



## CHRISTIAN VALUES AND ALTERNATIVE MASCULINITY: A STUDY OF MALE TEENAGERS IN NSUKKA METROPOLIS, SOUTH-EASTERN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*This work investigated the nature of masculinity among Christian male teenagers in Nsukka metropolis. Drawing from phenomenological instruments of interview and documentary approaches, the study specifically assessed Teenagers' (male) masculinity negotiated through Christian principles. The paper presupposes that various factors interfere with remodeling of social beliefs and actions. It establishes that the impact of Christian ethical values on gender-equality has led to the culture of alternative masculinity which is potentially girded with transformative principles and actions. The narrative contributes to the discourse on the intervention of Christian beliefs and practices in remolding individuals and social group actions.*

**Keywords:** Christianity, Values, Alternative Masculinity, Culture, Gender.

### Introduction

Nsukka, a homogenous cultural society, is built on a patriarchal social system. Men are presumed to be valued and respected more than their female counterparts (Agujiobi, 2020). The gendered hierarchy is created by overtime conversations and social acceptance, sustained by a given ideology, and thus birthed by social practices, which are configured into various existing social institutions. This has obviously led to the designation of some occupations and profession as gender-specific. Gendered hierarchy among the Nsukka people has led to psycho-social consequences (Agujiobi, 2020; Agwu, 2018 and Obasola, 2013;). It devolves into a social construct to delineate gender roles into femininity and masculinity.

Masculinity is consistently connected with dominance and prestige to be male as against the inferior status attached to being a female. It has been an age-long traditional practice among Nsukka people (Ezebuilo, 2023). This tradition had been pontificated by the sacred traditional religious laws and believed to be sanctioned by divinities and gods (Agwu, 2018; Taiwo & Kayode, 2016; Nsirim-Worlu, 2011 and Obasola, 2013;). In particular, Ele (2017) affirms that the Nsukka area is a patriarchal society that has resisted liberal social thoughts and other civilized ideals; anchoring her values and social practices on the pretext of divine orders. Diverse forms of masculinities are extant in Nsukka culture (Ezebuilo, 2023). They have survived for a very long time, sustained by an inconsequential belief system that they are part of the sacred 'orders and practices received from the forebears. The premium placed on masculinity could largely be

attributed to the mental enslaving of oneself to the creeds of socio-cultural classification of gender roles (Ugwu, 2018). This is for the reason that a people's cultural heritage is deeply founded that an obtuse thought would assume that it has some elements of natural origin. From time immemorial therefore, the odious practice of masculinities has become normalized in Nsukka. Each dimension of masculinity is believed to have adverse effect on women specifically because of gender stereotype (OECD, 2021). Women in Nsukka are placed at the peripheral level of the society. There is no room for equal value of women in Nsukka cultural tradition. This has egregiously resulted to their denial of political rights, educational privilege, unequal economic opportunities, and religious prerogatives (Ugwu, 2018; Ewelum, 2016). Even though that Nsukka has respectable matrilineal systems like the '*umuada*' and '*iyom-di*'—clannish council of daughters and daughters-in-law—but they are yet incomparable with the unlimited authority of the patrilineal equivalents like the '*umunna*'—council of clannish males. In a fuller description of women subordination in Nsukka, Agujiobi (2020) opines that the women folk in Nsukka are subordinate to their male counterparts who enjoy the right of having a higher value whilst the position of women is basically considered domestic.

However, with the impacts of Christianity, the marginalization of women in Nsukka has not been unchanging (Awoshiri et al, 2022). The Christian religion, is value-laden that is purportedly non-violent and non-discriminatory. It has significant potential to shape a people's cultural perspectives. The religion is a strong voice that transforms social attitudes (Okoli and Okwuosa, 2020). UN Women's report (2020) concurs that faith-based organization including Christianity naturally commands the trust and respect of local populations by even exerting tremendous impact on their identity, behavior, and belief system. In particular, Christianity has positively influenced traditional notions of gender inequality, promoting egalitarian values and balanced relationships between genders (Mwije, 2012). In agreement, Hernandez (2020) notes that Christ, the Lord of the Christian religion, is a model for every Christian, respecting every gender despite social definitions and expectations. The author resisted the main sources of social construction of masculinity; culture, colonialism, and religion. This position is regardless of Witherington's (1988) affirmation on the antithesis of Jesus in giving women their dignity. In England and South Africa, it has been found that men, who are informed by Christian values, are able to express a hybrid form of masculinity that aims at creating a balanced gender of equal value and respect (Nyhagen, 2020; Owino; 2014,). Evidence on how male teens in Australia construct their masculinity in relation to spirituality shows how the latter has profoundly influenced their tendency to challenge the hegemonic ideal of masculinity, and to hope for a future where masculinity is defined in more varied and fulfilling ways (Engebretson, 2006). On this backdrop this study argues that Christianity propagates non-violent ethics that shape the emergence of young men in Nsukka metropolis. They play significant roles in shaping societal norms and expectations, by specifically providing and strengthening alternate ways of masculinity. However, there is a knowledge gap in understanding how Christian values influence alternative masculinity among male teenagers in Nsukka Metropolis. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the impact of Christian values on alternative masculinity among male teenagers in the Nsukka cultural Zone.

This study adopted a phenomenological approach, combined with interviews and documentary analysis, to explore how Christian principles and values influence masculinity among male



teenagers in Nsukka. This study employed stratified random sampling to select 15 male teenagers (ages 16-19) who willingly shared their real names and participated in interviews. The research aimed to explore how these young Christians negotiate masculinity in relation to the values instilled in them. This study contributes to the ongoing discussions on gender equality, offering valuable insights into the intersection of Christian ethics and social behavior.

### **Conceptual Clarifications:**

**Christian Values:** These refer to the moral principles and teachings derived from the bible and Christian Faith. They often emphasize love, compassion, forgiveness, mercy, humility, selflessness, respect for others, and empathy.

**Alternative Masculinity:** It refers to forms of masculinity that challenge traditional notions of masculinity. It is characterized by emotional expression and vulnerability, rejection of aggression and dominance, empathy, fluid masculinity and egalitarian disposition with femininity.

### **Literature Review**

In gender studies, religion is often acknowledged to have contributed immensely to the emancipation of women. Quite though, some findings show that it poses as hindrance to the empowerment of women. In the same vein, Klingorová and Havlíček (2015) appeal to historical reference to confirm that the voices of women in patriarchal societies are silenced. In a contrary view, UN Women's report (2020) affirms that religion contributes significantly in shaping gender and cultural norms. In a study, Stuart (2010) found out that there are little manifestations in the growth and acceptance of gender equality among some religions, albeit the pace is remarkably low because the incidence of gender discrimination and the sidelining of women is still extant on the yardstick that the Christian religion is found to have promoted gender equality through its teachings and activities (Mwije, 2012). Research has shown that Christian values have significant impact on gender roles in Nigeria. According to Okoli and Okwuosa (2020), the Christian religion is a dominant force in the country, which has promoted equal gender roles in the lives of men and women, mostly through its impactful values. In retrospect Para-Mallam (2006) highlighted how both the Christian and Islamic religions have been utilized to challenge male bias, resulting to the promotion of holistic gender equality in Nigeria. A study by Onwunta (2009) also highlighted the need for the destruction of gender stereotypes for new gender perspective in Nigerian social climes. This is evidently attainable through the transformative impetus of the values of God's kingdom, which are inherently essential in the elimination of gender bias. However, these findings suggest that Christian values can have a complex and multifaceted impact on masculinity in Nigeria.

Masculinity is aliened to the social life of the pre-colonial African societies. In Nigeria with reference to South-East geo-political zone, Uchem (2001) found out that the Igbo people's social acclaim was decided by visible productivity and achievement, irrespective of their gender identity. Thus, in that clime, women were not perceived as inferior and were not marginalized. Even among some other Nigerian ethnic groups, their pre-colonial history was suggestive of the fact that there was equal aspiration and access to power. Harris (2017) shares similar observation about the pre-colonial Northern Nigeria where gender equality flourished until contact with Islam. Uchendu (2007) believes that the state of equality that existed in the pre-colonial epoch was upturned by

women's acquiescence in male projecting values which compelled women to defer to men, thus contributing to the institutionalization of gendered roles. In a scale of contradiction, scholars have maintained that masculinity is a colonial import. Togarasei (2013) explains that colonialism contributed to the distinction of gender in the pre-colonial societies as it limited women to such roles as secretaries, nurses, teachers, and housewives. From a sociological perspective, Itulua-Abumere (2013) maintains that masculinity is seen as a gender identity that is socially and culturally constructed. It has represented the social and cultural interpretation of maleness learnt through engagement and participation in the society. However, an objective examination indicates that every form of socialization has a weave of religious elements. Religion has been a significant aspect of every culture. It is interwoven in culture as one could conceit that it predates other aspects of a culture. It could be easier to arrive to the reason why masculinity thrive in societies with religion. Klingorová & Havlíček (2014) found out that societies where most inhabitants are without religious affiliation, display the lowest levels of gender inequality; Christian and Buddhist societies, tend to have average levels of gender inequality; and societies with the highest levels of gender inequality across the observed variables, were those whose inhabitants adhere to Islam and Hinduism.

In a historical research study on Christian masculinity, Werner (2011) has argued that religion and masculinity were incompatible in the nineteenth-century. The women promoted and preserved Christian values and norms which were conceived as feminine qualities. It thus, made men to distance themselves from the religion, leading to the feminization of Meanwhile, the above history presupposes a subtle exoneration of Christianity in the subordination of women. To identify the various dimensions of masculinity in a society, Olawoye et al (2004) found out that among the three ethnic groups in Nigeria, masculinity is strongly associated with the social position in the family and the physical capability to satisfy the sexual needs of the female partner(s) and to produce children. Decision-making authority, including decision on reproduction is largely vested in the man. In her editorial statement on men and masculinity, (Sweetman, 2001) observed that masculinity is thought in the western world as the gender that is naturally saddled with being the economic 'provider'. An ideal that emerged because of the Northern industrialization which led to the conception of men as breadwinners and the domestication of women. Stewart (2016) revealed that in the Greco-Roman world, masculinity was demonstrated by the avoidance of unmanliness, penetration and impenetrability, power and dominance, education, and self-control. Stewart's findings are not totally in variant with that of Uchendu (2007) who reveals that gender is a social construct several social factors like religion, environment and education are also likely to determine how the youths would express their masculinities in the years to come. For Nyhagen (2020) whose research finding shows that in Britain, religion consistently remains a strong factor that promotes more balanced and equal forms of masculinity. This work therefore, is poised to assess how Christian values shape the masculine ideals of male teens in Nsukka, Nigeria.

### **Christian Values and Alternative Masculinity: The Least Emphasized Connection**

In Nsukka, the cultural traditions are passed down through oral storytelling, proverbs, and taboos, teaching children about societal morality and gender expectations. However, there is a lack of written documentation on the population of male teenagers in Nsukka metropolis, a culturally diverse area with people from various backgrounds.



Without any doubt, the Christian religion like every other religion has a strong influence on the culture of a people including Nsukka. Scholars have recognized the incredible role of Christianity in shaping a people's worldview (Akah, 2016; Togarasei, 2013; Eves, 2012;). Alongside education, Christianity in Nsukka has come to be one of the civilizations that have left lasting impression on culture and worldview of the area. The notion of masculinity among the Nsukka people has been influenced by modern Christian social thought with regard to gender equality. In affirmation to such supposition that Christian values shape the social behaviours of teenagers, Francis, Onah (personal communication, May 4, 2022) credits his involvement in the altar servers' group, where males and females serve together during Holy Mass, for promoting his positive views on gender equality. This experience, he says, reinforced his belief in the equal worth of all individuals before God. The experience of a religious gesture facilitated the transformation of character. In a related experience, Kyrian Ugwuanyi (personal communication, April 29, 2022) also shared that his active membership in the Marian society of Legion of Mary has inspired him to lead a virtuous life, emulating the example of Mary, the Mother of God. This commitment has helped him develop a deeper sense of respect and brotherly love for his sisters, recognizing them as equal human beings deserving of dignity and respect.

These relative experiences of the impacts of being a Christian male teen corroborates the findings of Van Klinken (2012: 225) that "Christianity builds one into a better man". The bedrock of elementary Christian moral principles is to produce a virtuous man (used in the generic sense) that would not be a nuisance to the society. Johnpaul Eze (personal communication, May 4, 2022), a seventeen-year-old boy of the Anglican paramilitary brigade group also recounts how the Christian influence has significantly transformed his worldview as a growing man. He accords equality to women. It is an attestation to critically presume that religious faith practically provides a platform for extinguishing the flames of two extremes. In an instance, Nyhagen (2020) finds out that religious faith itself can be a source of alternatives to the toxic norms of masculinities. From the testimonials of the teenagers above, Christianity is laden with values and norms aimed to mitigate the excesses of human temperaments. Meanwhile, the learning of fundamental social behaviors springs forth from family as the basic Christian community. The inculcation of desired moral characters begins with informal education received from the family. Justin Ugwoke (personal communication, Sept. 22, 2022) recounted that growing up in a family with parents actively involved in the Evangelical Fellowship of Anglican Communion (EFAC) instilled in him a strong sense of equality between the sexes. He noted that his parents discouraged any display of superiority or intimidation by male siblings towards their female counterparts. As he matured, Justin realized that this upbringing was intentionally designed to mold him into a respectful and empathetic individual, aligning with Jesus' teachings on the equality of all sexes. This is an attribution of the basic roles of families in the socialization of the younger generations.

The family is the primary organ of educating and exposing the younger members of the larger society to what is ideal, valuable and normative. The Church utilizes the providentialism of the family institution to train children to the ways of the Christian life. The family is a strong determinant of the social characteristics of children. Thus, the family significantly shapes the thought-patterns, behaviours and worldviews of their wards. In a conviction, it does imply that the family can instill various perspectives of doing gender on their wards. This is highly informed by



the orientation of the parents involved. In other words, it is a significant demonstration that affirms that doing gender is as a result of social construction that has a basis in family. In talking about the roles of Christian parents in fostering the sense of alternative masculinity in their wards, Eves (2012) observes that among some churches in Papua Guinea, marital discord and all conflict and violence negates the godliness of a born-again Christian. Men who follow the born-again Christian ideals are concerned about how they treat women, reflect on their roles in family life. The living out of the Christian ideals is tantamount to the cultivation of characters that are not limited by gender stereotypes. SomtoChukwu Agu (personal communication, May 5, 2022) shared that his Catholic upbringing in a family of six boys taught him that domestic chores are not limited to gender. He and his brothers were encouraged to participate in various household tasks, shaping his perspective on masculinity. According to him, being a “real man” is not about physical attributes, but rather about intrinsic, noble qualities. The practice of the culture of masculinity is redundant in the contemporary age given the human advancement in science, technology and international relation.

Many of the opinions of these teenagers affirms that masculinity has never been a major concern for the Gen-Z. Paul Idoko (personal communication, Aug. 3, 2022) contends that traditional notions of masculinity are outdated. Raised in a Christian home in Nsukka, he was exposed to female pastors, which challenged his views on masculinity. He believes that both men and women have equal potentials to achieve life goals, and that personal success is more important than gender. Timothy Abugu (personal communication, May 2, 2022) recalled that at 15, he realized his mother had successfully chaired their church council for nearly a decade, earning the parishioners' support. This experience taught him that leadership effectiveness is based on competence and intellectual ability, rather than gender. The emphasis is on the central role that the family plays as the basic church. It is a key player in deconstructing masculinity and facilitating equality-minded masculinity. Notwithstanding, there is the proclivity of traditional beliefs in making permanent impression on a people that perhaps could engender an impediment to the Christianization and progressive transformation of such a people. The strength of these traditional beliefs cannot be slough off easily as it persistently holds sway to create a different world to the people. Most notably is that the overreaching effects of these beliefs are such that they are seemingly portrayed as permanent experience which would inadvertently blinker the illuminating powers of progressive social ideologies. This has however resulted to the one of the most recurring event in the Nsukka society that there used to be an unwarranted clash of Christian and traditional beliefs.

Even though that the Nsukka metropolis is progressively developing into a modern city, it still has some reservations for traditional worldviews especially among the adults. It fairly leaves the younger ones between rocks and hard. The extent of the influence of traditional beliefs on the teenagers was vividly captured by Emmanuel Eze (personal communication, May 10, 2022) reflected that his childhood was shaped by traditional norms, but when he moved to the city to prepare for university entrance exams, he encountered new social influences and perspectives that challenged his views, particularly on gender. With a sense of nostalgia, one of the male teens appraised the positive impartation of Nsukka traditional values including on gender stratification. Gerald Ugwuanyi (personal communication, May 6, 2022) noted that some traditional beliefs are rooted in misconceptions and primarily serve to promote male interests and ego, benefiting men



at the expense of others. In a much revealing tone, Kenneth Odo (personal communication, May 17, 2022) acknowledged that many men are socialized to view women as inferior, but emphasized that this outdated mindset can be changed, allowing men to adopt more positive and equitable attitudes towards women. Hillary Idoko (personal communication, May 13, 2022) shared that his traditional upbringing discouraged "feminized" roles for men, but attending a mixed Catholic secondary school broadened his perspective, particularly after witnessing female school heads demonstrate effective leadership.

A typical patriarchal society such as Nsukka, has age-long institutionalised gender discriminatory beliefs and practices. They are learned, transmitted and ingrained into the subconscious mind of the upcoming generations. The ability to ward off the clings of traditional beliefs is highly dependent on the openness of one to adapt to the changes occurring in every facet of human existence. Most of these male teens acknowledge the input of traditional beliefs in shaping their masculine overtures. Yet, their convictions as Christians have transformed their ideology about gender qualities. They are strongly convinced, as espoused by Christian social ethos, that all human persons of whatever gender identity are equal. The Church is very important to the young men who still believe in her message regarding gender equality issues (Lusey et al, 2017).

The perspectives of these teenagers are indicative that the adoption and sustenance of alternative masculinity is a consequence of the impacts of Christian ethics. The traditional views on the subordination of women had been affected by the Christian value teachings. Akah (2016) affirms that Christianity does great work not only being the voice of the voiceless, but she has also advocated the rights of women in the society. The *raison d'etre* for an alternative to toxic masculinities could be tied to the relevance that it shares with the ideals of Christian values. The value of the principle of equality confronts other masculinities which promotes dominance, hierarchy, violence, and discrimination of the females. The Christian values can potentially replace those elements of masculinities with such values like servitude, humility, peace, love, respect, kindness etc. In a practical dimension, Jesus demonstrated this possibility when he made the famous injunction to his disciples on being the servants of others. Stewart (2016) claims that Jesus calls the disciples to adopt the metaphorical position of slaves and children. The scholar argues further that such Jesus' order is evidence for the 'unmanning' of the disciples. The Jesus' order of humility and servitude enables the disciples to pursue honor not through the traditional masculine models like dominance, *unemotionality*, wealth, retaliation (cf. Matt. 5, 6, 23). But through the virtues and values of courage, justice, prudence, and self-control.

From a historical perspective, Werner (2011) has argued that the possible demotion of masculinity was because of the promotion of Christian values and norms by women in the nineteenth century resulting to the 'feminization of Christianity'. It became an idea by men to describe the promotion of ideals and value characteristics that were thought to be relevant to the weaklings and women but considered disparaging in applying to the gender that were thought to be breadwinners, soldiers, warrior kings and leaders. The 'feminization of Christianity' concept has a resounding relevance among contemporary men. Patridge (2022) refers to it as 'effeminate Christianity' which he criticized in favor of outright masculinities that is chiefly characterized by courage and bravery as exemplified by some bible male characters like Joshua, Gideon, Sampson, David, Jonathan, Nehemiah, the Prophets, the twelve Apostles, and Jesus Himself.

In furtherance, the scholar argues for the masculinity of Jesus, even though, it is yet to be many are yet many have not recognized that and submits that modern Christology portrays Jesus as a sort of divine door-mat who idly becomes obedient to the cross and begs people to accept Him as their Savior. Major critique of this distorted objectivity would readily point to the influence of remote cultures and disconnection with the theological polemics of St. Paul (cf. Galatian 3:28-29). Buchi (2020) in being critical to the position of misogyny illustrates that the Bible did not invent patriarchy, but it only expresses the prevalent state of male dominance in those times. What misogynists have come to term as the 'feminization of Christianity' is the consequence of the outward show of emotions and the leaving out of Christian Values by men. These are soft principles that cuts across gender. They are inherent parts of the humanness that every human being shares. Amos Ugwu (personal communication, May 5, 2022) confirms that: the idea of *unemotionality* as an indicative of masculinity is a sheer social construction because all human beings are naturally made to show emotions. Current liberal thinking has deconstructed the notion that men are not unemotional. This assertion simply means that masculinity as a social construct can be equally deconstructed. Uchendu (2017:282) corroborates such view that as masculinity is a mental phenomenon that can be consciously and individually deconstructed. Yet, Loader (2019) observes that despite the advent in the 20th century of pop psychology, which gave men permission to cry, many still have not made it. These teenagers have learnt a new masculinity that is emotional. A masculine identity that takes up 'feminine' roles. In an intriguing response, a male teen, Chijioke Edeh (personal communication, May 2, 2022) affirms that: emotionality should be considered more of a masculine ideal as it is a portrayal of Christian value of humility which is exemplified by the Lord of the Christian faith, Jesus. In the same line of conviction, Kelvin Onuh (personal communication, May 7, 2022) attributed his positive views on gender equality to his childhood experiences with Christian virtues like patience, obedience, and humility, gained through his involvement in the Block Rosary Movement in the Catholic Church. He lamented that these values are now often dismissed as "feminine" by male chauvinists. In a scale of rationality, it could be appraised that the Catholic theology of Mary, the Mother, and the Virgin, and host of other female Saints continue to have transformative effect in mitigating male dominance. Ogbonna Ukwuaba (personal communication, April 29, 2022) contended that salvation in the hereafter is not gender sensitive. In other words, a person's sex does not determine whether or not he or she will be admitted in the perceived 'heaven'.

From the foregoing, there is the presumption of correlation between Christian values and alternative masculinity. Christian teachings promote equality, humility, and servitude, which challenge traditional masculine norms. While traditional beliefs and practices continue to influence teenagers' views on masculinity, the family and Church play significant roles in shaping teenagers' understanding of masculinity and gender equality.

### **Alternative Masculinity: A Panacea to Social Insecurities and Violence Against Women**

An alternative masculinity emphasizes egalitarian values, unlike other forms of masculinities that prelude domination, such that it will naturally exclude women from aspiring to some socio-political and religious positions. It challenges men to critically change their perceptions of being men as socially constructed. Chitando and Njoronge (2013) refers to it as 'transformative masculinity'.





In some Christian clerical ministries, women are excluded from holding ordained ministries like bishopric, priestly and diaconate offices. This ministerial exclusion of women is grossly manifested in Catholicism and other orthodox Christian denominations (Molina, 2015). Meanwhile, the egalitarian tenet of the alternative masculinity recognizes the untapped spiritual potentials of women in the spread of the gospel and will consequently change the narrative (Ugwu, 2018). However, the emergence and flourishing of the culture of alternative masculinity in a society that is predominantly Roman Catholic could be problematic because of the Church's deep reservation for an exclusive male clergy (Uchem, 2001). The ministry of priesthood is a call to 'service' which by the basic principle of reason, it should be dischargeable by every Christian gender who is eager to follow the footsteps of Christ. An alternative masculinity therefore is an antithesis to such biased narrative. The Church ought to imbibe the tradition of Jesus other than the traditions of men. Jesus is the Lord and model of the Christian faith who was not discriminatory but treated every gender of His time with equal value, love and dignity as women were even the first of the disciples who Jesus revealed Himself to in the miracle of resurrection (Ugwu and Okoli, 2012).

However, just like alternative masculinity presupposes a possible recognition and subsequent inclusion of women in priestly vocations in the Church, it also allows for the equal right and participation of women in leadership and policy-making positions. Ordinarily, masculinity discriminates against women in aspiration and holding of leadership offices. This is to say that it is an often-observable fact that the number of women in the political terrain represents an almost to non-existing percentile of the women population especially in Africa. Thus, it becomes a signal of what masculinity had caused and to say that men had always occupied the political landscape especially in Africa, would be a sheer understatement.

The alternative masculinity, therefore, has the implication to alter the status quo as it will leverage on its principle of equality to allow women to aspire to leadership positions in all sense of freedom. An active inclusion and participation of women in both the economic and political leadership of a country is undeniably a means to national development. For example, the few economic and political institutions that had witnessed the leadership of women is a testament to such acclaim. The likes of Queen Elizabeth II, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Amina Mohammed, Mary John Son Sirleaf etc, quickly comes to the picture. It is also gainsaying that the typical traditional societies burdens the males as the ultimate breadwinners of a household as the masculine genders. The production, management and ownership of the household wealth are vested on the male members of the family. The socioeconomic condition of the traditional societies enormously affected gender equality. It promoted the sidelining of women to economic ownership and wealth. On that backdrop, the alternative masculinity changes the narrative to support wealth creation by women also. It would allow for equal division of labor and distribution of wealth as what was obtainable in the pre-colonial Igbo society when socio-economic acclaim was not measured based on gender.

Finally, an obvious implication of alternative masculinity is on a general sociological and psychological outlook. It transforms the views of the society about women, their dignity and worth. It certainly ushers new perspectives on the true meaning of womanhood not as standing in opposite to the intended divine purpose for the two genders but perhaps as complementary entities.

## **Discussion of Findings**

This study explores the relationship between Christian values and masculinity among male teenagers in Nsukka, Nigeria. It suggests that Christian teachings can influence a more egalitarian understanding of masculinity, challenging traditional cultural norms. The research highlights the potential for Christian values to promote alternative forms of masculinity that prioritize equality, humility, and respect for women. Meanwhile, the insights from the study could contribute to discussions on gender equality, religion, and social change in Nigeria.

## **The way Forward**

Having underscored the point that alternative masculinity has a close knit with Christian values, the Church should whiff off any form of male superiority complex that subordinates women. The Church has a crucial role to play in promoting Christian values that challenge male superiority complex and emphasize equality between genders. This involves encouraging young male teens to emulate Jesus Christ, who embodied values like obedience, humility, and selflessness (Partridge, 2022). By holding Jesus up as a model of pure Christian living, the Church can help young men develop a more nuanced understanding of masculinity that is grounded in Christian principles.

Contrary to the view that Christian values are “feminine” and have led to the “feminization” of Christianity (Werner, 2011), these values actually promote respect, equality, and mutual dignity for both men and women. The Church should emphasize the importance of Christian values in shaping a more just and equitable society, where men and women can thrive together. To promote alternative masculinity, public discussions, media, and social platforms should encourage reflections on this emerging culture.

## **Conclusion**

This study explored how male teenagers in Nsukka negotiate the social construct of masculinity through the efficient impact of the values of the Christian Faith. The findings reveal that Christian values foster the understanding of masculinity from traditional cultural norms of domination to a more egalitarian perspective, to thereby, promoting equal gender roles by deconstructing social conceptualization of gender qualities and expectations. According to the participants, who acclaim that their individual lives have been transformed by the impact of the Christian values, they believe that alternative masculinity is an emerging culture that mediates between two extremes. Thus, alternative masculinity effectively deconstructs social expectations of men’s superiority over women. It aligns with Christian principles, modeled after Christ’s exemplary sense of humility and empathy.

Ultimately, this research will inform educational policy and decision-making processes aimed at promoting healthy and positive forms of masculinity in the region. Through effective implementation of gender and sex-education curricula in the subjects of the Christian Religious Studies, Civic Education and Social Studies, alternative masculinity will enhance the concept and praxis of gender roles in Nsukka.



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