

# The Gender Shibboleth in Music and Entertainment Industry

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## Abstract

There is considerable tension and contradiction regarding the imbalance between the population of males and females in the music and entertainment industry. This tends to create a gender shibboleth in the system. Gender studies have formed part of the curriculum in tertiary institutions, similar to that of “Slave Trade” and “Communism” in previous eras. This study, therefore, attempts at diffusing the age-old tension and contradiction involving gender in the spheres of creation, performance, and perception of music and allied arts. The work uses the dialectical style to explicate aspects of relativism and/or truism as discovered in the course of this study. Various approaches including primary and secondary information gathering, on-the-spot assessment of trends in the field, and critical analysis of issues, are employed. It is observed that strong family support, social maturity, acquisition of a problem-solving mentality, and the quest for freedom have contributed to the emergence of giants in the field of music and the performing arts irrespective of so-called gender stereotypes. Imbalance, where that exists, may mostly be in the area of numerical strength not in the quality of intellectual capacity across the gender line. It is recommended that academicians, practitioners, and consumers alike should rise up to fight the shibboleth of gender in the music and entertainment industries. This fight may involve a change of attitude in refuting relative arguments and theories, creating musical works that promote soundness of mind, and refusing to be intimidated by centrifugal and/or centripetal forces, among others.

**Keywords:** Shibboleth, Gender, Stereotype, Entertainment, Relativism

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## I. Introduction

Gender and its related issues, as affecting the subdivision of the human being into masculine and feminine, have gained serious debate and counter-debates in the academia. When it comes to the world of music and the entertainment industry, these issues take the form of probing into who is the creator, performer and consumer of the product? Certain assumptions, facts and even truths based on historical, cultural, philosophical and religious parameters are derived. The big question is “Does music in its pure or functional form require such scrutiny?” The answer may be in the affirmation but with a caveat not to allow it ‘to be used to support social, religious or political theories’ (Arnold, 1984; 1224). Another poser is “Why are people so concerned about the subjective rather than the objective of music making?” or put simply – “What causes the gender shibboleth in Music and the related arts?” This study will attempt to answer these and other questions under the following guidelines:

- Summary of literature review and allied documentation on the subject
- On-the-spot assessment of trends in the field
- Critical analyses of the data collected in conventional settings
- Observations so deduced
- Conclusion
- Recommendations

## Summary of Literature Review and Allied Documentation

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, one of America’s civil rights activists, asserted that:

The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour-line, the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa in America and the islands of the sea. It was a phase of this problem that caused the civil war, and however much they who marched South and North in 1861 may have fixed on those technical points of union and local autonomy as a shibboleth, all nevertheless knew as we know that the question of Negro slaves was the real cause of the conflict. (1994:9)

Du Bois' assertion is apt as he questions the rationale behind the colour-line shibboleth in America at a certain period in history. In Du Bois' averment lies the fact that "the blacks look at themselves through the eyes of others" (ibid:2). Apparently, an element of self-defeat. The presenter uses this assertion as a paradigm to reconstruct the gender shibboleth that exists in the levels of music creation, performance and the consumption of the final product. From available records and expressed opinions, it is likely that this stereotype has more negative effects on the feminine gender than their masculine counterparts.

The inequality between men playing music and women singing as contained in Middleton (2016) is scary. Middleton gives a variety of instances in many genres of music because inequality is imperative, He submits:

Whether we believe that gender inequality is a social construct or a natural phenomenon, it is plain that locally, globally, and historically (since a true matriarchy has never existed) it is men who hold the power. Music has always held power too, a power it bestows on those who wield it. On top of this, instruments hold a certain control over music, be it harmonic, rhythmic or melodic. Thus, instruments, and their masters have many social connotations of control and importance (65).

Some of the postulations may seem relative in some cultures and backgrounds. For instance, some faith-based ministries including the Apostolic Faith Church and the Salvation Army to mention but two, have women playing all manner of instruments. The reasons for the social construct that restrain women in particular circumstances should be highlighted and addressed. Besides, true matriarchy may not exist, nevertheless, the few female folks who rise to the top strive to prove true maturity in leadership.

Taylor (2014) Submits an empirical study on how the brain can help support varying skills in males and females thus contributing to the reasons for inequality. The study highlights the comparison between male and female reactions to social activities because of the function of the brain.

<b>Females</b>	<b>Males</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Females tend to find jokes less funny overall and may chuckle rather than laugh outright. They tend to be amused by what they perceive as poor jokes but tend to rate jokes defined as very funny even higher than their male counterparts do.</li> <li>• Females tend to accept teasing more playfully.</li> <li>• Extroverted females are more likely to appreciate orectic humor (e.g slapstick, laughing as the expense of other people's misfortune such as someone slipping on a banana peel, racial/cultural/smutty jokes)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Males to tend to find jokes funnier, generally give most jokes a higher rating and are more likely to laugh harder at them. Males tend to try harder to be funny and actually maybe five times funnier (as compared to females).</li> <li>• Males are more likely to respond to teasing with aggression.</li> <li>• Males are more likely to appreciate orectic humor (e.g slapstick, laughing as the expense of other people's misfortune such as someone slipping on a banana peel, racial/cultural/smutty jokes)</li> </ul>

(p.4)

Kallberg (2000) submits that music itself can produce ideologies of gender (645) This may seem somehow plausible in the areas of song texts, performance techniques, style and other extra-musical nuances. Many examples abound which lend support to the evoking of emotions by songs and heightening the meaning of the songs. In Africa, there are songs exclusively meant for women and those for men, not only because of the instrumentations but because of the lyrics. For example,

<b>Song</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Nnookuknka urua	Give me money for market
Afo ammenge uyo	You ignore my plea
Ama ado okoneyo	In the dark
Afo adidake window	You stand beside my window
Osuk obong Dalin Dalin	And whisper Darling Darling
Ufang modo	Any space for me?
I say sodi for you	I say I am sorry for you
Ufang ibanga.	There is no space

Traditionally women are seen to address their needs in songs that may speak volumes than talking even politely to seemingly overbearing spouses. This is an example of poetic license which is a recognized cultural parlance in certain quarters except it is practised within the confines of that milieu.

On the other hand, Sergeant and Hinomides (2016) submit that:

Our results indicate that gendered information is not represented in the gestures, structures and narratives of a musical composition. No codes are embedded in music by composers that might operate as hidden signifiers of gender. Any gendered impressions experienced by a listener are imposed onto the incoming musical stimuli subjectively by that listener, contributed from a network of previously

established gender schemata, operating at a subliminal level, which relies on universal socially acquired stereotypical perceptions of relative characteristics of men and women. Masculinity and femininity are mapped onto the music by the listener.

There may be a cautious welcome of these research findings mostly in absolute music genres as opposed to word-based music where the lyrics paint pictures of meanings. It may further debunk some age-old relativism attached to musical symbols. On a starting note, Kallberg 2000 puts up a feminine subject: 'Indeed, as far back as the time of Plato and Aristotle, the entire category of music gauged against such domains as science and the military has commonly been viewed as a feminine realm of humans' activity' (46).

Kallberg further gives a critical subdivision of different disciplines in music assigning them masculine and feminine roles because of the numerical strengths of those who are engaged in the disciplines. The study of music theory, for example, has been criticized for the masculine orientation of its scholarly discourse--- Ethnomusicologists have been likened to feminine midwives--- More men than women are music theorists--- more women than men are ethnomusicologists (ibid: 647). This seems to be mostly an exercise in relativism

Other music disciplines and allied arts generate gender issues. The trends of claims and counter-claims of stereotypes are ambiguous and confusing.

Of grave concern is how women, apparently feeling a sense of inequality decide to fight the battle of the minority as if they were in a political democracy that emphasizes the game of numbers. They often carve niches for themselves, such as feminist composers, feminist ethnomusicologists and the like Ellen Koskoff is a leading figure in this regard. In her book "Feminist Ethnomusicology" Koskoff has traced the evolution of ethnomusicological thinking about women, gender and music (2016).

Heliman has cited a group of authors that view that 'Gender stereotypes are not only descriptive of how men and women typically are, they tend also to be prescriptive, indicating socially preferred characteristics, that is, how men and women should be; (2012).

The view of these authors is consoling in the light of the random attachment of unnecessary strings to prescribed functions. Besides, it seems odd to give prescriptions on such social matters as music making.

### **Social Background of the Various Feminist figures**

Another factor that can cause music to generate ideologies of gender is the social background of the musicians. An eminent feminist scholar at the University of Uyo discussed in her inaugural lecture the paths she had trodden from birth to adulthood. She outlays the good support system that she enjoyed from her parents which gave rise to her discovering the paths to greatness in youth. She submits:

My parents made me know I could get anything I needed, and so there was never a time I looked for anything outside my family. I was at the centre of everything that took place in the family; I guess this is still largely so till today, but I was also made to know the values of humility, hard work, love and appreciation. Thus, my four brothers especially the elder three, never saw me as a threat (Uko 2017: 3,4).

The same background is sketched by many feminist musicians that have described their financial and moral support from parents. Two siblings in the Department of Music, University of Uyo have parents who support both of them to study music. They are both exemplary and pacesetters. Kallberg 2000 opines that:

--- the various obstacles, including parental, institutional and financial, that until well into the 20th century have hindered the access of women to the kinds of educational resources routinely granted men and into the roles of gender in both the constitution of core musical repertoires and in the conceptions of musical talent and creativity (646).

On the other hand, it is disturbing to read an eyewitness account of a father who refused to encourage his daughter to pursue a course in Medicine. The allusion is that the father foresees the daughter's success in a professional course of medicine as a boost to the would-be husband's family rather than an asset to his posterity. Such ignorance of prescribing a daughter's future career on the basis of gendering demands is a part of what constitutes the gender shibboleth

The anatomy of the human body-feminine anatomy mostly-command impulsive attention in many ways. Myles Munroe the motivational speaker, in a recorded speech in 2011 (play the video) gave a seminal contribution on why women are most attractive. If Munroe's assertion were correct, or even if it were partly correct, it could be deduced, as Blacking said, that music has biological origin". It could also support an earlier paradigm that this researcher constructed from DuBois that the problem of the twentieth century – that which gave rise to the gender shibboleth in music and the entertainment industry is that of human anatomy. Besides Munroe says that women are "Incubators, if a woman is not an incubator, then it may be that salt (she) has lost its (her) saltiness.

### **Terminologies**

The terminology "Shibboleth" is worth treating here. The incorrect pronunciation of the word Shibboleth as against the correct pronunciation of "Shibboleth" earned the original culprit's death sentence as in

Judges 12:5,6. Shibboleth may look simple on the surface but it is a deciding factor in what constitutes tensions and contradictions in the society. There is **language shibboleth** in Nigeria as in the context mentioned above. There is the **colour-line shibboleth** as described by Du Bois earlier in this study. There is the **bourgeois shibboleth** as in Communism an age-old socio-economic system, reflected in George Orwell's "Animal Farm". There is **religious shibboleth** as in practice in some countries. This study's main focus is on **gender shibboleth** in Music and other entertainment industries.

Another terminology to be focused on is the entertainment industry. This term is used loosely to incorporate the creative and material aspects of culture which are adapted to serve as means of inspiring the audience in a gathering. It is a fast-growing industry, a major component of the tourism sector of the economy. Examples of the creative aspects of culture will include music and acting while the material aspects will include plastic arts and allied artifacts.

### **On-the-Spot Assessment of Trends in the Field**

The researcher has some experiences of ceremonial re-presentation of hitherto esoteric traditional music types for communal consumption. For instance, an *Utuekpe* (spider web) theatrical presentation was performed whereby women came closer to the arena conceived originally for the spirit manifest only. The cantor (lead singer) even issued a threat to the people claiming that he will use a sacred object to inflict hardship on the members of the audience. When the cantor was asked to confirm the seriousness of his threat, he responded that he only meant to scare the women. He further added that those on-lookers were his kith and kin and that performance in that context was only for entertainment. The contention is that most of such traditional performances are nowadays being de-mystified in order to use the products for modern consumption and entertainment. Indigenous musicians are aware that some of their products earn tourist attraction and thus they may not afford to compartmentalize their works into a purely traditional milieu.

Again, recent studies have shown how music genres originally performed at traditional settings have gained their entrance into the church and social gatherings. Women also participate in some of these presentations. In church settings, schools and colleges female students play musical instruments originally conceived for men in the traditional milieu. No offence may be recorded because of the new and ceremonial settings. For example, women who are adept in music performance have taken the lead in certain churches where orchestral music forms a tangible part of the liturgy. These women are poised to play instruments that were formerly dreaded by their predecessors. A female lecturer at the University of Uyo who worships in the Apostolic Faith Church is a lead player of the double bass in her church orchestra. She is very versatile to do that at the state and national levels. A female dancer and xylophonist from the Department of Music, University of Uyo, has earned popular acclaim as she plays the xylophone originally conceived for men in traditional settings even with much dexterity. In the Department of Music as well, some female students have nicked a name for themselves because they accept the challenge to play instruments that their predecessors considered forbidden. They even do courses that are relatively connoted as masculine.

In theatrical formations, women are playing crucial roles in improving the level of aesthetics and creating feelings that often transport "Alice in wonderland". It should be said that some of the current fashions, either positive and/or negative, are derived from Nigerian Home Videos popularly called Nollywood. That sector is very prolific for women who venture into dramatic arts.

### **Analysis of Data**

Over two hundred questionnaires were distributed in the Department of Music which has a population of more than three hundred students. Forty-seven per cent of the respondents were female students. Questions were asked on the instruments studied, challenges faced, support from parents and the society as well as general comments. Emphasis was mostly on the female students.

A good number of female students discovered their talents through motivation in the institution. Others embrace the study of musical instruments as a vocation to make a name and derive socio-economic benefits. Others further received encouragement from church institutions. Some complained of poor parental and/or societal support to study music. A good number of the students complained about sexual harassment and indecent behaviours of some colleagues. Female students show more interest in violin and viola, saxophone and singing. Some of them study piano, brass instruments and drums. Not many female students are involved in music technology. Many ladies excel in their musical instruments. It may be added, there is a phenomenal increase in the population of those who show interest in the study of music irrespective of pseudo challenges. Generally, female students emphasize that it takes courage and determination to excel against the background of poor self-image or in the words of Du Bois (1994) "measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity". What these categories of music artists engage in is refusing pity and contempt and accepting the norm of doggedness and confidence.

## **II. Observations**

There is gender shibboleth in music and the related arts which forces restraint on the female than on their male counterparts. This has become an ingrained habit that accounts for considerable differentials in the socio-political milieu. Nevertheless, the academic world seems to bridge the gap to most extent. Thus, it is observed that strong family support, social maturity, acquisition of a problem-solving mentality, and the quest for freedom have contributed to the emergence of giants in the field of academic music and performing arts irrespective of so-called gender stereotypes. On the other hand, some parents and institutionalized policies tend to frustrate the growth of the arts. However strong family support, social maturity on the part of the students and the need to contribute their quota to the growth of the eco-system help to raise giants out of the crowd.

Ladies have the capacity to be graceful in outlook. They can also nurse and groom music talents to maturity. It is equally observed that the numerical strength of men aside in the profession of music, women who make it to the top are rich in the verdure of talents and gifting

## **III. Conclusion**

It may be an accident to note that though the gender shibboleth has caused many-a-talent to be buried in the cementing of intimidation and ignorance, yet, the resistants are well rewarded. The musical transformation that has taken place in schools and churches is a pointer to the fact that old assumptions may fade away in the light of the realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **IV. Recommendations**

It is recommended that academicians and artists should rise up to expose and fight the gender shibboleth to a retreat as did DuBois and George Orwell in their major treaties on the struggle against the social tensions of their day. This is an assiduous task and calls for more collaborative research.

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