

THE ROLE OF CULTURAL NORMS AND RELIGIOUS BELIEFS IN SHAPING SEXUALITY

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69778/3106-7603/2025/1/a5>

Anthony Amirat Olamide

&

Jewoola Boluwatife Olamilekan

Department of Psychology,

University of Lagos, Lagos State

Corresponding email: anthonioolamide@gmail.com

Abstract

Sexuality is more than a biological instinct; it is a dynamic and socially constructed concept shaped by cultural norms and religious beliefs. Across the globe and especially in Nigerian society, these forces play a central role in defining what is considered acceptable, shameful, sacred, or deviant. Religion often acts as a moral compass, prescribing values such as chastity, abstinence before marriage, and heterosexuality as divine rules, while culture interprets and enforces these teachings in everyday life. These beliefs affect not only individual sexual behavior but also influence gender roles, legal systems, and sexual education. This paper examines how deeply embedded religious and cultural ideologies shape attitudes toward sexuality, using theoretical lenses such as social constructionism, psychoanalytic theory, and the functionalist perspective. It explores historical practices, including indigenous rites and colonial influences, and analyzes how globalization and digital media are challenging traditional norms. Particular attention is given to the Nigerian context, highlighting how young people today are navigating tensions between inherited beliefs and modern values around consent, pleasure, and identity. By synthesizing global literature and Nigerian case studies, this paper reveals how religion and culture continue to police, regulate, and in some cases, transform the sexual landscape. It ultimately underscores the need for more inclusive, rights-based, and contextually relevant understandings of sexuality in society.

Keywords: *Sexuality, Religion, Culture, Nigeria, Gender Roles, Social Norms*

Introduction

Culture and religion don't just influence how we dress, eat, or speak; they impact how we love, desire, and feel shame. It's not a surprise that they shape how we see sexuality not as instinct, but as morality, identity, and taboo. Sexuality is a central aspect of being human that encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure,

intimacy, and reproduction. Because our sexuality is made up of so many different components, our understanding of sexuality is ever-changing and unique to each person. Because these components are so diverse and deeply personal, our knowledge of sexuality constantly evolves. Yet, psychologists and sociologists agree that sexuality is a social construct formed through

language, norms, tradition, religion, law, and education.

In many societies, especially across Africa, religion and culture serve as gatekeepers of sexual norms. They define the limits of sexual expression, not just what is allowed, but what is punishable, worthy, or hidden in silence. In Nigeria, for instance, religious doctrines and cultural expectations converge to create powerful, often unspoken rules about gender roles, sexual purity, and bodily autonomy. These rules are passed down through families, religious institutions, community rituals, and even the legal system, subtly, and sometimes violently, shaping how people navigate their sexual identities.

Religion is often upheld as a moral compass, marking the boundaries of what is considered pure, holy, or sinful. In many faith traditions, values such as chastity, abstinence until marriage, and heterosexuality are not merely personal convictions; they are understood as divine instructions. Culture reinforces these values through rites of passage, gender norms, marriage expectations, and community surveillance. It dictates not only who may feel desire, but who is allowed to act on it, under what conditions, and with what consequences.

At the same time, globalization, urbanization, and the digital age have begun to destabilize all these inherited norms. Youth are increasingly exposed to global conversations around consent, pleasure, gender diversity, and sexual rights. This exposure has led to growing tensions between tradition and autonomy, obedience and agency, silence and expression.

This paper explores how cultural norms and religious beliefs shape societal attitudes toward sexuality, particularly in defining what is considered acceptable, deviant, sacred, or shameful. It examines the historical roots of these ideologies, their modern manifestations, and how individuals, especially young people, are pushing back or navigating within these frameworks. By centring both Nigerian and global perspectives, the paper aims to unpack how power, belief, and tradition continue to influence the way sexuality is perceived, performed, and policed.

Problem Statement

Despite growing enlightenment and sexual freedom across the globe, traditional cultural and religious beliefs continue to dictate the boundaries of what is considered acceptable sexuality in many societies. Across regions like the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia, there is still an existing conflict between inherited doctrines and modern understandings of identity, consent, and desire.

This clash often manifests in the form of stigma, silence, and shame, where open conversations around sex are taboo, and sexual education is limited or distorted. Many of these cultures' patriarchal interpretations of religion and tradition impose rigid gender roles and control over women's bodies, sexual choices, and sexual identities.

These cultural and religious constraints have real-world consequences ranging from suppression of sexual anatomy, misinformation, and poor sexual education to gender inequality and mutilation. The problem is not merely

one of belief, but of how belief is weaponized to control bodies, restrict freedoms, and suppress knowledge.

That's why this paper seeks to understand the influence of religious and cultural norms on sexuality and the urgent need to re-evaluate these ideologies in light of human rights, autonomy, and evolving global consciousness

Theoretical Framework

Understanding the influence of religion and cultural norms on sexuality requires more than just reviewing the ideologies behind these beliefs. It also requires a theoretical lens that explains how these ideologies are formed, sustained, and enforced. This section examines theories that frame sexuality as a socially constructed concept influenced by cultural and religious institutions.

Social constructionism states that many aspects of our social world, including knowledge, meaning, and even reality itself, are not inherent or objective but rather are produced and maintained through collective human interpretation and interaction. Berger and Luckmann (1966) explain that human beings engage in a continuous process of meaning-making, whereby societal institutions and practices become ingrained into everyday life and are seen as natural.

Applied to sexuality, this theory highlights how sexual norms, desires, and identities are constructed within specific cultural and historical contexts. Berger et al. (1966) also note that "sexuality is extremely plastic in the human animal," emphasizing that it is

shaped more by society than by innate biology. In many societies, religion and culture serve as powerful forces that define what forms of sexuality are deemed acceptable, moral, or deviant. Through this theory, ideas about virginity, modesty, gender roles, and sexual expression are not universal truths but social facts reinforced by tradition and belief systems.

Building on social constructionism, Gagnon and Simon's Sexual Scripting Theory (1973) offers a more behaviorally based framework. They argue that human sexual behavior is not simply the outcome of biological instincts but is guided by scripts that individuals learn and internalize over time. According to the theory, these scripts operate at three levels:

Cultural scenarios provide dominant norms and narratives about sexuality, like sex before marriage is sinful or men should pursue and women should resist. Interpersonal scripts guide actual interactions between individuals, often based on the internalized cultural scenarios. Intrapsychic scripts involve personal desires, fantasies, and internal negotiations that are shaped by external cultural messages.

This theory also emphasizes that sexuality is a performative act, heavily informed by the roles individuals are expected to play within their society. So, when religion and culture enforce specific gender roles or moral standards, they are essentially supplying the script for sexual behavior. These scripts are not neutral; they serve to uphold broader systems of power and control, often privileging patriarchal and heteronormative ideals.

Freud's psychoanalytic theory is another influential theory; it proposed that sexuality emerges in early childhood and progresses through psychosexual stages. Each stage is associated with specific erogenous zones and psychological challenges. According to Freud, unresolved conflicts in any of these stages can lead to fixations that shape adult sexual behavior and personality. This theory also emphasizes that religious beliefs and cultural norms repress human sexuality by instilling guilt and promoting obedience to 'civilized sexual morality,' which conflicts with natural sexual instincts, leading to anxiety, shame, neuroses, and societal unease due to suppressed desires (Cotti,2011).

In response, individuals may engage in sublimation, which is a defense mechanism through which repressed sexual energy is redirected into culturally acceptable outlets such as art, music, devotion, or celibacy. This theory helps explain how deeply embedded norms can unconsciously shape and limit sexual expression, even when they are not openly enforced.

The functionalist perspective views society as a system of interconnected parts that work together to maintain stability and order. Every institution, like religion, family, and education, is tasked with maintaining societal order, and sexuality is seen as a domain that must be regulated for the collective good. Saying that sexual norms are there for specific functions. For instance, regulating sexual behavior through marriage and family structures helps organize reproduction and inheritance, while religious doctrines often define boundaries around sexual conduct to

uphold moral order. Durkheim (1915) argued that religion, by establishing a shared moral framework, reinforces social solidarity and restrains individual impulses, including sexual desire.

From a functionalist point of view, unchecked sexual expression is perceived as a threat to social stability. So, sexuality must be guided and restrained to prevent chaos, maintain familial bonds, and ensure moral continuity across generations. This control is often prominent in cultural taboos, religious laws, and educational systems that reinforce sexual conformity as a way to sustain societal equilibrium.

Together, these theories provide a strong foundation for analyzing how cultural and religious narratives shape sexual behavior, identities, and expectations. They underscore that sexuality is not simply about personal preference or biological instinct; it is a reflection of broader social arrangements.

Literature Review

Sexuality is not a fixed biological drive; it is a socially constructed and deeply contextual experience shaped by culture, religion, and systems of power (Foucault, 1978). Across different regions, sexuality is interpreted, expressed, and regulated in ways that reflect the dominant values and beliefs of the society.

In many traditional societies, sexuality, particularly female sexuality, is closely tied to family honor, social control, and patriarchal norms. For example, in Nigeria, the Igbo and Yoruba cultures place a high value on virginity, modesty, and defined gender roles, especially for

women (Okafor & Obi, 2019). Virginity before marriage is often considered a mark of purity, and sexual expression outside heterosexual marriage is taboo (Bhana, 2015). These cultural expectations are reinforced through family upbringing, rites of passage, and community pressure. Yet, these norms are increasingly challenged by modernization, urbanization, and global media. Young people in fast-paced cities like Lagos, Nairobi, and Johannesburg are exposed to more liberal, pleasure-centered, and rights-based views of sexuality through the internet and social media (Ingham et al., 2001). This creates a clash between older generations defending tradition and youth creating new sexual identities (Tamale, 2011).

Religion also plays a powerful role in shaping sexual norms and morality. In Islamic societies like Iran and parts of Northern Nigeria, religious doctrine strictly governs sexual behavior, with an emphasis on modesty, chastity, and lawful marriage (Sadeghi, 2013). Christianity, especially in Latin American and African contexts, upholds gendered expectations, promoting female purity through the Virgin Mary ideal while excusing male sexual assertiveness under a machismo culture (Castañeda, 2011). In Hinduism, sexuality is both spiritual and moral. While celibacy before marriage is promoted, texts like the Kamasutra reflect a contrasting tradition that celebrates sexual pleasure (Doniger, 2009). Buddhist teachings generally treat sexuality as a bodily desire that must be overcome to attain enlightenment (Harvey, 2000). Indigenous religions, such as those among the Zulu in South Africa, often

link sexuality with fertility, ancestral respect, and ritualistic practices (Delius & Glaser, 2002). These religious frameworks do more than guide personal morality; they also influence policies, legal systems, and education, especially in more conservative nations.

Gender is another major factor influencing sexuality. Across the globe, gender roles determine who is allowed to express desire and how. Women's bodies are often treated as communal property, regulated through practices like virginity testing, female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriage, and honor killings, all justified under the guise of protecting morality. For instance, in parts of East and West Africa, FGM is still practiced despite legal prohibitions, reflecting deep-rooted beliefs about purity and marriageability. In contrast, male sexuality is often framed around dominance, control, and compulsory heterosexuality (Ratele, 2014). While men may enjoy more sexual freedom, they too are constrained by narrow ideals of masculinity and performance. These double standards reinforce power imbalances and limit genuine, healthy sexual agency for all genders.

Additionally, there are many cultural taboos around sex limiting open conversations and reducing access to important sexual health information. In many countries, including Nigeria, India, and parts of the Middle East, comprehensive sexuality education is either absent or framed solely around abstinence. This leaves young people to rely on misinformation from peers, media, or pornography (UNESCO, 2018). The result is a cycle of fear, shame, and risk, eventually leading to

unprotected sex, unsafe abortions, sexual violence, and stigma against sexual minorities. A lack of inclusive, age-appropriate, and rights-based sexuality education continues to hinder progress on public health, gender equality, and personal well-being.

Despite increasing global literature examining sexuality from cultural and religious perspectives. There are still significant gaps, particularly in African contexts. Much of the existing literature centers on European and American views, creating little space for African experiences... In Nigeria and across Africa, studies often generalize or homogenize cultural beliefs, neglecting regional diversity, ethnic specificities, and evolving youth attitudes

Sexual education also remains under-researched in many African countries. Discussions about virginity, family honor, and gender roles are often held back by political sensitivity and moral panic. Patriarchal values dominate these discussions, ignoring how they suppress female desire and uphold sexual double standards. The real experiences of young people, especially girls, are also often overlooked in academic and policy discussions.

Moving forward, literature should prioritize local voices, support community-based research, and embrace intersectional approaches that acknowledge diverse African identities. By addressing these areas, researchers can create inclusive frameworks that accurately represent the realities of sexuality across the continent.

Historical and Cultural Context of Sexuality

Sexuality has never existed in a vacuum; it is deeply intertwined with the history, customs, and value systems of societies. In many African cultures, sexuality was traditionally viewed through communal lenses. Sexual behavior was not seen as merely personal or private; it had implications for lineage, inheritance, morality, and societal harmony. The elders, who were custodians of tradition and morality, often regulated the sexual conduct of the youth.

Before the advent of colonial and religious reformations, sexuality in many African cultures was openly acknowledged but tightly structured. In southeastern Nigeria, among the Igbo people, young women underwent *iku aka*, a ritual virginity test performed by female elders before marriage. It was a symbolic rite intended to reinforce sexual discipline, especially among girls, as virginity was tied not only to a girl's moral worth but to the honor of her entire family. Girls who passed were celebrated through dance and gifts. Those who failed were subjected to shame, gossip, and social consequences that could affect their marital prospects and family reputation.

Among the Yoruba, sexual activity was considered appropriate only within marriage. However, male sexuality was often afforded more flexibility, with polygamy serving as a socially acceptable outlet for male sexual expression and lineage expansion. Female sexuality, by contrast, was expected to be restrained. Cultural proverbs, folklore, and moral tales

emphasized chastity, obedience, and loyalty. This control over female sexuality was embedded not only in marriage customs but in inheritance rights, lineage purity, and social roles.

In northern Nigeria, where Islamic influence merged with Hausa-Fulani culture, early marriage became a method of controlling female sexuality. Girls were often married between the ages of 12 and 16, long before any formal sex education. Here, sexuality was tethered tightly to religious ideals of modesty, piety, and submission. Virginity before marriage was paramount, and sexual transgressions, especially for women, were punishable by ostracization or even legal sanctions under Sharia law (Ojo, 2018).

In contrast to this, some African communities recognized sexuality as a natural and essential part of human development. Among the Bemba people of Zambia, the chisungu ritual marked a girl's transition into womanhood upon her first menstruation. During this rite, older women educated her on sexual responsibility, reproduction, pleasure, and respect for one's body. These practices served as community-based sex education, ensuring that youth were prepared for adult sexual roles within marriage (LaFont, 2001). Similar traditions existed across Uganda, Ghana, Kenya, and parts of South Africa, where initiation ceremonies were structured to normalize sexuality while embedding it in moral codes. These practices were not about shaming desire but managing it within socially approved frameworks. Elders, especially women, acted as custodians of sexual knowledge, not suppressing sexuality but guiding it

through storytelling, mentorship, and rituals (Tamale, 2005).

This communal understanding of sexuality began to shift quickly during the colonial period. European colonial administrators and Christian missionaries brought with them Victorian ideals, which are deep-rooted in sexual repression, monogamy, gender segregation, and shame. Indigenous practices such as polygamy, public nudity, fertility rituals, and premarital sex education were dismissed as primitive, immoral, or pagan.

Christian missionaries promoted the ideals of chastity, monogamy, and female subservience, often imposing strict dress codes, discouraging sexual expression, and introducing Western-style schooling that eliminated indigenous sex education. Polygamous marriages were demonized, female initiation rites were banned, and sexual pleasure, especially for women, was painted as sinful or inappropriate. In Nigeria, these teachings led to the withdrawal of elder women from roles as sexual educators and the growing silence around sexual knowledge in the home (Amadiume, 1987). Colonial laws further reinforced this silence. British Penal Codes criminalized certain sexual behaviors, especially those outside the heterosexual marital norm, and placed legal authority in the hands of colonial officials and missionaries. Today, remnants of those laws still exist in many African constitutions, reflecting colonial moral rather than indigenous understandings of sex and desire.

The effects of colonialism are visible in Nigeria's contemporary moral

landscape. Today, most formal sex education remains minimal, stigmatized, or focused solely on abstinence. Cultural taboos around menstruation, virginity, masturbation, and pleasure persist, while open conversations are seen as rebellious or immoral, especially for girls.

While cultural and religious ideologies preach purity and silence, modern media, peer culture, and urban life expose youth to complex and often conflicting messages about sexuality. This has created a generational rift where older generations hold tightly to inherited ideas, while younger people are increasingly pushing for openness, rights, and sexual agency.

5.0 Religious Influence on Sexuality

Religion has long served as one of the most powerful institutions shaping people's understanding of sexuality. Across various faiths, including Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Indigenous belief systems. Sexuality is often framed in moral and spiritual terms. Rather than being viewed as a natural part of life, it is moralized, policed, and often silenced. This influence is especially strong in countries like Nigeria, where religion is deeply connected with daily life, family structures, and public policy.

In Christianity, particularly among Pentecostal and Catholic communities in Nigeria, sexuality is commonly taught through the lens of sin and purity. Teachings emphasize abstinence until marriage, heterosexuality as the only acceptable orientation, and the sacredness of sex within marital union.

Women, in particular, are burdened with the responsibility of sexual purity, often being told that their bodies are temples that must not be defiled (Okafor & Obi, 2019). They preach sexual purity and self-control. Young people are encouraged to abstain from sex before marriage. Programs like True Love Waits and Purity Ball ceremonies are common in some urban churches. Religious leaders often preach that sex outside marriage is sinful, promoting abstinence as the only morally acceptable form of birth control

Islam also plays a significant role in shaping sexual norms, especially in northern Nigeria. Islamic teachings often stress modesty, gender separation, and the sanctity of marriage. Pre-marital and extra-marital sex are viewed as haram (forbidden), and chastity is seen as a sign of righteousness. In many Muslim-majority areas, gender segregation is practiced in schools, mosques, and even public transport in states implementing Sharia law. Any sexual activity outside marriage is forbidden (zina) and can result in harsh punishments, including flogging or imprisonment. Public displays of affection are frowned upon, and women may face stricter social consequences for perceived sexual misconduct than men. While these teachings are rooted in moral guidance, they can also reinforce gender inequality and control over female sexuality (Ojo, 2018). Across both religions, the effect is often the same: sexuality is taught as something to be repressed, hidden, or tightly controlled. This repression is reinforced by silence in families and schools, where religious values often block comprehensive sexual education. Young

people grow up without the language or knowledge to navigate their desires, leading to guilt, confusion, and harmful behaviours (Izugbara, 2008).

The psychological impact is also significant. For many, religious messages create internal conflict, where natural feelings of attraction or curiosity are met with shame and fear. This can lead to long-term anxiety about sex, especially for women, who are often seen as the gatekeepers of morality. Meanwhile, men may be encouraged to suppress emotion and dominate in sexual relationships, leading to toxic expectations and miscommunication (Ratele, 2014).

Indigenous religions, by contrast, had more fluid understandings of sexuality. In Yoruba traditional belief, the goddess Oshun represents beauty, fertility, and sexual attraction. Sexuality was celebrated as part of spiritual life. The Igbo concept of "chi" acknowledged both male and female spirits within individuals, allowing for more flexible gender identities in precolonial times.

In summary, religion remains a major force shaping sexual behaviour in Nigeria and beyond. While it can provide moral guidance and a sense of purpose, it also reinforces silence, fear, and inequality if left unchallenged. The challenge lies in finding a balance that respects faith while allowing space for healthy, informed, and autonomous expressions of sexuality.

Impact on Sexual Behaviour and Identity

Cultural and religious beliefs play a powerful role in shaping how people in Nigeria behave sexually. From childhood, many Nigerians are taught that sex is shameful, dirty, or only acceptable within marriage. These ideas often come from religious teachings and traditional expectations. In churches and mosques, messages about abstinence, purity, and sin are common, especially for women. This creates fear and silence around sex, which affects how people understand and experience their sexuality (Ojo, 2018).

For many young people, especially girls, sex is something to be avoided, not discussed. Parents rarely talk about it at home, and schools either skip it entirely or focus only on abstinence. As a result, many students turn to their peers, social media, or even pornography to learn about sex, which often leads to misinformation and risky behaviour (Izugbara, 2008; Okafor & Obi, 2019). A study among university students in Osun State showed that most of them didn't receive clear or helpful information about sex, even though they were already sexually active (Asekun-Olarinmoye et al., 2014).

Religious and cultural values also shape different rules for men and women. In many Nigerian communities, a woman's virginity is tied to her family's honour. Girls are praised for being quiet, obedient, and modest, while boys are given more freedom and are even encouraged to explore their sexuality. This double standard leads to confusion, pressure, and unequal power in relationships (Nnorom, 2016; Amadiume, 1987). Men, on the other hand, are expected to be in control, show

strength, and never show emotion. This makes it hard for them to talk openly about their feelings or be vulnerable. It also puts pressure on them to perform sexually, even when they are not ready or comfortable. These unhealthy expectations affect communication in relationships and can lead to issues like sexual dissatisfaction or even coercion (Ratele, 2014).

Because of the silence around sex, many people carry guilt or shame into adulthood. Married couples often struggle to talk about their needs, and sexual issues are rarely addressed openly. Harmful practices like virginity testing, female genital mutilation, and early marriage are still practiced in some areas and are often justified by religion or culture (Shell-Duncan, 2001).

Research also shows that not talking about sex doesn't stop young people from having it; it just makes it more dangerous. Without access to proper education or healthcare, people are more likely to have unprotected sex, face unwanted pregnancies, or contract sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Studies have shown that abstinence-only education doesn't reduce sexual activity, but instead increases risk by leaving young people unprepared (UNESCO, 2018; Oshi et al., 2005).

In the end, religion and culture shape not just what people believe about sex, but how they behave. While these beliefs can provide guidance, they often silence healthy conversations and limit personal freedom. To improve sexual health and well-being in Nigeria, we need to find a better balance; one that respects culture

and faith but also supports open, honest, and informed choices.

Changing Perspectives in a Globalized World

Despite strong traditional and religious controls, globalization and digital technology are steadily challenging long-held sexual norms. Nigerian youth today are no longer confined to the views of their immediate community. They are plugged into global conversations around gender, sexuality, and human rights. Platforms like Twitter and Instagram have become battlegrounds for cultural debates, with hashtags like #BeingFemaleInNigeria, #SexForGrades, and #EndRapeNow giving voice to stories that were once hidden in silence.

Even Nollywood and digital media are beginning to shift. New films and web series are openly addressing themes like pleasure, consent, sexual violence, and identity. Beverly Naya's documentary, 'Skin', explores colorism and body image, indirectly pushing forward conversations about desirability, shame, and self-worth. Similarly, "Everything in Between," a web series funded by The Initiative for Equal Rights (TIERs), features openly queer characters, something that would have been unthinkable in Nigerian mainstream media just a decade ago.

Offline, the culture is shifting too. Activist groups like Stand to End Rape (STER), the Dorothy Njemanze Foundation, and the Mirabel Centre are leading the charge. They support survivors, challenge harmful societal norms, and advocate for justice, creating

space for a rights-based, survivor-centered approach to sexuality.

Resistance is very obvious and loud, especially from conservative religious and cultural gatekeepers. But the shift is undeniable. More young Nigerians are beginning to question gender roles, demand bodily autonomy, and embrace diverse sexual identities. This transformation is not smooth or universal. It's slow, and often met with backlash, but it shows a deepening rift between inherited ideologies and the values of a globalized, questioning generation.

Conclusion

Sexuality, while often treated as an individual experience, is fundamentally shaped by larger forces, especially religion and culture. This paper has explored how, across different societies, sexuality is not just about physical desire or biological instinct, but about control, morality, identity, and power. In particular, cultural norms and religious beliefs act as powerful tools in defining what is considered "acceptable" or "deviant" sexuality. These forces often operate through silence, shame, and social expectations, regulating behavior, shaping laws, and limiting access to knowledge.

Within the Nigerian context, and more broadly across Sub-Saharan Africa, these influences are especially pronounced. From virginity rituals and

References

- Asekun-Olarinmoye, E. O., Asekun-Olarinmoye, O. S., Adebimpe, W. O., & Omisore, A. G. (2014). Effect of mass media and Internet on sexual behavior of undergraduates

chastity expectations to religious doctrines on modesty and heterosexual marriage, individuals, especially women, are taught to experience their sexuality through the lens of duty, guilt, and fear. Yet, as shown through recent literature and youth perspectives, these ideas are being challenged. Urbanization, media, education, and activism are slowly shifting conversations. Young people today are navigating dual realities, the pull of traditional values, and the push toward autonomy and sexual agency.

It's clear that sexuality is not simply a personal issue; it is political. Who gets to express desire, and under what conditions, is shaped by centuries-old religious teachings, cultural traditions, colonial histories, and gender ideologies. While these structures are not inherently oppressive, they often become so when they are used to silence, exclude, or punish difference.

Moving forward, there is a need for open, inclusive, and locally informed conversations about sexuality. Future research must center the voices of women, queer individuals, and young people in non-Western contexts. Only then can we begin to untangle the layers of moral authority that continue to shape and often suppress human desire.

Until sexuality is seen not as a sin to be managed, but as a right to be respected, true freedom will remain incomplete.

in Osogbo Metropolis, Southwestern Nigeria. *Adolescent Health, Medicine and Therapeutics*, 5, 15–23.

Amadiume, I. (1987). *Male daughters, female husbands: Gender and sex in an African society*. Zed Books.

BBC Africa Eye. (2019). *Sex for Grades* [Documentary]. BBC.

Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Anchor Books.

Bhana, D. (2015). *Childhood sexuality and AIDS education: The price of innocence*. Routledge.

Boyd, D. (2014). *It's complicated: The social lives of networked teens*. Yale University Press.

Castañeda, X. (2011). Gender roles, sexuality, and religion in Latin America. In A. E. Aguirre & M. M. Krogstad (Eds.), *Cultural influences on health and well-being in Latin America* (pp. 105–122). Springer.

Connell, R. W. (2005). *Masculinities* (2nd ed.). University of California Press.

Cotti, P. (2011). Sexuality and psychoanalytic aggrandisement: Freud's 1908 theory of cultural history. *History of Psychiatry*, 22(1), 58–74.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0957154X10380015>

Doniger, W. (2009). *The Hindus: An alternative history*. Penguin Press.

Durkheim, É. (1915). *The elementary forms of the religious life* (J. W. Swain, Trans.). George Allen & Unwin. (Original work published 1912)

Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality, Vol. 1: An introduction* (R. Hurley, Trans.). Pantheon Books.

Freud, S. (1905). *Three essays on the theory of sexuality* (J. Strachey, Trans.). The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis. (Original work published 1905)

Gagnon, J. H., & Simon, W. (1973). *Sexual conduct: The social sources of human sexuality*. Aldine.

Harvey, P. (2000). *An introduction to Buddhist ethics: Foundations, values and issues*. Cambridge University Press.

Ingham, R., Van Zessen, G., & Imrie, J. (2001). *Sexual behaviour in context: A global perspective*. Routledge.

- Izugbara, C. O. (2008). Masculinity scripts and abstinence-related beliefs of rural Nigerian male youth. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 45(3), 262–276.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00224490802204472>
- Mirabel Centre. (2023). *Annual report*. Lagos, Nigeria.
- Oduyoye, M. A. (2001). *Introducing African women's theology*. Sheffield Academic Press.
- Okafor, E. E., & Obi, S. N. (2019). Cultural perspectives on sexual behavior and health in southeastern Nigeria. *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, 23(2), 89–98.
- Oshi, D. C., & Nakalema, S. (2005). The role of teachers in sex education and the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS in Nigeria. *Sex Education*, 5(1), 93–104.
- Ratele, K. (2014). *Engaging youth masculinity and sexual health in South Africa*. HSRC Press.
- Sadeghi, F. (2013). Virginity, sexuality and gender norms in Iranian culture: A sociological perspective. *Iranian Studies*, 46(1), 49–64.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00210862.2012.743920>
- Shell-Duncan, B. (2001). The medicalization of female “circumcision”: Harm reduction or reproductive oppression? *Social Science & Medicine*, 52(7), 1013–1028.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536\(00\)00208-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536(00)00208-2)
- Stand To End Rape (STER). (2022). *Report on sexual violence in Nigerian institutions*. Retrieved from <https://standtoendrape.org>
- Tamale, S. (Ed.). (2011). *African sexualities: A reader*. Pambazuka Press.
- The Initiative for Equal Rights [TIERs]. (2020). *Everything in between* [Web series].
- UNESCO. (2018). *International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence-informed approach*. United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260770>