

Debunking Stereotypes: Ethical Frameworks for Understanding Generation Z (Gen Z) Women in Marriage Union Through the Lens of Igbo Cosmology

Kenechi Nnaemeka Afunugo

*Department of Religion and Human Relations,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka*

Abstract

This paper critically examines stereotypes about Gen Z women, particularly in marriage union, through the lens of Igbo cosmology. The study seeks to challenge the prevailing narratives that point Gen Z women as overly individualistic, addicted to internet and disengaged from traditional values. Via utilizing an interdisciplinary approach combining ethical frameworks from religion and sociology, this research aims to present a refined understanding of Gen Z women in the context of Igbo culture. This paper adopts Intersectionality Theory in evaluating its insights. The methodology is qualitative, relying on semi-structured interviews with Gen Z women in Igbo households, as well as ethnographic observations and secondary literature on Igbo cosmology. Data analysis employs thematic coding to identify recurring patterns in how these women perceive their roles and responsibilities within their homes, and how their world views align or diverge from traditional Igbo values. A significant gap in knowledge lies in the absence of studies that link Gen Z matrimonial dynamics with indigenous African cosmologies, specifically those that highlight how tradition and modernity coexist for these women. The findings reveal that Gen Z women are negotiating a balance between individual aspirations and collective family responsibilities, guided by a reinterpretation of Igbo values such as communalism, respect, submission to the patriarch of the family; and adaptability: Often, when they struggle to cope with these perceived pressures, they may resort to divorce or be misled into it. Recommendations include awareness education on the peculiarities of Gen Z women; seeking counseling or mediation services; alongside cultivating support networks. This research is conducted with a focus on the urban areas of Awka North and South Local Government Areas in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Keywords: Generation Z, Debunking, Stereotypes, Igbo Cosmology, Marriage Union, Lens, Ethical Frameworks

Introduction

This paper explores how to ethically peregrinate the challenges generation Z (Gen Z) women encounter in marriage traditions, addressing the stereotypes they face through the lens of Igbo Cosmology. Quebec (2023) argues that stereotypes are automatic,

oversimplified judgments society uses to classify people, which can negatively impact how people perceive and treat others, limiting their ability to be themselves alongside enhancing their personal development. This implies that stereotypes restrict individual identity and personal freedom by promoting narrow, preconceived views, leading to unfair treatment and preventing people from being seen and accepted for who they truly are. It suggests that relying on stereotypes hinders authentic interactions and reinforces social limitations. Relatively, Ye (2023) affirms that gender stereotypes contribute to workplace discrimination against women, limiting their access to senior positions and influencing how men and women are perceived and treated. Gregoriou (2023) highlights how gender stereotypes and biased public opinion negatively impact female athletes, undermining their self-image and performance. Although she stresses that despite these challenges, many female athletes continue to excel and inspire others. The author consequently calls for society to recognize and respect female abilities in track and field, focusing on talent rather than appearance or gender, to create a more inclusive sports culture.

Reuben et al (2014) maintain that women are less likely than men to pursue mathematics or science careers, partly due to negative sex-based stereotypes. The authors experiment showed that even when men and women perform equally well on tasks, employers are more likely to hire men, especially when performance is self-reported, as men tend to overstate their abilities while women underreport. They register that implicit stereotypes lead to biased hiring decisions that disadvantage women, even with full performance information. Tabassum et al (2021) equally insist that gender stereotypes persist in society and hinder women's career progression, despite shifts in management literature. The authors elucidate that contemporary management culture fails to engage with gender studies theories, which could help create gender-neutral, affirmative action-oriented perspectives. Liu (2020) argues that gender stereotypes significantly affect women in politics by creating additional challenges for them. These stereotypes often undermine their leadership abilities, subject them to higher scrutiny, and influence how they are perceived by voters and peers. As a result, women political leaders face barriers that their male counterparts do not making it harder for them to succeed in political roles. Gao et al (2023) in their study to determine how birth year affects the tendency to marry, with gender roles and gender stereotypes in intimate relationship acting as mediators; observes that: The tendency to marry decreases across generations; gender roles and stereotypes mediate the relationship between birth year and the tendency to marry; including that exposure to negative media strengthens the negative effect of birth year on the tendency to marry, but it does not influence the relationship between birth year and gender roles or stereotypes in intimate relationship. This implies that gender stereotypes and media negativity reinforce declining marriage rates, particularly across generations.

Cherry (2023) illustrates that pertinent to the challenges of stereotypes in conceptualizing females' eligibility and capability in marriage union; biases, personal experience, and cultural norms contribute to relationship stereotypes by shaping expectations based on power structures, past interactions, and societal values. Li et al (2021) observe that higher gender self-stereotyping correlates with increased life satisfaction, distinctly in males, due to boosts in relational self-esteem (RSE) and personal self-esteem (PSE). This enunciates that, stereotypes in relationships, uniquely in marriage, can lead to unequal expectations and roles, affecting communication and intimacy. They may hinder individual growth, as partners conform to traditional roles, resulting in dissatisfaction and conflict. However, understanding and challenging these stereotypes as this study is poised in actualizing, can foster healthier, more equitable relationships.

Hannaford (2023) streamlines that stereotypes play a significant role in why women are opting out of marriage. She elaborates that women often face societal expectations tied to marriage, as evidenced in the Igbo cosmology, which can perpetuate infidelity, emotional vulnerability, and economic dependency. These pressures can make marriage seem less appealing, especially as women gain independence through careers and personal empowerment. Additionally, stereotypes about women's roles in relationships and the perception of marriage as a necessary goal can lead women to seek alternative forms of fulfillment through family, friendships, and personal pursuits, rather than traditional marital bonds.

Hinging on the aforementioned contexts, this study addresses several problems; the misrepresentation of Gen Z women as rejecting family responsibilities, the oversimplification of their relationship with tradition, and the inadequate integration of indigenous ethical frameworks in understanding their evolving roles. The research applies Intersectionality Theory to analyze its findings using a qualitative approach. It draws on semi-structured interviews with Gen Z women in Igbo conjugal unions, ethnographic observations, and secondary sources on Igbo cosmology. Thematic coding is used to explore patterns in how these women view their familial cum matrimonial roles, and how their perspectives align or differ from traditional Igbo values. This study focuses on the urban areas of Awka North and South Local Government Area in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Understanding Generation Z Women Beyond Designated Stereotypes

Mckinsey and Company (2024) elaborate that Generation Z, born between 1996 and 2010, represents the second youngest generation, situated between Millennials and Generation Alpha. Their identity has been influenced by the digital era, concerns over climate change, an evolving economic environment, and the impact of the covid-19 pandemic. They stress

that often referred to as “digital natives”, they are the first generation to have grown up fully immersed in the internet.

Eldridge (2024) articulates that Generation Z refers to individuals born in the late 1990s and early 2000s, typically between 1997 and 2012, though the exact years are sometimes debated: This generation follows Millennials (Generation Y) and is succeeded by Generation Alpha. Eldridge avers that Gen Z has been shaped by major events like the 2007-09 great recessions and the covid-19 pandemic. Growing up in the era of the iPhone and after the formation of the Department of Homeland Security post-9/11, they have seen significant societal shifts, including the election of the first black U.S president, Barack Obama, and the legalization of same-sex marriage. The author proclaims that early names for this generation included “i generation’ and “Homelanders”. Capturing a generic perspective of Gen Z pertinent to American milieu, Eldridge accentuates that they are the most demographically diverse generation in American history. Nearly half of Gen Zers are racial or ethnic minorities, with 1 in 14 identifying as Hispanic. They are more likely than previous generations to have at least one foreign-born parent, though immigrants make up a smaller proportion of Gen Z compared to Millennials. The author maintains that Gen Z has grown up in more diverse environments, with higher numbers of single-parents, mixed-race, and LGBTQ+ families in legal partnerships. Notably, 16% of Gen Zers identify as LGBTQ+, surpassing any previous generation. They are also breaking away from traditional gender norms, with over half believing forms should include more than just “man” or “woman” as gender options.

Eldridge (2024) further elucidates that most Gen Zers live in cities or metropolitan areas, with only 13% raised in rural regions, and they are less likely to relocate compared to older generations at the same age. He asserts that research from 2018 showed that the oldest Gen Zers are postponing or even avoiding marriage, with only 4% marrying between 18 and 21, nearly half the rate of Millennials, where 7% married at a young age. This trend may thus be linked to the fact that more Gen Zers are pursuing higher education. Turner (2015), Weir ((2016), Twenge (2017), Cooke (2017), and Manning (2019) uphold that Generation Z grew up with the internet and portable technology, leading to distinct behavioural patterns. They live at a slower pace, have lower rates of teenage pregnancy and alcohol consumption, and prioritize academics and job prospects, demonstrating better impulse control than previous generations. The authors posit that they also exhibits increased mental health awareness, and sleep deprivation. While youth subcultures remain, they are quieter, and nostalgia plays a significant role in their culture. The authors declare that globally, Gen Z girls enter puberty at younger ages, raising welfare concerns, and Generation Z spends more time to electronic devices, which may impact attention spans and vocabulary. They streamline that the generation is also the least religious, with many identifying as nonbelievers or atheists, and

the decline in adolescent pregnancy amongst them is linked to better contraception access and a trend toward abstinence.

Katz (2022) highlights that Generation Z is the first generation to grow up in a fully internet-connected world: Shaping them into highly collaborative, pragmatic, and self-reliant individuals. They value diversity, authenticity, flexibility, and non-hierarchical leadership, and they are deeply concerned with social and environmental issues like climate change. She delineates that contrary to misconceptions that they are coddled or lazy, Gen Zers are innovative and adaptive, using digital tools to find opportunities and solutions in both their personal and professional lives. The author insists that they prefer in-person communication despite their comfort with digital platforms and value directness and relevance in their interactions. Overall, Katz posits that their approach often challenges traditional norms, leading to new ways of thinking and problem-solving, especially in the workplace. Noteworthy is that the misconception that generation Z is coddled or lazy overlooks their adaptability, pragmatism, and innovative use of digital tools, which make them highly self-reliant and collaborative problem-solvers.

Mantooth et al (2023) avers that Generation Z, known as digital natives, is tech-savvy, pragmatic, and diverse, often prioritizing mental health and being highly concerned with the future. They are more risk-averse, better at delaying gratification, and are the best-educated generation yet. While associated with higher rates of mental illness and intellectual disabilities, they challenge misconceptions of being tech-obsessed, showing a great interest in reading compared to previous generations. The authors affirm that Gen Z is globally connected, radically inclusive, ethical, individualistic, and highly engaged in communication, valuing progressive and spiritual ideals

Ultimately, insights gained from this work; along with the interactions with Generation Z women such as C. Sam-Obi, I. Nwoye, and A. Okonkwo (personal communication, August 27th, 2024) suggests that Gen Z females are often unfairly labeled as lazy, rebellious against traditional views, and uninterested in marriage: These stereotypes overlook the complexity and resilience of their experiences. Contrary to the notion of laziness, many Gen Z women are incredibly motivated, leveraging technology and social media to create impactful change, pursue entrepreneurial ventures, and advocate for social justice. Their challenge to traditional norms is not a rejection of values but rather a quest for equity and inclusivity, reflecting a desire for more progressive relationship and careers that align with their personal beliefs. Additionally, the perception that they are not ready to settle down in marriage fails to acknowledge their emphasis on personal growth, education and financial stability as prerequisites for meaningful partnerships. Eventually, these stereotypes diminish their achievements and contribution, which are reshaping societal expectations and paving the way for a more equitable future.

Traditional Igbo Women's Roles in Marriage and their Clash with Gen Z Perspectives

Isidienu (2015) elucidates that in Igbo traditional marriage union, a woman holds a pivotal role as the cornerstone of family life, responsible for maintaining the social, moral, and economical fabric of the household. She is seen as the nurturer and educator of children, instilling cultural values, ethics, and responsibilities that shape individuals who contribute to the strength of society. Isidienu posits that politically, women often play indirect but crucial roles through their influence in family decisions and social mediation within the community. Economically, they contribute by managing household resources and engaging in subsistence farming or trade to support the family's sustenance. However, the author underscores that the increasing impact of Western culture has disrupted these traditional roles, eroding the family bonds and values that were once key to the unity of Igbo society.

Ezekwugo (1991), Nduka et al (2019) and Obienusi et al (2022) concur that in traditional Igbo marriage, women's roles to their husbands includes but is not relegated only to submission and respect, which are deeply rooted in cultural values. They stress that a wife is expected to support her husband in family decisions, demonstrating deference to his authority while fostering harmony within the household. This includes managing the home and caring for children, which reinforces her position as a nurturing figure. Additionally, they affirm that a wife is responsible for maintaining respectful relationships with her husband's extended family, often serving as a mediator and upholding familial traditions. The authors delineate that this dynamic emphasizes cooperation and respect, crucial for maintaining family unity and cultural integrity in the Igbo society. Ogobegwu (2021) records that the traditional role of Igbo women centers on caring for their husbands and children: With all other responsibilities stemming from this. The columnist stresses that Igbo girls are equally raised to fulfill this role. Moreover, known for their hard work, women support their husbands in farming or trading, with their tasks varying from rice and cassava farming to managing the palm oil industry. Overall, Igbo women play a crucial and visible role in the economies of their communities. Umu Igbo Unite Los Angeles (2018) declares that in the family, the mother is responsible for inspiring the father with ideas to advance the household and for preserving family wealth and resources: She upholds moral and ethical standards, ensures the home is welcoming for family and guests, and is tasked with loving her husband, preparing meals, and maintaining the home's cleanliness. It should be underscored that while these tradition duties provided a sense of structure and stability within the household, they also limited women's opportunities for personal and professional growth.

The discoveries so far and from the reflections of T. Ozondu, K. Oseloka, I. Okoro and G. Nnamani (personal communication August 27th, 2024) reflect that the primary duty of a woman in the marriage union in Igbo land is to be a good housekeeper, ensuring the family

is well-fed and the home is clean, including washing clothes for the husband and children. As children grow, she delegates some tasks to her daughters while maintaining responsibility for her husband's needs. A woman is expected to support her husband with wise counsel, especially during financial hardship, and assist in training the children, particularly the girls, in household skills. She must show respect, love, care and humility towards her husband, acting as a symbol of unity in the home. Additionally, she is expected to provide for her husband's sexual needs without refusal, whether for pleasure or procreation.

E. Nnaemeka, S. Chiemenem, I. Uzowulu and I. Nwoye (personal communication, August 28th, 2024) specifies that Igbo traditional marriage roles as already outlined in this study historically place women at the heart of advancing the husband's vision, fulfilling household duties, and serving as the primary care givers. These roles expected women to provide unwavering support to their households, care for the home, and ensure that their children, especially the girl child, are trained to perpetuate these norms. Sexual relations are viewed through the lens of procreation and the husband's desires, with the women's role often being seen as accommodating and fulfilling these needs to maintain marital harmony. These Gen Z respondents argue that this structure emphasizes family unity, generational continuity, and adherence to societal expectations with women often sacrificing personal ambitions for family well-being.

However, Generation Z females, influenced by modern values of individualism, equality, and self-empowerment, tend to challenge these traditional expectations. Many Gen Z women like I. Ezechi, K. Osonwa, O. Ezedibia and N. Okonkwo (personal communication, August 30th, 2024) affirm that they seek and visualize partnerships where roles are more equally distributed, focusing on mutual respect, shared responsibilities, and the pursuit of their own careers and goals alongside those of their husbands. They also advocate for sexual autonomy, insisting that they are not "sex or sexual objects, thus their pleasures and desires equally counts". They moreover champion for the right to prioritize their own desires and reproductive choices. This shift can create tension within marriages rooted in traditional frameworks, as the younger generation may view these roles as limiting and incompatible with their pursuit of personal fulfillment and gender equality.

Marriage Stereotypes of Gen Z women in Contemporary Igbo Society

C. Umeh, C. Ikeora, A. Nweke and Q. Anusiem (personal communication, September 10th, 2024) express that in contemporary Igbo society, Generation Z women are often perceived as prioritizing independence and financial autonomy, which sometimes conflicts with traditional expectations. They exposit that many young women in present day generation are focusing on higher education and career development, which can shift their priorities

away from traditional marital roles. Additionally, they tend to favour love marriages over arranged ones, preferring to choose partners based on personal compatibility rather than family expectations or social status, which highlights a desire for emotional connection and personal agency in marriage choices. Sadly, older generations in the Igbo enclaves usually interpret this as insubordination to parental directions and aversion to societal expectations. V. Onodugo and H. Obi-Nwosu (personal communication, 26th, May, 2021) elucidate that modern generation is also challenging traditional gender roles, often rejecting the expectation of being submissive wives and instead advocating for equality and shared responsibilities within marriage. This aligns with a global trend of seeking partnership based on mutual respect and balanced roles in both career and domestic responsibilities. They both aver that Gen Z women value personal growth and self-fulfillment, often delaying marriage to focus on self-discovery and personal development, which is frequently seen by older generations as reluctance to prioritize family values.

The influence of Westernization and social media on Generation Z women is another point of contention, as they are perceived as adopting Western values that may differ from traditional Igbo norms as G. Nganwuchu and C. Onyelibe (personal communication, September 15th, 2024) stipulate. Social media exposes them to diverse perspectives on relationships, fashion, and social behavior, which can lead to tensions between embracing modern trends and maintaining cultural identity. This is more often than not viewed as a threat to cultural preservation, as Western ideals may shape their views on marriage and family life. Generation Z women are sometimes perceived as more self-centered, prioritizing their personal happiness and individual goals over family obligation. This reflects a growing awareness of mental health and self-care, where marriage is seen as just one component of a fulfilling life as N. Nwobu, C. Okeke, A. Enemoh, E. Okeke, E. Okafor, and A. Okonkwo (personal communication, September 14th, 2024) insist. Additionally, C. Ezepeue, U. Arize, N. Ojukwu and C. Maduka (personal communication, September 14th, 2024) enunciate that Gen Z women are viewed as more likely to end unsatisfying relationships, contributing to a stereotype of increased divorce rates and fear of commitment. This is tied to a desire for emotional well-being, where they prioritize personal satisfaction over enduring difficult marriages for societal approval. These evolving perspectives reflect how Generation Z Igbo women are redefining their roles within marriage and society as they navigate the balance between tradition and modernity: Sadly, these are perceived as being selfish and whimsical.

Overall, the stereotypes surrounding Gen Z women in the context of marriage within Igbo society are unfounded, as every generation, including Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials (generation Y), and others before them, has exhibited its own challenges and strengths. To single out Gen Z women as particularly problematic ignores the fact that they

are highly objective, rational and often more adaptable to changing cultural norms. Dismissing them based on traditional biases fails to acknowledge their capacity for critical thinking and modern values, which can enhance the institution of marriage rather than undermine it. All the generations in modern history has names representing the generally acceptable levels for them.

Selected Interviews on Gen Z Women's Views of Marriage and Commitment in Igbo Communities

A. Okenna, P. Ezechi and N. Ozor (personal communication, September 17th, 2024) stipulate that in Igbo enclaves, Generation Z women often approach marriage with a blend of traditional values and modern perspectives. While marriage remains a significant milestone within the culture, many young Igbo women today, including those already married, sees it less as an obligatory step and more as a partnership based on mutual respect and shared aspirations. According to these respondents, they tend to prioritize personal development, education, and career goals, seeking relationships that align with their individual paths rather than those that strictly adhere to societal expectations. Moreover, staying in a marriage for these young women is increasingly conditional on factors such as emotional fulfillment, financial independence, and compatibility. K. Chidebe, I. Agbata and U. Onyeagolu (personal communication, September 17th, 2024) argue that unlike previous generations, Generation Z women hardly tolerate unhappiness or unfulfilling relationships solely for the sake of maintaining social appearances. They also often place a strong emphasis on mental health, individual autonomy, and equality with relationships, which shapes their views on both entering and remaining in marriage. While they respect the cultural heritage around marriage, many seek to balance these values with their personal beliefs and aspirations, signaling a shift towards a more progressive outlook within Igbo society.

In addition, A. Ezeh, N. Ozoka and H. Nwankwo (personal communication September 17th, 2024) assert that Generation Z women in Igbo communities are redefining the roles traditionally assigned to women within marriage. Many are advocating for shared responsibilities in areas like household management and financial contributions, expecting their partners to be active participants rather than defaulting to prescribed gender roles. According to these respondents; this shift is influenced by greater access to education and exposure to global ideas, which encourage young Igbo women to question and reshape norms to better suit their evolving needs and ambitions. They tend to value partnerships that are collaborative, with a strong emphasis on communication and mutual support.

Furthermore, the influence of social media and digital connectivity play a significant role in shaping the perceptions of marriage among Igbo Generation Z women. A. Kasie and O.

Umeh (personal communication, October 7th, 2024) assert that through online platforms, they gain insight into diverse relationship dynamics, allowing them to compare and contrast different marital practices and philosophies. This exposure can both reinforce and challenge traditional beliefs, providing these women with broader range of perspectives that they may incorporate into their own views on marriage. These respondents proclaim that while they are aware of cultural expectations, many are determined to approach marriage on their terms, advocating for relationships that respect individuality and nurture personal growth.

It is important to underscore that within the scope of this study, there exists a minority of Generation Z women who adhere to the belief that men should act as their financial providers, treating them as “ATM machines”. V. Ezenwa and O. Okafor (personal communication, October 7th, 2024) exclaim that these women prioritize marriage, often viewing it as a means to secure financial support, and are willing to embrace the role of housewives if it is their only viable path to marriage. For this group, domestic life and dependence on their husbands for economic security remain central to their worldview, contrasting with the broader trends of self-reliance and independence observed in their peers.

Gen Z Women and Evolving Roles in Igbo Marriages amid Modern Realities

Generation Z women in Igbo societies pertinent to the findings of this study, are negotiating a transformative period as traditional marriage roles evolve in response to modern realities. Historically, as realized in this study hitherto, Igbo marriages were deeply rooted in customs that emphasized gender roles, with women expected to prioritize household duties, child bearing, and supporting their husbands. This structure, which shaped generations of Igbo women, continues to influence expectations within families and communities, although these roles are increasingly being challenged by younger generations. Today, Generation Z Igbo women are redefining these roles by embracing education, career opportunities, and a more equal partnership dynamic in marriage. They are actively participating in conversations about gender equality, economic independence, and shared responsibilities, which was less common in the past. This shift reflects a sweeping trend among Gen Z globally, as they advocate for gender parity and resist conventional stereotypes. Consequently, there is a growing acceptance of women who balance both career ambitions and family, with many young Igbo men also supporting these challenges as S. Okeke and E. Nwafor (personal communication, September 19th, 2024) elucidate.

However, this evolution comes with unique challenges as Generation Z women face pressures to balance modern aspirations with cultural expectations. For some, this means negotiating their roles with family members who hold traditional views on marriage and gender roles. More so, these women encounter the complexities of harmonizing Igbo

cultural values with contemporary ideals, which can lead to tensions between preserving heritage and pursuing personal growth. Despite these challenges, Generation Z Igbo women are actively shaping a new narrative that embraces diversity in roles and reimages what it means to be a wife, mother, and career woman within their society.

It is crucial to observe that it is not the fault of Generation Z Igbo women that they are evolving in their roles as wives and mothers alongside their potential counterparts. The demands of modern society, including education, career aspirations, and the shifting dynamics of family life, require them to adapt and redefine traditional roles. Their evolution is a response to the realities of economic pressure, gender equity movements, and technological advancements that shape today's world. Rather than being seen as a deviation from cultural norms, this transformation reflects their resilience in balancing tradition with modern expectations while contributing positively to their families and communities. Change, especially significant positive change, is constant and should not be approached with mediocrity or ambivalence. Clinging to traditional roles that are no longer relevant in modern times will only set people back, causing them to become irrelevant and suffer the consequences.

A generation that refuses to embrace modernity, the internet, and digital platforms will face severe disadvantages, including isolation from global communication, limited access to information and opportunities, and reduced economic competitiveness. Their resistance to change will hinder innovation, restrict career prospects in a tech-driven world, and impair their ability to participate in modern education and social systems. Ultimately, they risk becoming irrelevant, unable to adapt to evolving social norms and technologies that shape progress and development.

Intersectionality Theory: Advocating Acceptance of Gen Z Igbo Women's Worldview

Samie (2023) cumulates that Intersectionality, a concept coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989, refers to the interaction and cumulative effects of multiple forms of discrimination, particularly as they affect women of colour. It serves as an intellectual framework for understanding how various aspects of identity including, race, gender, class, and sexuality, interact to create unique experiences of privilege or oppression. Crenshaw, according to Samie, introduced the term to address the limitations of traditional approaches to discrimination, which often treated race and gender separately, and emphasized that Black women's experiences reflect a distinctive convergence of both. The author submits that Crenshaw's work including her 1991 article highlighted the need for legal and social systems to recognize and address these overlapping oppressions. Atewologun (2018) highlights that Intersectionality Theory examines the interconnections between social categories like gender, ethnicity, and class, highlighting how individuals experience

workplaces differently based on these factors. Initially focused on the racialized experiences of minority ethnic women, it has gained prominence in business studies, exploring both individual subjectivities (intra-categorical) and systemic power dynamics (inter-categorical). Atewologun delineates that being a critical theory; it values situated, contextual knowledge and employs both qualitative and quantitative research methods to address social justice and inequality, with future challenges in balancing its broad applicability with its sociopolitical aims. Coaston (2019) elaborates that Intersectionality Theory, as developed by Crenshaw, is not about establishing a new racial hierarchy with Black women at the top. Instead, the theory seeks to dismantle all forms of racial hierarchies. It emphasizes understanding and addressing the complex, interconnected nature of oppression and inequality without privileging one group over another. The goal is to challenge and eliminate systematic injustices, promoting equality for all marginalized identities. Applying the Intersectionality Framework to this research, it provides a critical lens for understanding how Gen Z women navigate Igbo marriage systems, shaped by overlapping social identities such as gender, age, and education. Igbo cosmology traditionally views marriage as a community-centered institution, but Gen Z women, influenced by modern ideals of gender equality and independence, experience these structures differently. They face dual pressures of adhering to traditional roles while asserting more progressive values, which exposes them to stereotypes based on generational and feminist perspectives that challenge patriarchal norms.

Socio-economic factors, including class and education, play a significant role in shaping the power dynamics within Igbo marriages for Gen Z women. Many prioritize career and financial independence, which contrasts with traditional expectations of domesticity and male financial control. This intersectional approach reveals how modern economic autonomy can create tension in marriages, where women seek equality in decision-making and financial roles. Cultural identity and modernity also intersect, as Gen Z women strive to balance preserving Igbo traditions with globalized perspectives on relationships. They may push for more autonomy and privacy in marriage, challenging the extended family's role traditionally upheld in Igbo cosmology. Intersectionality, in this context, offers an ethical framework to understand and address the unique experiences and challenges of Gen Z women in Igbo marriages, advocating for more inclusive and equitable perspectives on marriage while respecting cultural values.

Ethical Guidelines for Understanding and Accommodating Gen Z Women in Contemporary Igbo Marriage

Addressing the challenges faced by Gen Z women in Igbo society regarding traditional expectations in marriages requires tactical and systematic socio-religious regimen incorporated in the following ethical guidelines:

- *Not insisting on one's preconceived terms but rather being versatile and teachable:* This principle of versatility and teachability is crucial. As societal norms evolve, younger generations may challenge traditional expectations, seeking relationships that prioritize mutual respect and cooperation. Via fostering an environment where both partners are open to learning from each other and adapting their roles, marriages can thrive in a way that honours cultural heritage while also accommodating modern values. This balance promotes understanding and resilience, allowing couples to traverse challenges together and build a partnership that reflects both individual aspirations and communal traditions.
- *Keeping third parties away from the marriage union:* In contemporary Igbo society, accommodating Gen Z women in marriage requires a balance between tradition and modern values. The involvement of third parties like family and friends, can lead to interference in the couple's relationship. To empower Gen Z women, it is crucial to emphasize their individual agency and create egalitarian partnerships where both partners' needs are respected. Redefining the role of community members as mentors rather than overseers can promote support without intrusion. Open communication is vital for establishing boundaries with third parties, fostering trust between partners. Through prioritizing dialogue and redefining community involvement, couples can nurture healthy relationships that honour both tradition and modern expectations, leading to more harmonious marriages.
- *Respecting individual autonomy:* Gen Z women place a high value on personal independence and self-expression. In Igbo cosmology, marriage traditionally involves communal and familial input, but it is important to respect the women's ability to make decisions regarding her life and marriage. Both partners should have the freedom to pursue their personal goals and interests without fear of judgment or suppression. This includes career aspirations, educational goals, and lifestyles choices. Respecting autonomy also involves giving space for personal growth and individuality, rather than expecting conformity to older gender roles.
- *Embracing open communication:* Clear and honest communication is essential for resolving conflicts and understanding one another's needs. In traditional Igbo

marriage, communication often flows through family structures, but modern couples need direct dialogue. Gen Z women value transparency, so regular check-ins and conversations about each partner's expectations, feelings, and concerns are crucial. This can help break down misunderstandings related to traditional gender roles and bridge the gap between personal values and cultural expectations. Open communication also allows for the negotiation of duties and responsibilities within the home, allowing both partners to feel heard.

- *Promoting gender equality details:* Gender roles in traditional Igbo society are often clearly defined, but Gen Z women tend to advocate for equality in decision-making and household responsibilities. Promoting gender equality means re-evaluating the distribution of power and tasks within the marriage. Both partners should share the responsibilities of childcare, housework, and financial duties in deep understanding and love. Equal respect should be given to both partners' contributions to the household, whether they are financial or emotional. Furthermore, decisions about family planning, sexual satisfaction, parenting, and finances should involve both spouses equally, ensuring that both voices are heard and valued.
- *Integrating modern values with tradition:* While honouring Igbo cosmology, which emphasizes community, family, and ancestral respect, modern Gen Z women often bring different values to the table, such as technological advancement, gender equality, and self-expression. This integration requires flexibility from both partners. Certain traditional ceremonies and practices, such as bride price or extended family obligations, may need to be reconsidered or adapted in a way that aligns with the couple's values. Both partners should be open to reevaluating their traditions to find a middle ground that respect the past but acknowledge present-day realities.
- *Encouraging education and personal growth:* Education is a key factor in the personal development of Gen Z women, and marriage should not stifle this growth. In traditional Igbo culture, the woman's role is often seen as supportive within the family, but in today's world, her personal and professional development is equally important. Husbands should actively encourage their wives to pursue higher education, vocational training, or entrepreneurial endeavours. This ensures that women feel fulfilled and empowered, which in turn strengthens the marriage. Both partners should be lifelong learners, and supporting one another's personal goals should be a mutual commitment.
- *Fostering mutual respect:* Mutual respect is the cornerstone of a healthy marriage. In the context of Igbo cosmology, respect for one's partners transcends just the

husband-wife dynamic; it includes respecting each other's families and cultural backgrounds. Respecting a Gen Z woman's voice and choices in decisions about family, work, and social life is crucial. Respect also means valuing each other's time, boundaries, and emotional needs. This respect must extend to dealing with conflicts, where both partners refrain from undermining or dismissing the other's perspectives or feelings. Respecting one another's boundaries and opinions fosters a strong, balanced partnership.

- *Promoting emotional support:* Emotional support is critical in marriages, especially as modern pressures from work, societal, and family dynamics increase. Gen Z women prioritize mental health and emotional well-being hence fostering a supportive involvement where both partners feel safe is key. In the past, traditional Igbo marriages may have focused more on pragmatic and social structures, but modern relationships require emotional depth and vulnerability. Husbands and wives should be each other's confidants, offering empathy, understanding, and reassurance during tough times. This emotional connection should be nurtured through regular quality time, shared experiences, and showing affection.
- *Addressing intergenerational differences:* There can be significant differences between the values of Gen Z women and older generations, including their parents or extended family. This often leads to conflict in areas like child-bearing, financial independence, and gender roles. It is essential to acknowledge and respect these generational differences while finding compromises that honor both tradition and modern values. Couples should be proactive in discussing how to manage expectations from older family members without allowing them to dominate or control the marriage. Gen Z women may value more liberal approaches to parenting, career, and social engagement, and husbands need to be allies in navigating these differences with respect and tact.
- *Upholding cultural heritage:* Upholding Igbo cultural heritage while accommodating modern values is crucial in maintaining a sense of identity and belonging within the marriage. Couples should actively participate in cultural traditions that resonate with them, such as festivals, honouring of ancestors, gainful and meaningful rite of passages, language preservation, imbibing of Igbo core values and passing it on to their children, and other important customs. However, it is equally important to allow the evolution of these traditions to align with their lifestyle and beliefs. This means both partners must engage in critical conversations about which cultural practices are meaningful to them and which ones may need adjustment. Gen Z women often value their cultural roots but seek to engage with them in a way that reflects their modern lives.

Conclusion

This study does not suggest that Generation Z Igbo women should regress into uniformed or diminished roles within marriage and society. Rather, it advocates for a positive enlightenment that integrates traditional values with modern perspectives, empowering these women to contribute meaningfully to both their households and society. The intention is to dismantle stereotypes that may confine women to limiting roles while promoting an ethical framework that recognizes the evolving dynamics of marriage and individual agency within the context of Igbo cosmology. However, the study has a significant limitation. It primarily focuses on a specific cultural and generational group, which may not fully capture the diversity of experiences among Igbo women or other ethnicities within Nigeria or globally. Moreover, many Igbo natives, particularly the older generations, are not fully familiar with generational terms and designations such as Generation Z (Gen Z), Generation Y, and Millennials. Nevertheless, this study has served as an eye-opener in that regard. Future research should explore more sophisticated and data-driven approaches, including longitudinal studies that examine the evolving roles of Igbo women over time. It is important to note that this study is not exhaustive, and while it offers valuable insights, it should be seen as part of an ongoing conversation rather than a definitive conclusion.

Recommendations

The following substantive recommendations are proffered apposite to the findings of this work:

1. Gen Z women, while encouraged to pursue their visions, must not do so with rigid determination that disregards the importance of mutual understanding with their spouses. They are advised to approach their husbands with love, patience, and reasoning, allowing time for understanding and collaboration, rather than being whimsical or impulsively inclined. A balanced approach in presenting their perspectives, where respect and emotional intelligence are paramount, is essential to fostering harmony in marriage.
2. Every human being, regardless of their background, is created by God with unique strengths and weaknesses. No man is perfect, and each person has flaws that remind them of shared humanity. Instead of focusing on stereotypes or dwelling on people's shortcomings, it is essential to embrace their individuality and the uniqueness of personality. Through supporting one another and working together, mankind can bring out the best in themselves and those around them. True strength lies in accepting one's imperfections and helping others rise, not in trying to conform to narrow societal expectations. Every human is valuable, just as they are, and people's worth is found in how they uplift others.

3. Seeking counseling or mediation services is crucial. Professional counseling can help couples address issues constructively and develop strategies for dealing with cultural demands. For Gen Z Igbo women facing external pressures, family counseling or mediation can bridge generational gaps and foster understanding. Local communities or religious institutions may offer services tailored to the specific cultural dynamics of Igbo society, which can provide relevant and practical assistance.
4. Cultivating support networks is very essential. Gen Z Igbo women can always join groups or communities of like-minded women: This can provide emotional support, practical advice, and shared experiences. Many online platforms and local group offer spaces where women can discuss challenges, find encouragement, and gain insights. Connecting with mentors or older women who have successfully balanced such related demands like coping with Igbo traditional roles of women in marriage with respect to their peculiarities can also provide valuable guidance and strategies.
5. Awareness education on the peculiarities of Gen Z women: Igbo people traditionally anchored in communal and patriarchal systems may struggle to understand Gen Z's emphasis on individuality, digital connectivity, and fluidity in social norms. This disconnect calls for intentional education that highlights generational shifts in values, gender roles, and marriage expectations, to bridge the gap; ensuring that cultural preservation and modern realities are balanced.

References

- Atewologun, D. (2015, August 28). Intersectionality Theory. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Business and Management*. <https://oxfordre.com/business/views/10.1095/acrefore>.
- Cherry, K. (2023, July 31). 9 Common Relationship Stereotypes that we Normalize – But are Actually not okay. *Very well mind*. <https://www.verywellmind.com>.
- Coaston, J. (2019, May 28). The Intersectionality Wars. *Vox*. <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/5/20/18542843>.
- Cooke, H. (2017, May 16). Teen birth rate halves since 2008. *Stuff* <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/92626913/>.
- Eldridge, A. (2024, October 3). Generation Z: Demographic Group. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com>.
- Ezekwugo, C.M. (1991). Omenana and Odinana in the Igbo World: A Philosophical Appraisal. *African Marburgenia*, 24(2), 3-18.
- Gao, Y. et al. (2023). The influence of Birth years on Tendency to marry: The moderating role of Negative Media Information Exposure. *The 6th International Conference on*

- Computer in Management and Business (ICMB)*, January 13-15, 2023, Macau, China.
- Gregarious, S. (2023, March 15). Female Athletes: Stereotypes and Public Opinion and How it Affects Self-Image. *Money Smart Athlete Blog*. <https://moneysmartathlete.com/>.
- Hannaford, D. (2023, January 13). Why are women opting out of Marriage around the World. *PHYS.ORG*. <https://www.google.com/amp/s/phys.org/news/2023-01>.
- Isidienu, I.C. (2015). The Family as the Bedrock of Igbo Traditional Society. *JMEL – Journal of Modern European Languages and Literature*, 4, 119-128.
- Katz, R. (2022, January 3). Gen Z are not “Coddled”. They are highly collaborative, self-reliant and pragmatic, according to new Stamford-affiliated research *Stanford Report: Stanford University*. <https://www.stanford.edu/starries/2022/01/know-gen-z>.
- Li, J. et al. (2021). The Relationship Between Gender Self-stereotyping and life satisfaction: The Mediation role of Relational Self-Esteem and Personal Self-esteem. *Sec. Personality and Social Psychology*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.769459>.
- Liu, S.J.S. (2020). Cracking Gender Stereotypes? Challenges women political leaders face. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 41(3).
- Manning, C.J. (2019, May 6). Gen Z is the least religious Generation. Here’s why that could be good thing. *Pacific Standard*. <https://psmag.com/ideas/>.
- Mantooth, K. (2023, November 21). Gen Z/Overview Meaning & Characteristics. *Study.com*. <https://study.com/academy/lesson>.
- Mckinsey & Company. (2024, August 28). What is Gen Z? <https://www.mckinsey.com/>.
- Nduka, U. et al. (2019). Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart and the Role of Women in Igbo Traditional Religious Culture. *Open Journal of Social Science*, 7:272-289. Doi:10.4236/jss.2019.712020.
- Obienusi, I.E. et al. (2022). Patriarchy and Culture: The Position of Women in the Rural Igbo Community. *ODIBENDI: A Journal of Igbo Consciousness*, 174-189.
- Ogobegwu, T.A. (2021). Igbo Marriage Practices: Marriage Practices in Igboland. *IGBO CULTURE: BEING AFRICAN*. <https://beingafrican.com/igbo-marriage-practices/>.
- Quebec. (2023, August 30). *Effects of Stereotypes on Personal Development*. <https://www.quebec.ca/en/>.
- Reuben, E. et al. (2014). How stereotypes impair women’s careers in science. *Cross Mark*. <https://www.pnas.org>.
- Samie, A. (2023, December 20). Intersectionality. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/intesectionality>.

- Tabassum, N. et al. (2021). Gender stereotypes and their impact on women's career progressions from a managerial perspective. *IIM Kozhikode Society & Management Review*, 10(9), 1-17.
- Turner, A. (2015). Generation Z: Technology and Social Interest. *Journal of Individual Psychology*, 71(2), 103-133.
- Twenge, J. (2017, September 19). Why today's teens aren't in any hurry to grow up. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com>.
- Umu Igbo Unite, Los Angeles. (2018, February 3). The Igbo Family Structure *CULTURE + CONNECTIONS*. <https://www.uiv/osangeles.org/post/the-igbo-family-structure-1>.
- Weir, K. (2016). The risks of earlier puberty. American Psychology Association, 47(3). <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2016/03/puberty/>.
- Ye, X. (2023). The Impact of Gender Stereotypes on Women in the Workplace. *Proceedings of the International Conference on Global Politics and Socio-Humanities*, 13(1), 125-130.