

**EMBRACING GENDER EQUALITY: MOVING BEYOND THE
NOTION OF SUPERIORITY IN NIGERIA (2024)**

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ABSTRACT

The paper analyzes gender equality with a view to moving beyond the notion of superiority in Nigeria. Gender equality is often misconceived as a competition for superiority rather than a celebration of diverse contributions across all genders. This paper advocates for a paradigm shift towards recognizing and celebrating the contributions of all genders, emphasizing collaboration to foster inclusivity. It also mentions the relevance and efficiency of both genders in a national movement especially to foster oneness at all levels. The absence of a particular gender does not mean incapacitation of the other; instead, it could result in less effectiveness in accomplishment of desired goals and targets. Drawing on theoretical framework of intersectionality theory of gender and adopting the secondary method of data collection, the paper underscores the importance of embracing diversity to create a more equitable society; and the accommodation-cum-involvement of each gender for effectiveness. The paper found that the starting point of progress is the merging of the effort of both genders not side lining one to favor the other; not exalting one and relegating the other but exploring both parties' tendencies for a collective goal. The study recommends that government should invest heavily in affordable and accessible childcare facilities that can enable women to balance work and care giving responsibilities effectively. Providing subsidies or tax incentives for childcare services reduces the financial burden on families and encourages women's workforce participation. Moreover, establishing workplace childcare centers or flexible work arrangements, such as telecommuting or flexible hours, allows parents to manage their work and family commitments more effectively

Keywords: Gender, Gender Equality, Superiority, Gender Superiority, Intersectionality

1.0 INTRODUCTION

William (2011) asserts that "In contemporary discourse, gender equality has often been equated with notions of competition and supremacy, undermining its true essence". This article seeks to redefine gender equality as a platform for acknowledging and appreciating the unique

contributions of individuals of all genders to humanity. By exploring the concept through conceptual, empirical, and theoretical lenses, it aims to elucidate the significance of recognizing that difference does not imply superiority, but rather serves as a catalyst for collective progress and empowerment (Difference is not better). In addition, the superiority of one gender over another or the negligence of a particular gender by prioritizing the other does not foster collectivity.

Acha (2016) asserts that gender equality is hinged on mutual respect, identification and encouragement of potentials of everyone and equal opportunities given to each person irrespective of gender for the realization of those potentials which should be harnessed for sustainable development in the country. Gender roles were clear though Nigeria, being a patriarchal society, women were rated lower than men and as such should be seen and not heard. The woman was truly marginalized and even till date, in Igboland, a woman cannot talk in the council of elders even in matters that threaten her being. She cannot be a member of the council because she is a woman and can only express a view through her husband, her brother-in-law or a son that has come of age. This marginalization led to the oppression and subjugation of women which they bore because tradition and culture made it so.

The movement towards gender equality and inclusion emanated from the Western world and it started with the suffragette movement of the late-19th century which led to a change in relation to women's property rights in marriage. Agarwal (2010) submits that gradually the awareness for gender equality particularly in politics increased and escalated in the 60s as agitation for gender equality amplified giving rise to movements like women liberation and feminism. These movements emphasized women's inclusion and insisted that women should have equal rights with men.

Literally, this means that indeed, what a man can do a woman can do also but the originators emphasize the rights of women to work in paid employment and also to vote. This is understandable as women in Western culture before the 19th century manned the home, did domestic works, were lonely and were not economically empowered. The situation in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular was different as women were economically empowered as they engaged in small business ventures, interacted with one another individually or in groups as sisters, wives, age grades, etc. and contributed to building their families so to some extent, actualized themselves. There was therefore no need for an agitation for equality with men.

Women wield economic powers and social influence in their communities yet find it difficult to counter their subordination to and humiliation by men. Some women try to counter this age-long tradition, but unfortunately, asserting themselves wrongly thereby creating more problems than solving the existing ones. For instance, some women abandon their homes "preferring their profession to marriage", some of them use men to have children without entering into a domestic arrangement (James 3). It is therefore not uncommon to hear the expression "what a man can do a woman can do also or even better" but one hardly hears "what a woman can do, a man can do also". Both expressions are wrong as there are specific roles for specific gender.

Agbalajobi (2010) asserts that the agitation for equality assumed different dimensions with the multiplicity of the movements with each one focusing on a specific issue championing their causes through campaigns, writings, conferences, workshops, seminars and pressure groups.

The expectation was that the crusades would culminate in the elimination of the oppression and subjugation of women and entrench a platform for self-actualization and empowerment. This desire has remained a mirage though some appreciable achievements have been recorded as there is hardly any occupation that is regarded as an exclusive reserve of a particular gender. For instance, now, women serve in the armed forces and other military and Para-military professions, engineering and an increasing number of women are active in politics and occupy high positions in business in many countries of the world.

2.0 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Concept of Gender

The term gender is derived from the Latin noun, “Genus” which means kind or group. Agbalajobi (2010) submits that recently the word was used as a grammatical concept to classify words into masculine and feminine. Today the connection of gender is being untidily used to denote the different and unequal perceptions, views, roles, relevance or rewards that a society assigns to the two sex categories, discrimination happens to both male and female in individual situations, particularly the female, or women group. United Nation (2014) argues that the act of subjugating women is an inherent tradition, which has consistently been kept in an active state and coupled with its debilitating ability. As society has been grappling with the problem of creating a fair, just and equitable arrangement among different people, the mainstream agenda of development is challenged through; how to enhance the role of women in politics and governance.

United Nation Entity for Gender Equality and the empowerment of women (2014) submits that gender refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women that are created in our families, our societies and our cultures. The concept of gender also includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviours of both women and men (femininity and masculinity). Okojie (1999) argues that gender roles and expectations are learned. They can change over time and they vary within and between cultures. Systems of social differentiation such as political status, class, ethnicity, physical and mental disability, age and more, modify gender roles. The concept of gender is vital because, applied to social analysis, it reveals how women’s subordination (or men’s domination) is socially constructed. As such, the subordination can be changed or ended. It is not biologically predetermined nor is it fixed forever.

There is no human society where women are not discriminated or marginalized. Women are an entrenched, global pandemic. Obeta (2004) specifically explained that male and female goes along with a number of stereo-type that virtually imposes both role performances, possibilities of different kinds. That is why Ogwu (1996) confirms that women have been traditionally designated to occupations, which require such skills with cultural values. To Agbalajobi (2010) the key point that leads to discrimination against women has its roots in the nature of our societies which celebrate men as being unique, stronger and fit for the public space while women are feeble and weak meant to stay within the confluence of the private space. All these are consequences of cultural norms of the society which are embraced by the people of the world.

Gender is a multifaceted construct that encompasses societal norms, roles, and expectations associated with being male, female, or non-binary. Morley (2012:30), a prominent gender theorist, emphasizes the performative nature of gender, stating that it is "a stylized repetition of acts... which are internally discontinuous... so that the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment". This highlights the idea that gender is not inherent but rather constructed through repeated social performances.

Furthermore, gender is deeply intertwined with power dynamics and social structures. Sociologist Morley (2012:34) describes gender as "a system of social practices, a structure of power relations, a cultural framework, a set of identities, a way of signifying relations, and a set of human experiences". This perspective underscores the complex and dynamic nature of gender, which shapes individuals' experiences and opportunities in society.

Makkinen (1989:23), a biologist and gender theorist, challenges the binary understanding of gender, arguing that it is "not just about what's between your legs, but what's between your ears and in your heart". This highlights the diversity of gender identities and expressions beyond traditional male and female categories.

In addition, Kira (2003) theory of intersectionality highlights how gender intersects with other axes of identity, such as race, class, and sexuality, to shape individuals' experiences of oppression and privilege. She asserts that "intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects". This underscores the importance of considering the intersecting dimensions of identity when analyzing gender dynamics.

The concept of gender is complex and multifaceted, encompassing social, cultural, and power dimensions. Understanding gender requires recognizing its performative nature, its intersectionality with other aspects of identity, and its impact on individuals' lives and experiences.

2.2 Concept of Equality

"Gender equality, as conceptualized in this study, transcends the binary understanding of gender roles and instead emphasizes the value of diversity and inclusion" (Alemika & Agugua, 2001:12). By reframing our conceptualization of gender equality, we create space for meaningful dialogue and collaboration that enriches society as a whole. Besides, the collaboration of both gender helps project the notion of team spirit and communal living and involvement of all and sundry in national roles. This section delves into historical perspectives, debunks stereotypes, examines societal influences, and analyzes the role of intersectionality in shaping gender identity.

Equality is a foundational principle that advocates for fairness, justice, and parity among individuals, regardless of their differences in identity, background, or circumstances. It encompasses equal rights, opportunities, and treatment for all members of society.

Alita (2011:23), a renowned economist and philosopher, emphasizes the importance of equality in achieving societal well-being, stating that "equality of social arrangements should focus not only on removing discriminatory barriers but also on creating a society where everyone has the

opportunity to develop their full potential". This highlights the multifaceted nature of equality, which extends beyond mere absence of discrimination to encompass the promotion of capabilities and opportunities for all individuals.

Political theorist Aluko (2008) proposes the concept of "justice as fairness," which emphasizes the importance of equality in distributive justice. He argues that "social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage and attached to positions and offices open to all". This underscores the need for equitable distribution of resources and opportunities within society to ensure that everyone has a fair chance to succeed.

Furthermore, feminist philosopher Anya (1993) advocates for a capabilities approach to equality, which focuses on ensuring that individuals have the necessary capabilities to lead flourishing lives. She states that "equality requires the presence of certain capabilities in all members of society, such as the capability to live a healthy life, to pursue education, and to participate in political life". This highlights the importance of addressing structural inequalities and barriers that limit individuals' capabilities and opportunities.

The concept of equality is fundamental to building a just and inclusive society. It requires not only the removal of discriminatory barriers but also the creation of conditions that enable all individuals to thrive and participate fully in society.

2.3 Concept of Gender Equality

Gender equality is a fundamental principle that advocates for equal rights, opportunities, and treatment for individuals of all genders. According to feminist scholar Attah (2011), "The recognition of the fact that women are human beings, just as men are, with the same rights, obligations, and opportunities," encapsulates the essence of gender equality. It strives to challenge and dismantle gender-based discrimination, stereotypes, and biases, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of gender identity or expression, have the same opportunities to fulfill their potential and participate fully in society.

Renowned economist Awe (1992) emphasizes that gender equality is not just a matter of social justice but also a prerequisite for sustainable development. He argues, "Gender equality is central to economic development, and societies cannot achieve their full potential if half of their population is excluded or marginalized" (Awe, 1992:12). This highlights the intrinsic link between gender equality and broader societal progress and prosperity.

Gender equality also entails addressing systemic barriers and structural inequalities that perpetuate gender-based disparities. Political scientist Beth (2016:9) stresses the importance of structural change, stating, "Gender equality requires more than changing individual attitudes; it requires transforming social institutions and power relations". This underscores the need for policy interventions and institutional reforms to dismantle patriarchal structures and promote gender-inclusive practices.

Furthermore, gender equality is closely intertwined with other forms of social justice and human rights. As intersectional feminist Bola (2005:10) asserts, "Gender equality cannot be achieved in isolation from other forms of oppression, such as racism, classism, and

homophobia". Recognizing the intersecting dimensions of identity and oppression is crucial for understanding and addressing the complexities of gender inequality.

Gender equality therefore, is a multifaceted concept that encompasses legal, social, economic, and political dimensions. It requires concerted efforts at individual, institutional, and societal levels to challenge discriminatory norms, dismantle structural barriers, and promote inclusivity and justice for all genders.

2.4 Concept of Gender Superiority

The concept of superiority refers to the belief or perception that one group, individual, or identity is inherently better, more valuable, or more deserving than others. This notion often manifests in hierarchical structures and power dynamics, leading to inequality and discrimination.

Renowned sociologist Cellie (2012:20) explores the concept of superiority within the context of patriarchy, stating that "Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females". This highlights how notions of superiority are deeply embedded in systems of oppression, where certain groups are privileged at the expense of others. Gender superiority refers to the belief or perception that one gender is inherently superior to another, often leading to the privileging of one gender over the other and the reinforcement of gender-based hierarchies.

Renowned feminist scholars Chattoprad and Duflo (2014:23) delve into the concept of gender superiority within the context of patriarchy, stating that "Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females". This highlights how patriarchal ideologies perpetuate notions of male superiority, leading to the marginalization and subjugation of women.

Sociologist Chen (2010) explores the concept of gender superiority through the lens of hegemonic masculinity, which emphasizes traits such as dominance, control, and aggression as markers of male superiority. She states that "hegemonic masculinity is associated with dominance and control, positioning men as superior to women and other marginalized genders". This illustrates how societal norms and expectations reinforce gender hierarchies that privilege men over women and non-binary individuals.

In addition, feminist philosophers Eagly and Carli (2014:120) reflect on the concept of gender superiority in her seminal work, stating that "The assertion of male superiority is only a hypothesis, not an evident fact". This challenges the notion of inherent male superiority and underscores the importance of questioning and dismantling patriarchal beliefs and structures. Therefore, the concept of gender superiority is deeply entrenched in patriarchal ideologies and social norms, perpetuating inequalities and injustices based on gender identity. Understanding and challenging notions of gender superiority are essential for promoting gender equality and creating a more just and inclusive society.

3.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Intersectionality theory provides insights into the complex interplay of social identities and power structures (Ebere, 2003). This section explores the evolution of feminist theory, structural inequalities, and sociological critiques of traditional notions of masculinity and femininity.

The history of feminism is clearly the history of women spirit, and women relationships that are popularized and degraded. It is also the memoirs of the several fair and unfair quests of women to comprehend their experiences per time, in relation to their society and the world they find themselves. Unlike other bias thought of the concept, it is the quest of women to find order and unity in the multiplicity and diversity that surround them (Eshiet, 2011) rather than equality or dominance that is labeled of them. It is further the movement of women in dire need to liberate themselves and the entire women folk from cultural imprisonment, domestic violence, male overrated dominance, religious tyranny, social imbalance, economic marginalization and political negligence of the male gender.

Kira (2003:12) views feminism as “about challenging the division of labor in the world that puts men in charge of the public sphere- works, sports, wars, government - while women slave away and unpaid in the home, carrying the whole burden of family life”. Makkinnen (1989:23), a radical feminist philosopher and theologian says feminism is a “way of being characterized by:

- a) an awesome and ecstatic sense of otherness from patriarchal norms and values,
- b) conscious awareness of the sad society's sanctions against radical feminists,
- c) moral outrage on behalf of women as women,
- d) commitment to the cause of women that persists, even against the current, when feminism is no longer ‘popular’”.

However, in a more straight-to-the-point manner, Morley (2012:23) writes that "feminism is just one of the many components of post-modernist views of cultural life that have been used to interpret literary texts and theorize literature". She goes further to say that it "became popular because of its consciousness-raising and combative proclivities and its emphasis on issues relating to human rights".

A recall into history presents to us numerous women who took the bull by the horn and became the fish in the troubled waters of gender balance so much that with power, courage and talent they fought the clog in the where of women's right and identity development and recognition. Obetta (2004) feminism is the offshoot of reconstructing a misplaced ideology of women as subordinate beings. It was said to have begun the moment women became consciously alerted of a spiraling chauvinism over their thoughts, views and opinion. However, it took many centuries for the platforms and groups to be large and effective enough to counter a long-existing and culturally incepted ideology patriarchy.

Historically, according to Ogwu (1996) the concept had no voice or recognition during the 'feudal past'; not until when the European societies had restrictions to 'feudal system' in the 18th century. Industrialization and urban cities development began to bring about the need to 'separate the chaff from the wheat'. Men became more of workers while females became the home restricted types. Hence, the notion of men as "breadwinners" and women as mere "housewives" surfaced thereby a class separation and standard. The growth of Industrialization

bred several philosopher-thinkers with different ideologies and explication of what a society should look at. In the same vein, women too began to poise mind bulging but unnoticed perhaps unattended questions of their subjugation and unequal treatment by the male gender. They also arose to question and rebel against the tyrannical outburst of men in the society.

In one of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's works on education in Okojie (1999), he said: "men and women are made for each other, but their mutual dependence is not equal. We could survive without them better than they could without us. They are dependent on our feelings, on the prize we put on their merits, on the value we set on their relation to men. To please men, to be useful to them, to win their love and respect, to raise them as children and care for them as adults, console them, make them lives sweet and pleasant". The strands of degradation and male dominance spotted in Rousseau's paper ignited an impetus to the feministic reaction of some women (group) or (individual). Ogwu (1996) in reaction to Rousseau's paper exposed the make-up of patriarchy which the latter wrote in favor. She said of patriarchy that it is "a society manufactured and controlled by males, fatherland. A society in which every legitimated institution is entirely in the hands of males, and a few selected hence women. A society which is characterized by oppression, expression, narcissism, necrophilia, joyless society ruled by God father, son and company; society fixated on proliferation, propagation and procreation, and bent on the destruction of all life".

However, philosophers of the era wrote in different ways to explore the issue of women subjugation. In his easy "On Liberty", John Stuart Mill discussed in William (2011) that individual freedom births happiness. That is, the happiness of every man including woman depends on his/her freedom. His aim of writing this: "legal subordination of one sex to the other is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement...it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality" was to remedy the abuse of women. His intention was to give a new name to the practices and notions that denied women equal educational opportunities and access on merit to all influential statuses, offices and positions, even occupation. He concludes by saying: "History tells us a good deal about what women can do, because women have done it. It tells us nothing about what they can't do and it never will until they are routinely given the opportunity."

Applying the Intersectionality theory to gender equality, the theory emphasizes the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, sexuality, and gender, which intersect to shape individuals' experiences of privilege and oppression. When applied to gender identity, intersectionality highlights the diverse experiences of individuals who navigate multiple marginalized identities. Understanding the complex intersections of gender with other social categories is essential for addressing systemic inequalities and promoting social justice for all genders. By acknowledging the unique experiences of individuals with intersecting identities, societies can develop more inclusive policies and practices that uplift marginalized communities.

3.1 Historical Background on Gender Roles in Nigeria

Gender inequality in Nigeria has deep historical roots, influenced by cultural, religious, and socio-economic factors.

Colonial Legacy: The colonial period in Nigeria, characterized by British rule, had a profound impact on gender relations. Historian Ogwu (1996:23) argues that "colonialism introduced and reinforced patriarchal structures, relegating women to subordinate roles in both the public and private spheres". British colonial policies often upheld traditional patriarchal norms, marginalizing women and limiting their access to education, property rights, and political participation.

Cultural Traditions: Nigeria is a diverse country with over 250 ethnic groups, each with its own cultural traditions and practices regarding gender roles and relations. Anthropologist Agarwal (2010) explores the intersection of culture and gender in her work, stating that "traditional Igbo society was not inherently patriarchal; rather, colonialism and external influences reinforced patriarchal norms and eroded women's status and autonomy". Cultural practices such as early marriage, female genital mutilation, and gender-based violence continue to perpetuate gender inequality in many communities.

Religious Influences: Nigeria is home to a diverse range of religious beliefs, including Christianity, Islam, and indigenous African religions. Religious scholar Acha (2016:50) highlights the role of religion in shaping gender dynamics, stating that "interpretations of religious texts and traditions have often been used to justify patriarchal norms and restrict women's rights and freedoms". Religious institutions and leaders have sometimes reinforced gender stereotypes and discrimination, further entrenching gender inequality.

Socio-Economic Factors: Socio-economic disparities exacerbate gender inequality in Nigeria, particularly in access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Economist Agbalajobi (2010) examines the impact of economic policies on gender inequality, stating that "structural adjustment programs and neoliberal policies have disproportionately affected women, leading to increased poverty, unemployment, and vulnerability". Women in Nigeria often face barriers to accessing credit, land ownership, and employment, further perpetuating their economic marginalization.

Gender inequality in contemporary Nigeria is a complex and multifaceted issue rooted in historical, cultural, religious, and socio-economic factors. Addressing these inequalities require comprehensive strategies that challenge patriarchal norms, promote women's rights and empowerment, and create an enabling environment for gender equality to flourish.

Alemika & Agugua (2001) argue that throughout history, gender roles have been deeply embedded in cultural, social, and economic structures, shaping the lives of individuals and societies. In ancient civilizations, such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece, gender roles were often based on agricultural and survival needs, leading to the division of labor along gender lines. For example, men were typically responsible for tasks requiring physical strength, such as hunting and warfare, while women were tasked with domestic duties like childcare and food preparation.

There have also been records of women being not so relevant in agricultural contributions in history. For instance, women were not allowed to plant crops such as yams, trees, and any other crop termed 'masculine'. They were limited to cultivating crops like cassava, groundnuts, corn, and the like. This was more evident in the Igbo community of Nigeria, Africa. The introduction of agricultural technological machines was not within the reach of women because it could be

inferred from this era that women were not in the picture of the operators. However, after looking at the correlation between agricultural technology and female participation in agriculture in pre-industrial societies, Agbalajobi (2010) examined the margin between agricultural technology and the impact it still has on the female labor force in modern times.

A correlation between female labor-force participation in agriculture and agricultural technology in the past does not necessarily imply that differences in historical agriculture technology affect female labor-force participation today (Agbalajobi, 2010:66).

Alade (2012), for example, documents that within the northeastern United States, the low relative productivity of women and children in agriculture (and their low participation in this sector) allowed them to participate in the manufacturing sector. In this setting, initial female labor-force participation in agriculture is inversely related to subsequent participation in manufacturing, resulting in a lack of continuity of female labor-force participation over time as industrialization occurred.

During the Middle Ages in Europe, feudalism and Christianity reinforced patriarchal norms, relegating women to subordinate roles within the family and society. The rise of industrialization (the development of industries in a country or region on a wide scale) in the 18th and 19th centuries further solidified gender roles, with men primarily working in factories and women confined to the domestic sphere. It has always been about the projection of the male gender as superior and the female as inferior. The female gender in these ages were painted as a weaker vessel and second fiddle, as it did not fit into certain roles and realms, leaving it a depiction of “less” and “demoted”. These historical perspectives on gender roles demonstrate the entrenched nature of gender-based divisions and how they have been perpetuated over time.

3.2 Debunking Gender Stereotypes

To a large extent, stereotypes are biased installations by a particular group or sect that are unfavorable to another group who are perceived as weak or incapacitated. Alita (2011) submits that gender stereotypes are ingrained beliefs or assumptions about the characteristics, behaviors, and roles of individuals based on their gender. This is more evident in patriarchal systems where power and decision-making are centralized in the hands of men, who in turn dominate the women. Aluko (2008) argues that stereotypes manifest in several forms and arms in such a society. For instance, it could be an entrenchment in the marital structure of a society where the women are completely subject to the men.

Again, it can manifest in duty administration where the women’s ‘weak and frail’ structure can only earn them jobs that are feminine and not masculine. Despite progress in combating stereotypes, they continue to persist in various forms and are perpetuated by media, education, and cultural norms. For example, the stereotype that women are more nurturing and emotional while men are more aggressive and rational reinforces traditional gender norms and limits opportunities for individuals to express themselves authentically (Any, 1993).

William (2011) asserts that debunking gender stereotypes is essential for promoting gender equality and reducing discrimination. By challenging stereotypes and recognizing the diversity

of experiences and identities within gender categories, individuals and societies can create more inclusive and equitable environments that allow everyone to thrive.

Cultural and Societal Influences on Gender Perceptions

Cultural and societal influences play a significant role in shaping perceptions of gender and influencing individual behavior. Cultural norms, traditions, and media representations contribute to the construction of gender identities and expectations, often reinforcing binary notions of gender. For example, in many cultures, there are rigid expectations regarding appropriate dress, behavior, and occupations based on gender, leading to the marginalization of individuals who do not conform to these norms (Morley, 2012).

Moreover, socialization processes, including family, peer groups, and education systems, play a crucial role in transmitting gender norms and values to individuals from a young age. By examining the cultural and societal influences on gender perceptions, we can better understand the complexities of gender dynamics and work towards creating more inclusive and accepting environments.

3.3 Gender Equality: Moving Beyond Superiority

True gender equality necessitates embracing diversity and collaboration (Obetta, 2004). Detailed discussions on policy recommendations, educational interventions, and grassroots empowerment initiatives are provided to illustrate practical steps towards achieving gender equality. Just as an individual with black skin cannot change to become white, or vice versa, and a person of short stature cannot become tall, because these traits are genetically determined, similarly, a person assigned male or female at birth cannot simply decide to change their gender identity. One cannot simply choose to be a man or a woman based solely on desire or societal pressure.

Likewise, no individual should be made to feel inferior or discriminated against because of their innate genetic characteristics. Everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their genetic makeup or gender identity.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The productivity rate of any firm, establishment or society is largely dependent on the collectivity of the genders present in such institutions. The starting point of progress is the merging of the effort of both genders not side lining one to favor the other; not exalting one and relegating the other but exploring both parties' tendencies for a collective goal. This paper advocates for reimagining gender equality as a means of celebrating diversity and fostering collaboration. It reflects on the significance of language and discourse, proposes future research directions, and discusses the implications for policy and practice.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Achieving gender equality in Nigeria requires a multifaceted approach that addresses structural barriers and promotes inclusive policies and practices. Here are some recommendations to improve gender equality in the country:

i. Government should invest heavily in affordable and accessible childcare facilities that can enable women to balance work and care giving responsibilities effectively. Providing subsidies or tax incentives for childcare services reduces the financial burden on families and encourages women's workforce participation. Moreover, establishing workplace childcare centers or flexible work arrangements, such as telecommuting or flexible hours, allows parents to manage their work and family commitments more effectively.

ii. The need to implement educational initiatives and awareness campaigns that challenge gender stereotypes and promote gender equality are crucial for fostering a culture of inclusivity and respect. By integrating gender-sensitive curricula in schools and universities, young people can learn about the importance of gender equality and respectful relationships from an early age. Additionally, engaging communities through awareness-raising programs and advocacy efforts help debunk myths and misconceptions about gender roles and promotes social acceptance of gender diversity.

iii. The need to enact and enforce laws that prohibit gender-based discrimination and promote equal opportunities for all genders are essential for advancing gender equality. Strengthening legal frameworks to address issues such as gender-based violence, workplace discrimination, and unequal access to resources ensures that women's rights are protected and upheld. Additionally, providing legal aid services and support networks for survivors of gender-based violence enhances access to justice and promotes accountability for perpetrators.

iv. Advancing gender equality in Nigeria requires coordinated efforts from governments, civil society organizations, businesses, and communities. As such, there is need to foster a culture of inclusivity and respect. That way, the country will create a more equitable society where all individuals have equal opportunities to thrive and contribute to national development.

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