with all seriousness, though it is not encouraged. Virginity, in this context, is an absence of sexual intercourse; a person sexually undefiled, with no blemish, unused, or untouched is a virgin. Virginity is a highly cherished and recognized virtue in the Yoruba culture. Sex matters in other societies, apart from Yoruba, are equally discussed. In Samoans of Polynesia's culture,



younger one are allowed a numbers of sexual intercourse when they are not yet married, and all these mating may not results in marriage. Sex before marriage is cherished among the Ila-speaking people in Zambia; girls are given houses of their own. Virginity, as established by in this culture, is not expected from or binding on any one above the age of ten. But in traditional Yoruba community, virginity was greatly valued, highly encouraged, cherished, honoured, rewarded and celebrated. Sadly enough, the narrative is not the same in this modern era.

II. Conceptual Exploration of Sex, Sexuality, Gender and Culture

The term "Sex" implies the holistic characteristics that define a human as female and male. It involves all the characteristics which differentiate man and woman, with some reproductive assignments, anatomy, or physiological components. It may commonly be interpreted as gender, socially interpreted within the behavioural terrain, the state of being masculine or feminine in terms of attitude. People are born female or male biologically, but learn how to be feminies or masculine. Gender is a social definition of being male or female. The term "sex" can also be employed to explain different sexual practices, such is sexual intercourse. Sexuality is an umbrella term that connotes a main aspect that indicates a state of being human, including sex, identity, feelings, emotionally attached, love and urge and reproductive tendencies. In other word, it is far beyond urge or desire; but, includes every idea of sex relations, values, imaginings, feelings, experiences, thoughts, attitudes, learning, and behaviours of whether male or female. It equally means the totality of who a person is, what he/she believes, feels and how he or she responds (Bullough, 1994). It is a long term process which starts from birth to death. It comprises of the entire person's identity, attitudes, reflection and affects to be female or male. The old people, adults and even children are sexually endowed with personal interest in all things relating to what goes on around them, including sexuality. They desire to touch people around them, and having a touch from the people with deeper emotion. They intend to give

love, to be loved, along with self-understand of growth and developmental increments. And as the growth is observed, little ones start imitating adults socially and sexually like holding, hugging, kissing and pecking. They look at each others' genitals while playing "Doctor".

In a general term, culture means to be highly civilized in a sophistication of the individual(s), who is "cultured" or "uncultured". In this context, it is advisable to considered culture from the point of view of anthropology and sociology point. The word 'culture' can be described as all things that should be seen as man's engagement, actions and behaviours of man are cultural products of man; in this sense, culture implies the complete and specific pattern of life of any people (Amadi, 1982). It entails different aspects of life, attitude, values, norm, skill, object, belief, systems, worldview cherished by man, learned or copied as parts of certain set of people in a given community. Culture is very complex, a whole entity containing belief, knowledge, arts, laws, morality, customs, and any others, capabilities or habits mediated to man as member of a group in the society Tylor (1971). That is, culture encompasses all of man's social-economic, political and religious life, acquired or learned. And this clearly and significantly separates or differentiates man from animals. Material and non-materials are two aspects of culture; non-material is subdivided into cognitive and normative. Thus, the Yoruba, through culture, indicates a life patterns that is unique product of hands and minds from African worldview (Ogunmodede, 1992). Life is ultimately dignified, respected, regarded to be sacred and considered originated the almighty God. Again, social attachment, co-operation as well as the individual welfare is guarantee and reinforced by appreciating values such as greetings, hospitality, mutual love and co-habitation, brotherhood and oneness. Fairness or Justice is given its rightful place as morally imperative of peaceful life.

III. The Interplay between Religion, Mythology, Cultural Norms and Sexuality

Religion has to do with specific system of belief worship the Supreme Being called God, or Deities.

Several religions are found in Africa. We have three major ones in Nigeria: Traditional African Religion popularly referred to as (ATR), Christianity, and Islam. In many societies and cultures, religion has primary influence, serving as viable tool for building and sustaining every act relating to sex, as well as regulating sexual relationship. Religion draws its strength out of particular norms and a certain system of belief involving the mandate and influence of an ultimate essence (or spirits) taken to be responsible for bringing the present univers into existence, governing and controlling its fate and affairs. The ultimate being rules over fate and purpose of human beings, rewards, punishes or decides their fate at the eschaton. Religion often deals with all kinds of what have been revealed, contained in holy texts, explicitly read and interpreted through God's representatives. The revelation through God's word usually dictates the expected pattern of sexual acts, fostering the dos and don'ts that dictate who is eligible to engage in sex, under what circumstances, with reasons. These regulations that are related to sexual acts and other behaviours are interpreted by religious leaders like priests, pastors, imams or rabbis and other leaders who claim to have direct contact with Supreme Beings or his representatives, and interpreter (Parrinder, 1980).

From the antiquity, religion has been dictating many things about sexuality. Sexual dignity, values, behaviours or relationships are contents in religion. Religious doctrines have been applied to guide the children, the adolescent and the adults. Besides, "great religions of the world," Islam, Buddhism and Judaism, Hinduism, Christianity, are perceived to be known for patriarchal bias which keeps women in a secondary and supportive place and. Even, in the religions of the Easterners, where gods, goddesses, are painted in ritual sex and women are commonly portrayed as the sexually initiators and experts, the responsibilities of women still much presenting them as inferior to men. Similarly, in Islam, male dominates and women are subordinates. Jewish religion, Christianity, and Protestantism are of divergent opinions concerning the religious views; Jesus said to the disciples that there will not be difference among the men and the women in the kingdom of God, but the masculine views of the

disciples usually dominates the teaching on equality of the genders. Equally, the early Christians taught that sex purity is an ultimate determinant in the spiritual realm. Those who gave birth to Jesus were described virgins to encourage the married and not yet married to be sexually decently while sex encouraged for procreation. Protestant recently affirmed this equality thereby ordaining men and women into ministry (Parrinder, 1980). Religion provides workable guiding rules regarding how people should live. These guidelines, though interpreted differently, include the following:

1. Good and dignified behaviours
2. Good and acceptable neighbourliness
3. Love and care for one another
4. Do the right
5. Be a person of peaceful
6. Abide by laws
7. Being useful and dutiful
8. Be Respectful
9. Shun Premarital sex and outside of marriage
10. Be Committed
11. Promote good life
12. Be a responsible person
13. Cherish sex in marriage

Sexual intimacy is not encouraged in some religions and cultures, based on the traditions or the cultural perspectives. In various Islamic communities, boys and girls can be separated in their school, and to date is disdained, and as for others, courtship is not allowed until when marriage happens and the woman moves to the husband's house. To them, lack of decency carries great effects for who engaged in it and their families. Among the Muslims, much attention is directed to female purity, chastity, modesty, seclusion and veiling. What matter most to Muslim men is the character of their women (Struas, 1992).

Cultural Norms on Sexuality

A norm is the principle about right attitude or deed, which is binding on every member in particular group to control, guide, or relates for acceptable sex

behaviours. Norm suggests that there must be a right behaviour in a community. There are many norms in Nigeria showing that we have several ethnic groups; each of them has their own cultures. For instance, woman must cover completely when they leave their houses in some cultures; while in another they may not, or cover herself partially (Gunther, 1976). Breaking of norms in Africa is considered as a taboo. A taboo is forbidden and highly disapproved thing in every culture. It varies, just like norms, across different ethnics. Examples of taboos, in Nigeria, include the following:

1. Sex among brothers and sisters
2. Sex with parents
3. Sex with the animals
4. Sex when menstruating
5. Obscenity
6. To discuss sexual matters openly
7. Mentioning sexual organs in public discussions
8. Sexual activities before marriage

Also, every culture determines the acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, regarding to sex relationship in Nigeria. Generally, the following are acceptable variations on what is appropriate among cultures:

- Dressing decently and appropriately
- Avoidance of being naked unexpectedly and unnecessarily
- Chastity among boys and girls is ensured
- Parents' sexual relationship is kept private
- Films to be watched at home is censored
- Pornography is disallowed
- Parents' approval and consent before having hands in marriage with anyone.

Behaviours that are not allowed

- a. Sex abuses like gay, sexual harassment, rape, incest, etc.
- b. Being addicted to alcoholism

- c. Abuse of drug
- d. Indecent dressing
- e. Exposure of sensitive organs

Sexuality and Mythology in Yoruba Culture

1. Eating of eggs can increase libido
2. A boy that is beaten with broom can be impotent
3. A women who is pregnant should not go out in the mid-day or mid-night, so as to avoid being afflicted by evil spirit
4. Consuming excess of beef can cause lack of fertility.
5. Sex with virgin often purifies blood of man
6. Menstruating women taking their food without salt
7. Touching a baby by young girls or women who are menstruating, or recently had sexual intercourse is harmful
8. An unwanted pregnancy can be effectively aborted by eating groundnuts
9. Menstruating woman must not be allowed to go to a stream
10. Circumcision Female to give birth to a child easily.
11. Circumcision of Female is cultural and can never be changed

Social life and Sexual reproductive health of individuals can be promoted through the following guidelines:

1. Keeping responsible partners
2. Wear decent and dignified clothing
3. Select peers carefully
4. Be a courteous person, showing respect in talking.
5. Don't engage in harmful practices, but respect constituted authority
6. Culturally be mindful of right media exposure like movies, journals, news, radio etc
7. Examine your proposed actions based values

IV. Biblical View and Yoruba Tradition on the Value of Virginity

Biblical Perspective on the Value of Virginity

The word 'virginity' originates from the Hebrew word 'betula', which means "to separate", commonly used for a woman who never had sex with a man. It is of similar implication with the Greek 'parthenos'. 'Parthenos' indicates an individual who has reached the age he/she is capable of and suppose to have sex relations but had not yet experienced it (Baab, 1962). This implies that the Virginity of a bride is highly cherished, considered valuable, and carefully explicitly dictated in the bible. As revealed from the Biblical angle, a woman that has been engaged or betrothed could be referred to as a "wife" while still within similar standard of faithfulness (Genesis 29:21; Deuteronomy 22:23-24; Matthew 1:18, 20); the man who engages the woman could also be referred to as a "husband" (Matthew 1:19). The proof faithfulness by the couples is publicly displayed as toke, forming the part of marriage procedures, expressing how significant virginity is among the bible characters.

The ancient Israelite's law revealed the immense value the people attached to being virgin of a bride. Virginity of Fiancée is very significant before being married (Leviticus 21:13; Deuteronomy 22; 13-21). Thus, a proof of this virtue might be asked from the side of the husband before they go into the event of such marriage proper. In case of any suspicion and attempt of defilement, the husband could ask the parents of his wife to-be to show reliable marks of being faithful (Deuteronomy 22:13-21). So Parents of the would-be wife need to present proof of their daughter's virginity, which could be one of her blood stained cloths of her menstruation so as to show absence of pregnancy. The stained cloth served an evidence that the woman had not being defiled by any man (Deuteronomy 22:13-21). It would be a crime to engage in sexual acts with third party while being engaged under the custody of her parents. The husband to be could be fined a hundred shekels if he lied, wrongly accusing wife to be of being unfaithful; he could be flogged and forced to marry the woman (Deuteronomy 22:13-19), However, in the case of

genuine a accusation and unfaithfulness, the wife to be would be killed by stoning (Deuteronomy 22:20ff). If an undefiled and engaged woman is rapped by a man, especially in public in which she could not receive any assistance or rescue, he would deserve to be killed (Deuteronomy 22:25ff). However, if the girl is yet to be engaged by any man, he would be asked to pay the father of the girl the sum of 50 shekels and take her as his wife (Deuteronomy 22; 28f. cf Exodus 22:15), because her matrimonial value had been inflicted with damage.

The word 'betrothed' employed in the first five of Moses (Exodus 22:16, Deuteronomy 20:7; 22:23-24) connotes a contract that is officially and constitutionally binding on the parental sides of the intending couples, which was a constitutional condition of their union (Deuteronomy 28: 30, 2 Sam, 3:14), during which they must still remain undefiled (Deuteronomy 22:23-24). The prospective groom has been considered to have taken the possession of his bride with legal marital authority on her through the means of sacred traditional price paid on the woman known as 'the bride price' offered to bride's family. Particular rules or guiding principles were set up, precisely, to the priestly lineage. High priest might be allowed to go into a marriage union with an undefiled woman, a virgin, from his own tribal people (Leviticus 21:13f.). If a priest failed in this regarding, married, non-virgin, any child from that union became automatically unqualified for priesthood services in Israel (Leviticus 21:13-15) (Ryrie, 1994). The tradition basically indicates God's demand on holiness, marriage sanctity and necessity of discouraging defilement. Virginity was perceived an unmistakable channel to justify the state of being righteous based on the way one lived (Rea (1975). With the life of Esther in the scriptures, Rea viewed a mark of royalty an honour in being virgin. Hence, parents made it their noble responsibility, especially of daughters, to protect their virginity at all cost. The betrothal was often effective within one year, forming a unique aspect of enduring union as recorded in Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:27; 2:5 (Wright *et al*, 1980). It is vividly stated that, though Mary was considered being the wife of Joseph during the period

of their engagement, they did not go into any immorality and sex occurred only after the first child, Jesus. New Testament revealed the matter of virginity was clearly suggested by Apostle Paul (Mckenzie, 1976). His instruction appears to mean that he forbids those intending couples who are yet to marry to stay away from sex (1 Corinthians 7:1, 2). Premarital sex has been considered immoral with which no anyone was to be identified until he or she got married. I Thess. 4:3-7 teach people to desist from fornication and Hebrews 13; 4 teaches the honour and glory of undefiled marriage. Marriage had long been seen sacred, complete and full institution in every area. Jesus, considered lustful looking at a woman as committing adultery (Matthew. 5:27,28). Thus, sex before marriage is completely forbidden in the New Testament.

Sexual Morality and the Values of Virginity among the Yoruba

Marriage, as a sacred institution, is universal in all human communities. In the Yoruba traditional setting, sex before marriage is forbidden. It is established that the sexual desire and gratification outside wedlock is contrary to the Yoruba believe system. This implies that wife to be must not defile herself through any immoral relationship until she is legally wedded by the groom, as a result of the more value placed on virginity. One can even be tempted to say that Yoruba people have idolized virginity of the woman which is a sign of been undefiled. Virgin girl offers the highest pride to her father and mother, groom and the entire family. Normally, unmarried boys and girls should be new in terms of sex and totally ignorant till the night of wedding when the mother the groom would be around to educate the newly wedded couples on it. Failing to put them through, the father of the husband comes in and teaches the new husband. The uninterrupted joy often happened to the mother of the man who stood-by their door when the new wife cried in the room showing that the wife had never been touched by any man. Mark of her virginity was commonly bed sheet that was blood-stained which would be sent to the parents of the bride in a vessel very early the following day of their wedding. That was commonly followed by money and hen to be used for ritual of

blessing to the new wife, just to thank her god, who had helped her that no man ever had any sexual intercourse with her before marriage. According to custom, the bride would stay for that day in the house of her parents, with feasting and entertainment, while similar event would hold in her husband's house, even more elaborate. Fadipe (1970) submitted that two women from would stay with the wife till the event of the bridal night had passed, they were from her extended family. The female family members would sleep out of the room at the door of the newly wedded couples to expect good news of hearing the shouting or crying of the new wife. Should the wife was found unfaith, being disvirgined, they used any available means to leave the place as early as possible, together with the associates of the bride who need to seek for protection from any aggressive encounter for the disappointment. But, such could never end in rejection of the woman completely. Confession and naming of the men or man who was responsible for the defilement would be required of the woman for proper judgment in line with their custom, as the concerned might be sued. The woman who was unfaithful would suffer considerably, being denied of many gifts that were commonly showered on brides. The attitude might even earn her some shameful reputations for certain numbers of days. That shame would extend to her family members, as messages were coded and symbolically sent to them the next day (Fadipe, 1970). To relieve him of any traumatic rigor, words of comfort were sent by her father to the husband, at times asking that the woman be brought back home. Coming back home, the woman would be flogged, being tied down, to force her to reveal the man or men who defiled her. Many at times, it might not necessary to send the woman back home in order to access all means of knowing the truth; the husband could possess different mechanisms to probe his wife to reveal the identity of the people involved. As she confessed, husband might proceed to sue them for damages in customary fashion. The faithful wife would be praised by co-wives, and members. However, the unfaithful would be taunted. The faithful often gladden the heart of her husband, sending messages of joy, congratulation, thanks and well-done to her parents and relatives. Sheet white smeared with blood would be sent in a calabash covered to her parents with money and hen

for ritual, as mentioned earlier. Very early of the next day, the man and his friends would go and appreciate the parents of the bride, the same he would repeat when he would go with drummers and his contemporaries. That day was given to celebration in the compounds of the fathers of both the bridegroom and the bride. Fabarebo (2004) reinforces, stressing that cultural morality on sex in traditional Yoruba community was regarded as a communal duties to see that no child violated cultural principles regarding sex. It is saddened as such responsibilities today are disdained in this contemporary society, considering it to be barbaric.

V. Virginity in Modern Yoruba Society

It is undeniable that people's attitudes toward marriage and sexual relations are changing as numbers of male and female get involved in premarital and extramarital affairs, even in modern communities of the Yoruba indigenes. The USA and some other European nations, through research findings, revealed an ongoing increase in sexual experiences before engaging in marriage within the last century. In fact, many young persons, girls and boys today, are found arranging for or going into marriage without involving their parents, all in the name of "modernization" or "civilization" (Otitte and Ogionwo, 2006). Today, virginity is no more significant in marriages in Yoruba society. What matters now is conception and child bearing. Sexual purity, fidelity and virginity are no more dignify and emphasized, aside in minor cases. Nowadays, you hear a shameful report of child bearing after one or two months. Thus, it can be deduced that the approval and joy of some marriages nowadays is in pregnancy, and even child bearing before wedding. This has led to increase in indiscriminate and unbridled sexual activities among the contemporary young ladies and boys. Sex today is perceived as showing love as a result of deeper feeling towards the opposite sex. Unfortunately today, some religious leaders also toe this immoral line by conducting church wedding for marriage partners who have gone into immorality and impregnated the proposed wife. A certain story a brother and a sister was told who gave birth to a child after six months of wedding. It is evidently discovered that the absence of a code of

conduct and a presumptuous, relaxed attitude of many Christian youths have given rise to some premarital and extramarital sex in among Christian circles. Young people are currently indulging themselves in immoral acts during their courtship. The manner at which Christian boys and girls conduct their courtship now is typically is similar, and even, identical to appears not to that of the sinners in world; it is courtship conducted with no consciousness Godliness. Some boys and girls not only hold hands and sit together in public places, but also engage in open contacts like hugging and kissing that exposed them to temptations. Therefore, sex before marriage is now on the increase in modern society.

VI. Conclusion

This paper examined sexuality and virginity in biblical and traditional Yoruba perspectives, focusing on effects of modernity and change of perception about the concept. In other word, the Yoruba cultures, values, the biblical perspective on sexuality and sanctity of marriage, which are currently suffused with immorality in the present day communities were examined. The cases of infidelity flooded the street today are explored with possible suggestions for halting the spread of immoral acts. If these suggestions are judiciously used, sex abuse among younger people will indeed reduce. This means that, to bring back the lost value, dignity of being virgin among the present Yoruba people, there some steps to be urgently taken. Orodiji (2002) suggests some salient principles for stopping sexual corruption, that is, sex before marriage. These include:

- a. Youths should avoid reading immoral books, magazines and pornographic junks;
- b. Ungodly television programmes and video should not be watched;
- c. Body make-up, indecent dress and sexy underwear should be avoided.
- d. Youths should avoid unbridled relationship and friendship with opposite sex.
- e. Youths should be dutiful and not be idle;
- f. Self – determination and covenant with God on sex is important.

Recommendations

1. Parents should endeavor to educate their children on sex, how and when to engage or go into it. The purposes and value of sex, purity demanded should be diligently communicated to younger ones.
2. All schools should design workable methods of teaching sex education useful for both the students and their teachers, including punitive mechanisms for any sexual sin.
3. In schools as well, there should be functional counseling section organised for students on sex education.
4. Children can also learn from social and mass media about the meaning, purpose, use of sex and the peril of misuse it.
4. Churches, Mosques and other places assigned for religious activities can also contribute their own quota by emphasizing sexual purity.
5. Adults in the community should serve as role model to the younger people; immoral discussions should be avoided

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