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## Culture Dynamics in Men's Perception of Women in Anglophone Cameroon

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### **Abstract:**

*The article examines the dynamics of culture as they influence the way women are perceived by men in Anglophone Cameroon. In doing so, the authors analyze data from a sample of 270 men and 60 women in six communities in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon, the only two English-speaking regions of the country. A triangulated method of data collection was used (questionnaires, focus group discussions (FGD) and in-depth interviews (IDI). The results of the study show that culture has a considerable influence on the way men in Anglophone Cameroon perceive women. The article argues that culture does not only affect men's perception of women but it also impinges on women's socio-economic empowerment and constrains gender equality. Education and sensitization of both sexes from childhood on equal rights is recommended.*

**Keywords:** Culture, men, perception, women, Anglophone Cameroon

### **1. Introduction**

Culture has been a subject of discussion in the public domain on a global level for many years. All human groups have a culture, which varies from one group to another. The pioneer English Anthropologist Edward B. Tylor, in *Primitive Culture* (1871), defines culture as "a complex whole" which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Tylor terms culture a "complete whole" because it provides the multi-dimensional societal factors that are affected by inter and intra-relationships of man in the societal environment. He observes that culture provides people with an ethos which must be honoured in both thought and practice. According to him, ethos means a people's self-understanding and its self-presentation in the world through thought and practice. Tischler (2002) on his part defines culture as all that human beings learn to do, to use, to produce, to know and to believe as they grow to maturity and live out their lives in the societal groups to which they belong. He points out that culture is the general phenomenon that characterizes all human groups and is readily and easily transferred from one person to another and from one generation to the next. The history of culture is therefore the history of man and woman as a human being (ibid).

According to Nnadozie (2001), African cultures are unique and intrinsic, though with many underlying differences. They are also very rich. Five of the world's six major divisions of humanity can be found in Africa; namely, black African, white Caucasians (in South Africa), Arabs (in North Africa), Asians (in Madagascar, Khosians), the bushman of Southern Africa and the pigmies (in Central Africa). Nnadozie observes that most African communities are patriarchal and communal in worldview. Individualism, on the other hand, is negligible in Africa because people own their first loyalty to their extended family, village or clan. Gender roles are defined by culture and males have far more opportunities than females in most African settings (ibid).

As in most African countries, cultural values, both written and oral, inform daily existence among Anglophone Cameroonians, a people who view tradition as the bedrock of culture. Music, dance, folklore and expressive originality all mirror the comprehensive worldview of this segment of Cameroonian society. While the sources of cultural practices may be debatable, some scholars share the view that oral tradition originated from the gods and goddesses while others say they originated from old people and their experiences (Ojoade, 1988). To have a better perspective on how men perceive women in communities in Anglophone Cameroon, the culture must be taken into consideration.

As a concept, culture can be understood to mean the beliefs and customs of a people passed on, whether written or oral, from generation to generation (Kah, 2006). This could consist of folktales, legends, myths, arts and crafts, proverbs and songs among others. In Anglophone Cameroon, proverbs as expressive features carry didactic weight, especially when someone needs to be brought back on track. Cultural practices, proverbs especially, are often taken as gospel truth in Anglophone Cameroon. And quite often, they subjugate women. A proverb such as "At the centre of every woman is the core of a prostitute" epitomizes women as essentially negative beings with poor morals, whereas in real life this is not the case. Harmful views about women affect their psychology, but

women are reluctant to question them. According to Ojoade (1988), views such as the one expressed in the proverb above are distilled from experience and wisdom.

Given that gender is a social construct, the interplay between the cultural and the social is strong. Gannan & Pillai (2015) observe that culture is a fuzzy concept that interacts with political, social and economic forces. They also posit that most cultural views are based on stereotypes which they define as “a distorted view or mental picture of groups and their supposed characteristic on the basis of which one tends to evaluate individuals from each other”. In addition, they point out that stereotypes can be erroneous and can lead to unwarranted conclusions, especially if no exceptions are made.

Perception is the oldest field in philosophy. As such, philosophers have almost always based theories of knowledge on assumed perceptual certainty. Methods of studying perception range from essentially biological or physiological approaches, through the philosophy of mind to empiricist epistemology. For example, Merleau Ponty asserts that perception is the base of all science and knowledge (Gregory, 1980). William (2003) in *Understanding Media Theory* opines that when people come in contact with certain things, issues or persons, they form a certain view about these things or persons. He observes that peoples’ perception of human beings is based on the information which is gathered on contact and the experience of the perceiver. Thus, he argues that the experience of the perceiver helps in giving meaning and attributes and in creating impressions about others. Individuals perceive the world from their own vantage point and perception is influenced by things such as values, needs, goals, interests, beliefs, attitudes, expectations, wants, knowledge, feelings and education.

According to Panda (2009: 92), quoting Gautama, “perception is a cognition resulting from sense-object contact which is inexpressible by words, which is not erroneous; and it is determinate, that is, definite in character”. Bhatta on his part argues that perception is erroneous (ibid). Bhatta emphasizes that perception of a mirage, for example, is erroneous because what is presented to the consciousness does not correspond to reality later. Thus one thing is mistaken for the other. In addition, Bhatta contends that the common mistake people make about perception is that of stereotype. He argues that every individual is unique. Thus lumping people together leads to incorrect judgment. For instance, the view that a woman’s place is in the kitchen is a stereotypical perception because women can still carry out lots of activities outside the private sphere. He concludes by maintaining that there are two types of perception - the indeterminate (not definite in character) and the determinate (definite in character).

Peoples’ contact with women and the type of work they engage in are major predicators of the society’s perception of women. It is commonplace to hear or read references to women in negative terms. Descriptions of women as mothers, wives, emotional, weaker sex, inferior, dependent, care providers, envious, money minded, and unintelligent are commonplace. These critical views have direct implications on gender equality in particular and women’s socio-economic development in general.

Such negative perceptions of women by men are a cause for concern in the society, and understandably so, particularly amongst women who play crucial roles within the family and the society. The need to address the effect of culture on men’s perception of women has become more imperative now than ever before because of the vital role women play in the society and in development processes.

In the twenty-first century, the way male Anglophones perceive women continues to be informed by untested assumptions and stereotypes. The scientific study of the influence of culture on the way women are perceived by men in this part of Cameroon can provide empirical information which should enhance our understanding of how culture negatively affects men’s perception of women and hence constrains their socio-economic empowerment and the attainment of gender equality.

## 2. Global Perceptions of Women

Although studies of men’s perception of women are few, there has been an increasing interest in studies about men and gender equality since the first decade of the twenty-first century. This is because there is a realization amongst feminists, gender activists and other stakeholders that men and women must work in partnership in order to achieve gender equality and sustainable development. As custodians of culture, men’s cooperation becomes even more imperative.

Globally, women are often perceived as mothers, child bearers and care providers. The definition of women as ‘baby makers’ is almost universal (Bates et al, 1995: 20-21; Evans 2003; Atanga 2010). During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the common view of women was that they are home makers and child-bearers and do not possess the intelligence and strength to be able to participate in activities outside the home. Whether married or single, all Victorian women were expected to be weak and helpless, and fragile like delicate flowers, incapable of making decisions beyond selecting the menu and ensuring that their many children were taught moral values. A woman’s main preoccupation was to make the home a place of comfort for her husband and family from the stress of Industrial Britain (Weston Pauline, n.d.) Some scholars support the assertion that ‘Wife’ and ‘Mother’ are important archetypes of woman, and motherhood has been regarded as the ultimate source of power and fulfilment (Akujobi, (2011).

Akujobi (ibid) points out that motherhood is an experience that is shaped by social context and culture. She asserts that motherhood as an experience and as an institution has been defined differently by different writers. Mbiti, (1970: 144) underlines the concept of motherhood when he states that it is central to African philosophy. According to him, a barren woman is perceived as incomplete; she is what he calls the dead end of human life, not only at the genealogical level, but also for herself. Devault et al. (2001) on their part posit that because of women’s motherhood roles, women have sacrificed many aspects of their lives, accepting exclusion from various social spheres and taking a series of responsibilities on their children and husbands which should actually be shared with them and other institutions.

Liberal feminists have also exposed how the myth and mystique of motherhood keep women in their place - the home. They stress that the institution of motherhood has been used to exclude women from the public life. Betty Frieden, feminist author and activist, in her classic, *The Feminine Mystique*, examines how the use of negative stereotypes of women oppresses them. She asserts that American culture was based on old prejudices which were disguised in new pseudo- scientific dogmas (the feminine mystique). According to her, the feminine mystique defines woman only in sexual terms – as man’s wife, mother, love object, dishwasher and general server of physical needs, and never in human terms as a person herself (Frieden,1963). The assumption often made is that mothers contribute nothing to the market economy and as a result no economic recognition is given to such work, thus leaving women economically dependent on men or their husbands. Thus, Rich (1976) argues that motherhood denies women their potential as full human beings. She points out that institutionalised motherhood demands of women maternal instinct, selflessness, and relation to others, rather than intelligence, self-realization and the creation of self.

In many societies, men and women are socialized into different roles. According to Parson, (Parson & Bales, 1955), a contemporary nuclear family has a breadwinner, and a homemaker and their children. He posits that the nuclear family is efficient in that the breadwinner provides for the instrumental needs of the family unit, needs such as food and shelter, as well as other material needs, while the wife provides for the expressive needs of the family unit (affective and emotional needs as well as socialization). This view of the family is called the Breadwinner model. Parson claims that this gendered division of labour is essential for the harmonious functioning of society.

Gender roles can be seen as intrinsically linked to motherhood. In African cultures in particular, women are primarily responsible for domestic and child- rearing/ care activities as well as many other family matters. Some writers have termed these activities “support services” (see Garcia and De Oliveria, 2006). Cameroon is no exception to this global phenomenon. Since men in general are socialized into breadwinners and family heads, women are expected to still be mainly responsible for childcare and domestic work even when they hold heavy responsibilities in the formal work force. Husbands, employers and women themselves continue to view childcare as the woman’s rather than as the family’s responsibility thus allowing the man to give preference to his job over family responsibility (Lips 2004). This bias equally allows employers to define equality in men’s terms while not taking into account home responsibility which is left totally in women’s care.

Given women’s multiple roles, they are constantly juggling these roles and very often there is hardly a perfect balance hence their low performance in the labour market. This has led societies to view women abilities as being below men’s standard. Consequentially, women are perceived as being inferior to men, particularly with regards to intelligence. This view is global and pervasive and remains a colonial heritage with the arrival of colonizers in Africa.

Lorber (1993b: 170) opines that “the social order that elevates men over women is legitimated by women’s devotion to child care, since it takes them out of the running for top-level jobs and political positions and defuses their consciousness of oppression” Thus she argues that glorifying motherhood and defining it in ways that make many women feel guilty and weighed-down by it, benefits men who have the most power economically and politically. Assigning caretaking to women makes women economically dependent on men and is used to justify women’s lower status and pay at work. Robinson (1985) in ‘How to know when you are really feminine’ also maintains that women practice altruism. He believes that women were born to serve their husbands and children before thinking of themselves. According to him, this is made possible because of their procreative abilities of having a womb.

Women’s ability to multi-task has been recognized by many writers as women are globally perceived as being hard-working, enduring and industrious. According to Lip (2004), women globally, but particularly those in developing countries, generally get up early and go to bed late. Many authors (Moser 1994, Mosse 1993, and Taylor 1999), have underscored women’s triple roles in development processes. For example, Moser (1994) asserts that women carry out productive roles (as workers in the formal sector), biological reproductive roles (child bearing and nurturing) and social reproductive roles (participation in community and social activities). Taylor (1999: 18), while acknowledging this categorization of women’s role, argues that women perform multiple roles, which are too simplistically sheathed into Moser’s framework of triple roles. Women in many societies, particularly in developing countries, carry out economic activities such as farming, dairy production, poultry keeping and small-scale trading. Their contributions to these economic activities, though substantial, are often minimized and overlooked as emanating from their biology (Mosse, 1993). Thus, women’s productive work is often less visible and valued than men’s (Williams et al.1994).

Gender stereotyping is pervasive in many societies as most societies often ascribe roles and values as well as attitudes to men and women. In many African societies, young girls have been traditionally lured into marriage during their teenage years because of the general view that women are meant to get married as soon as they are of age. Thus young girls are sometimes given away into marriage at a very young age, sometimes to men many years older than them. Once married, culture mandates that they take care of their husbands and the entire household responsibilities of cooking, cleaning, washing of clothes, to mention a few. Bruce J, and Clark (2004) observe that these child brides often have little or no knowledge about the responsibilities of being a wife and no information about sex and child birth. They are expected to assume culturally enforced gender roles of mothering and nurturing. Such roles which are enforced by tradition have resulted in the discrimination, domination and exploitation of one sex (usually the male) over the other (the female).

Women in many cultures and communities are perceived to be more loving and more compassionate than men. Many people who share this view base their assumptions on women’s biology. They argue that women are by nature very loving and compassionate and any woman who deviates from this norm is viewed as non-conformist. Some researchers, however, maintain that the ability to show compassion can be learned. For example, current research carried out by the University of Wisconsin, Madison, reveals that positive

emotions such as loving kindness and compassion can be learned. According to these researchers, women are socialized to show compassion.

### 3. The Study

The primary data for this paper was collected during a study carried out in selected communities in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon in 2014. These two regions make up what this paper refers to as “Anglophone Cameroon”. They are so called because out of the ten regions in Cameroon, they are the two regions with a common British colonial experience and an Anglo-Saxon culture. English is the dominant official language, and Pidgin English the lingua franca.

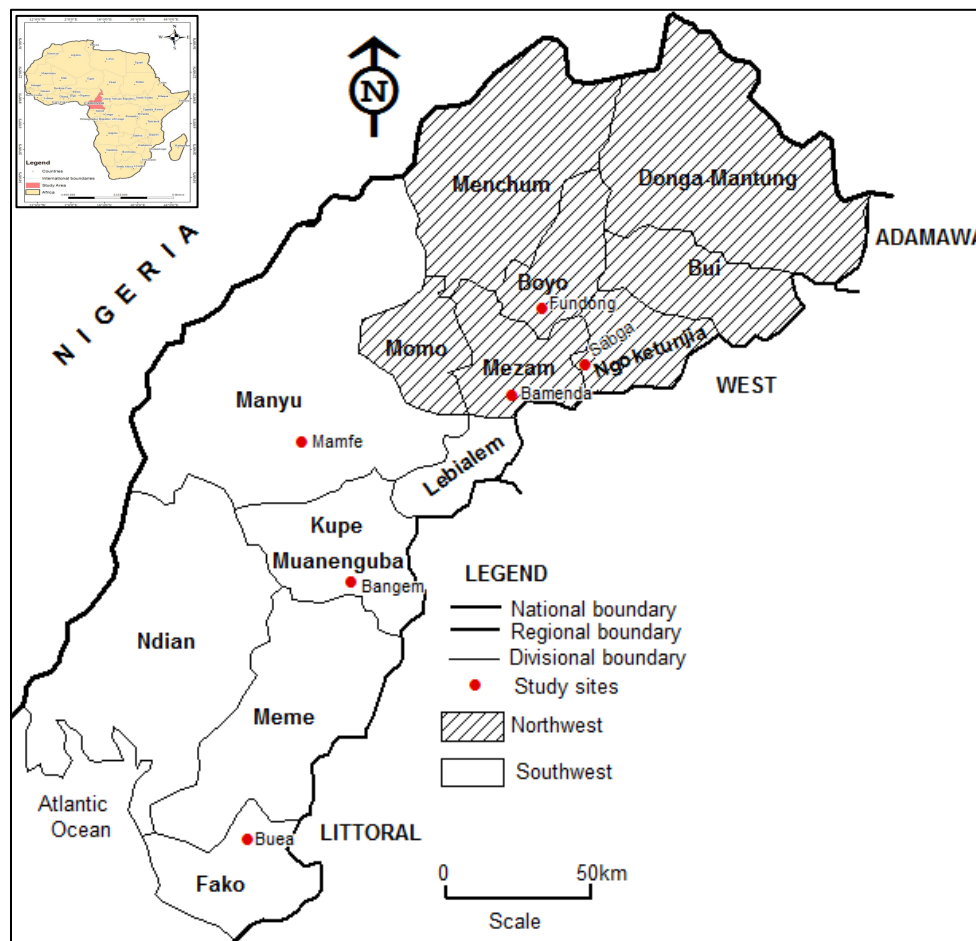


Figure 2: Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon illustrating study sites  
Source: Adapted from Atlas Jeune Afrique, 2005; reproduced by L.F. Fombe, Dept. of Geography, University of Buea.

Both regions have six divisions each; namely, Mezam, Momo, Menchum, Bui, Donga- Mantaung and Ngoketunja in the North - West Region and Meme, Fako, Ndian, Lebialem, Manyu and Kupe-Muanenguba in the South - West Region. According to the 2005 Official Census results, (BUCREP, 2010), the South West Region has a population of 1,316,079 while that of the North West region is 1,804,700 giving a total of 3,189,000. This makes up the population of Anglophone Cameroon.

This study surveyed 270 men and 60 women given that the target gender for the study is men. The men and women selected were considered representative of a cross section of the society. Respondents were aged between 25 and 60+ years. The selection of this age bracket is based on the fact that Cameroonian men’s average “grown –up” age is 25.2 years and the upper limit of the potentially active population is 60 years (MINEFI- DSCN, 1999). A total of 6 communities within the two Anglophone regions were studied. The communities were purposefully selected from three divisions in each region. The selection of the communities was guided by composition and scope – urban, semi-urban and rural with the intention of producing a sample that is inclusive of all categories of communities.

Convenience sampling, a form of non-random sampling, was used to select respondents. According to Sarantakos (1998), convenience sampling technique is one in which all units appropriate for study with which the researcher comes into contact during a certain period of time and at a given place are considered. Purposive sampling was used to readjust the sample so as to make visible certain socio-demographic characteristics, such as age, linguistic background, occupation, and religion, to mention a few.

The study areas were Buea, a cosmopolitan town in Fako Division, Mamfe, a semi-urban town in Manyu Division, and Bangem, a rural village in Kupe Muanenguba Division. These are towns and villages in the South West Region. Towns from the North-West region included Bamenda, a cosmopolitan town in Mezam Division, Fundong, a semi-urban town in Boyo Division, and Sabga, a rural village in Mezam Division. The selection of Buea and Bamenda was based on their strategic positions as the headquarters of the South West and North West regions respectively. Mamfe was equally chosen based on its strategic location with roads leading to and coming from Kumba, Nigeria and Bamenda, and its high population of immigrants. Fundong on the other hand is not only a subdivision like Mamfe but it is unique because of its matrilineal culture. Similarly, the authors' choice of Sabga was based on her interest in studying the distinctive culture of the Mbororos who are predominantly Muslims. Bangem was chosen on the other hand, because of its rural nature and the predominance of agricultural activities. The selection of the respondents for the study was based on the criteria that they should be indigenes of the town or village, or long-term residents of the community being researched.

#### 4. Findings and Discussion

##### 4.1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

A total sample of 330 respondents were interviewed, 270 men and 60 women. The majority of the respondents, 32.4 percent, were between the age range 31- 40; 21.5 percent in the age group of 25- 30 years while the age range 41- 50 years made up 20 percent of the interviewees. 12.4 percent were within the age bracket of 51 – 60 years while respondents over 60 years were 13.6 percent. The majority of the respondents were married, with 71.1 percent of them males and 58.3 percent females, giving a total of 227 married respondents. (See Table 1 below). That the majority of the respondents in the sample are married is important because their views on how marriage perpetuates traditional norms that subvert women's socio-economic development is of significance.

Sex	Marital status					Total
	Married	Co-habitation	Single	Divorced	Widowed	
Male	71.1%	5.9%	20.0%	1.5%	1.5%	100.0%
Female	58.3%	0.0%	20.0%	3.3%	18.3%	100.0%
Total	68.8%	4.8%	20.0%	1.8%	4.5%	100.0%

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by marital status and by sex

Source: Generated from field data

The second highest category was that of single males and females, 20 percent each. 5.9 percent male respondents cohabitated and 1.5 percent were divorced. No female respondent cohabitated and only 3.3 percent female respondents were divorced. Although the target population was the Anglophone population, non-Anglophones from other regions or tribes who had lived in the Anglophone Regions for long were included in the study. 2.4 percent of such respondents came from the West Region, 0.3 percent, from the Centre Region, 0.9 percent from the Littoral, 0.9 percent from the Adamaoua, and 0.3 percent from the Far North. Anglophones, that is, indigenes of North West and South West Regions, constituted 95.1 percent of the respondents. To ensure maximum diversity, 69 tribes were involved. 34.8 percent of the respondents were sampled from rural, 35.5 percent from semi-urban, and 29.7 percent from urban settings. Participants were equally diversified in their occupation. Table 2 below shows that semi-skilled workers (traders, welders, carpenters, electricians, textile designers, butchers, bakers, security officers, gardeners, waiters, care workers, etc.) comprised the majority, 41.5percent, followed by skilled workers, (managers, administrators, teachers, engineers, researchers, architects, scientists, lecturers, etc.) 24.2 percent, farmers 22.1 percent, students, 6.1percent and applicants 3.9 percent.

Sex	Occupation						N
	Farmer	Housewife	Skilled worker	Semi-skilled worker	Student	Applicant	
Male	21.9%	0%	23.3%	44.4%	5.9%	4.8%	100 %
Female	23.3%	11.7%	30.0%	28.3%	6.7%	0%	100 %
Total	22.1%	2.1%	24.2%	41.5%	6.1%	3.9%	100%

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by occupation and by sex

Source: Generated from Field Data

The data also show that housewives comprised 11.7 percent of the respondents. There were more female farmers, 23.3 percent, than male farmers, 21.9 percent. Fewer females than males were skilled workers. However, the majority of the female skilled workers were teachers, clerks or secretaries while men were administrators, lecturers, statisticians, land surveyors, veterinarians, bailiffs, entrepreneurs or scientists. More males were semi-skilled workers.

##### 4.2. Effect of Cultural Beliefs

The study focuses on cultural practices and how they influence men's perception of women in Anglophone Cameroon. Data from the field study validate the fact that parents, friends and elderly persons play a significant role in propagating cultural practices through oral transmission of stereotypical views about women. Approximately eighty-nine percent of the respondents attested to the fact that they had grown up to know that women were naturally inferior to men, that men were traditionally perceived as heads of families,

women as inferior human beings whose only role was to care for the home and the family. They were also told that women are untrustworthy and devilish and were barred from seeing certain “jujus” (male cultural masquerades), eating gizzards and certain leaves, and in the case of Muslims, worshipping together with men or playing leadership roles of any sort, to mention only a few (see Table 5 below). These stereotypes were verified across all the variables, and especially so in villages.

Cultural Practices	%
Exclusively male or female structures.	6.1%
Women as inferior to men; men as family heads	27.5%
Women as inferior human beings	22.4%
Women as companions to men	9.2%
Cultural segregation against women	21.4%
Cultural discrimination against men	0.3%
Established gender role difference	3.4%
Women as self-centered beings	0.3%
Women, maternal affection and childcare	3.1%
Marriage as women's main goal	3.1%
Women as untrustworthy	8.8%
Woman as unfit to receive a dowry paid on her child or to marry a man	1.4%
Women and farm work	1.4%
Women and the true paternity of the child	1.4%
Pregnant women and restriction from certain chores and/or activities	4.7%
Women and domestic chores	20.3%
Women contribute to economic development and society welfare	2.4%
Women unfit to inherit husband's property	2.4%
Women unfit to own land	1.4%
Women as indispensable partners to men	3.4%
Women and respect for men, and submissiveness	5.1%
Women as devilish	7.1%
Women as delicate and difficult to manage.	5.8%
Women as dependent on husbands and men	2.0%
Women who are menstruating should not go near their husbands	0.3%
Women are subjected to practice of widowhood	1.0%
Monogamy	0.3%
Women are executors; they only apply decisions taken	1.0%
In some cultures, the last son is supposed to marry only within the tribe	0.3%
Women have no tribe or country when they are unmarried	1.0%
Women are perceived as showing solidarity among them	0.3%
Lack of solidarity among women	0.3%
Women are perceived as psychologically and emotionally weak	3.1%
Women are perceived physically as the weaker sex	2.7%
Matrilineal society	0.3%
Women talk too much	1.0%
Women are perceived as superior to men	2.4%
The importance of education for women	0.3%
Care for pregnant women	0.7%
Don't know	1.7%
Women are perceived as necessary ills	0.7%
Women are perceived as good managers	0.3%
Women are perceived as money-minded	0.7%
Women should be considered on their intrinsic value	0.7%
Wife is chosen by parents in Bamileke culture	0.3%
Investment on women and education is considered a waste	3.7%
Women are ambitious, want to compete with men	0.3%
Women are sex tools	0.3%
Roles of men and women are different	0.3%
Patrilineal system because women and children belong to husband's family	0.7%
Early marriage	0.3%
Married women are restricted to the home	2.7%
A married woman should be faithful	1.0%
A married man should be faithful	1.4%
Women perceived as goods for sale	0.3%
Precautions should be taken before marriage	1.0%
The importance of parental/ spousal responsibility	0.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>89.4%</b>

*Table 3: Acquired cultural practices.*

*Valid N=295*

*Source: Generated from field data*

The majority of the respondents, 89.4 percent, had been told something about women based on culture. Most of the respondents stated that such orally transmitted views of women have significantly influenced their perception of the sex.

Mbunwe-Samba (1989: 91) cited in Ntungia et al (2004) asserts that proverbs are the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of the elders and are told with the intention of introducing the young generation to the history, customs, tradition and even the religion of the tribe. Thus proverbs are the distilled wisdom of past generations and the authentic voice of history.

A Cameroonian proverb such as “At the centre of every woman is the core of a prostitute” casts the woman in an essentially negative light; and yet quite a few respondents stated that women have higher moral standards than men. Negative statements about women affect their psychology. But they cannot question such proverbs because of cultural brain- washing. Gender biased proverbs retard women’s social development skills in particular and human development in general because they erode the self- esteem of the maligned sex and affects their ability to stand up for their needs. It also numbs their motivation to take decisions in the public sphere. Such drawbacks do not only hinder the attainment of gender equality but equally impact on development processes.

#### 4.3. Survey of Culture Dynamics and Men’s Perception of Women

Evidence from the field indicates that culture is an underlying factor to the way men in Anglophone Cameroon perceive women. Forty-three percent of the respondents confirmed this view as shown in Figure 2 below. Fifteen percent said socialization has also had an effect on the way men view women while 14 percent stated that religion and gender relations respectively have some influence on men’s view of women. Eleven percent stated that culture, gender relations, socialization and religion all have in different ways influenced the way women are perceived by men. Only 3 percent of the respondents mentioned other factors.

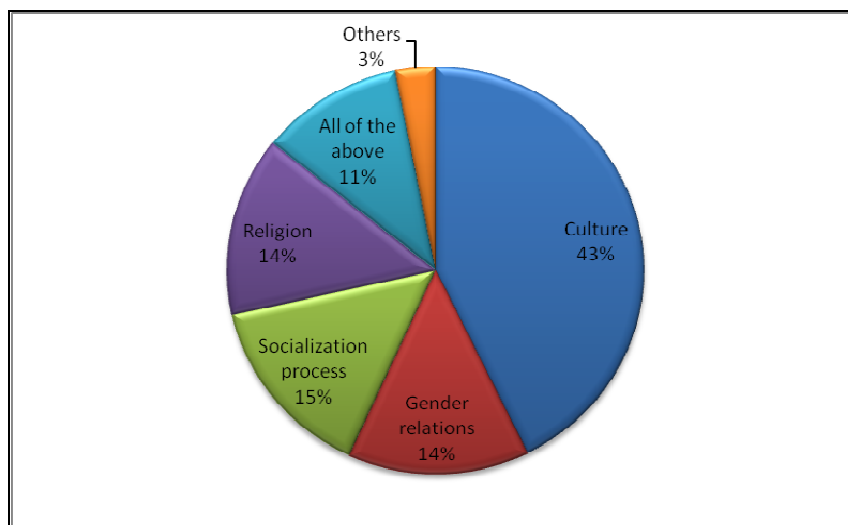


Figure 3: Culture as a major underlying factor to the way men perceive women in Anglophone Cameroon  
Source: Generated from field data

The data reveal that the cultures of most communities in Anglophone Cameroon do not allow women freedom of action or possession, particularly of land. Women’s lack of access to and control over land is a common discriminatory practice that was stated by respondents from all the six communities studied. A significant number of respondents stated that “Women work and buy land but they cannot inherit it”. Ownership rights to land in this context refers to the legal rights for a woman to acquire, own, sell and transfer land.

Fonjong (2011) observes that women in Anglophone Cameroon do not have adequate access to land, neither do they contribute in making major decisions on its allocation and use. According to him, women at best can have usufruct rights which depend on the nature of their relationship with male relatives such as husbands, fathers or brothers or any other male relative. Thus, Ngwafor (1993) argues that a woman tends to suffer since she is said to be her father’s property and ownership is transferred to her husband upon marriage, and subsequently to her son or brother-in-law upon the death of her husband (see also Ngassa, 2012). A woman is therefore discriminated against and subordinated when it comes to inheriting her father’s property for fear that the property will be passed on to her husband to the detriment of her own family. This fact was underscored during the researchers’ interview with the Fon of Nkwen, Momo Division in the North West Region, His Royal Highness, Fon Azefer II. Given that land in Africa in general, but particularly in Anglophone Cameroon, is considered a very valuable productive asset, the cultural barring of women from owning land impinges on their socio-economic empowerment especially as they make up the majority of farmers in Cameroon.

Discussants during the focus group discussions also validated the fact that in many communities, women cannot own family land. Land ownership and control is always through a male lineage, thus confirming Ngassa’s (2012) observation that customary law in Anglophone Cameroon is basically patriarchal and patrilineal except in rare cases where matrilineal succession exists, for example in Fundong, Boyo Division. Even in matrilineal societies like Fundong, it is the maternal nephew who inherits the husband’s property, not the maternal niece. In the case of Kom tradition, respondents explained that the reason behind the matrilineal lineage is based on the

Kom traditional belief that it is only a woman who knows the true father of a child as illuminated in the following responses, “A woman is the only one who knows who is responsible for her pregnancy”; and “The true biological father of a child is only rightly known by the mother”. Respondents claimed that if a sister’s son inherits the property the blood lineage is assured.

Under the customary law system in Anglophone Cameroon, women cannot own property because they are traditionally considered as property themselves and property cannot own property (Ngwafor, 1993). This view was validated in many communities studied as elucidated in the following responses: “Women are like dogs, bought from the market and are properties of the men”; “Men when they pay dowry, they see women as articles of trade, hence daughters are valued as future commodities”; “Because women don’t have village, even family properties and bride price is collected by men; this has made men to see a woman as property and to a certain level they are considered asset to be sold”.

Results from the study reveal that socio-cultural practices in Anglophone Cameroon have been out rightly in favour of men. Fewer women compared to men own land because of socio-economic and cultural constraints. Subordination of women within marriage and inadequate economic power to purchase land at market prices prevent them from acquiring and developing assets that can aid households break away from poverty and inequality traps. These constraints relegate women to secondary positions in society.

Data analyzed also indicate that women do not receive bride price in Anglophone Cameroon. A significant number of respondents stated that according to culture, women cannot receive bride price. Also called bride wealth, bride price is a customary gift made before, during and after marriage by the husband and kin to the wife and her kin (Kottak, 1991; Ngassa, 2012; Ashraf 2014), which makes the children born to the woman full members of her husband’s decent group (ibid). Bride wealth makes the girl proud and is the sole factor that gives validity to a customary marriage irrespective of the dowry paid. It acts as a form of assurance that the girl will be well treated, barring which she has the right to return to her father’s house and the bride price returned to her husband’s family. Given the importance of bride price as explained above, it is not a surprise that cultural practices exclude women from taking part in receiving the bride price: they are perceived traditionally as inferior and powerless in relation to men, unfit to be heads of the family. As the popular saying goes, “Money is power”. If women are allowed to take bride price they will have some social and economic power and therefore be at leverage with men. To forestall such a likelihood, men do all they can to relegate women to the background each time a cultural or community activity concerning money or any form of cash payments is on.

Field results equally disclose that women are not allowed to enter “juju” (male cultural masquerade) houses or to view certain “jujus” and if they go against these prescriptions the consequences can be drastic. Some respondents from Fundong, Kom tribe pointed out that there are some traditional places from which women are barred and there are also some “jujus” that women are not supposed to see. A few respondents from Sabga, Fikem Oku tribe also said, “There is ‘Juju’ that if the woman sees she will become mad” Consequently, any woman who dares to approach such “juju” houses meets men’s serious rebuke, even verbal abuses. Such behaviour affects women’s self - worthiness and creates a certain degree of inferiority in women while legalizing male superiority and power.

Similarly, women are not allowed to perform certain traditional rites considered prerogatives of men and they cannot belong to certain exclusively male traditional societies. For example, respondents from Fundong, Kom tribe said, “Women are not allowed to enroll in Ngumba or Kwifon societies.” Those from the Bakossi tribe said “There are some “no go” areas for women such as, the secret society of the Bakossi where strong decisions are taken for the community.” Respondents from Buea, of the Bakweri tribe, likewise stated that “Women do not belong to traditional societies.” With regards to Manyu, a good number of respondents stated that “The woman cannot belong to the “Ekpe” society thus giving the man an upper hand.” During the focus group discussions in Mamfe participants also stated that women do not participate in the opening of caskets whenever a corpse is brought into the town from another city or town. This has been a long-standing custom in the Manyu culture. They also said a woman is not allowed to sit close to the chief during traditional council sessions. The seat close to the chief’s is usually reserved for a male member of the council. Such discriminatory practices have their roots in culture as women are traditionally viewed as inferior to men. For instance, a substantive proportion, 31.6 percent, of respondents stated that women are perceived as inferior to men and have to respect them because men are leaders while women are helpers.

Women in Anglophone Cameroon also face some discrimination in terms of what they can eat or not eat. A good number of respondents from the communities studied stated that culturally men are allowed certain pleasures like eating the gizzard of a chicken whereas woman is not. It is noteworthy that in most cultures in Cameroon in general and Anglophone Cameroon in particular, the gizzard is regarded as the best part of a chicken; it is referred to as the “the complete chicken”; as such, it is reserved for the father or the oldest male in the family. Although the gizzard is not the best or even a healthy part of the chicken, and women do not lose anything nutritive by not eating it, they should nonetheless be given the freedom to choose to eat or not to eat it. The fact that they are denied the freedom to make such choices is a form of oppression and an infringement on their human rights. Such discriminatory practices subjugate women and render them powerless in the face of culture.

Another cultural practice which field data indicate suppresses women is the wearing of the veil by married women in the Muslim religion. The following response exemplifies this point, “In our culture a married woman veils herself while the unmarried ones do not but for the men there is nothing to differentiate the married from the unmarried.” This view was expressed mainly by Muslim respondents. The interplay of culture and religion makes it difficult to enforce women’s rights in most Muslim communities. What is of interest is that women in Anglophone Cameroon feel discriminated against, but they are unable to contest cultural practices that subdue them because they have not been empowered socio- economically to question their subjugated position. Other respondents said that in the Muslim tradition women walk behind their husband and not vice versa. “When a man and a woman are moving, the woman should be behind and not in front.” According to field findings, Muslim women or wives are also not permitted by tradition to kill a cow or fowl; they cannot lead a prayer session in the Mosque and they do not have the right to visit the Lamido, an Islamic leader.



Women are excluded from participation in, or contact with religious or secular compartments of society believed to be most powerful. Respondents stated that women are not allowed to be a chief or a member of the traditional council. Many women in Anglophone Cameroon have reluctantly accepted such cultural limitations on their status because fighting tradition seems unfruitful and is usually considered a rebellion or taboo in some cultures.

The practice of Widowhood rites is another reprehensible custom that is not only detrimental to women's social status but also impinges on their human rights. Field studies reveal that the widowhood rite is a pervasive cultural practice that discriminates against women and suppresses them. A good number of respondents stated that when a husband dies, men and women oblige the widow to cut her hair, put on sackcloth, pay for cleansing after staying one week without taking a bath, go for nights without sleep, and lie on bare floor. At the same time widowers walk about freely indistinguishable from other men, as illustrated in the following statements: "When your husband dies, men and other women will tell you to wear sack dresses and then stay for one week without bathing"; and "Women sleep naked in case of death of their spouse while men do not.", Sometimes the widow is even accused of killing her husband. She is also expected to wear "sackcloth", a mourning attire, usually black or white, for a period of one year. Among the Bakweri and the Douala, it is black and blue.

The period of widowhood is usually a period of grief, confusion, emotional disturbance, stress and fear, especially in cultures where discrimination against women is resilient. No such tribulations are imposed on widowers. Paradoxically, it is women who often perpetuate the practice of widowhood rites, inflicting hardship on other women in an effort to maintain the culture of the people. This finding validates Awa's (2000: 110) observation that female oppression is a painful reality in Anglophone Cameroon where the issue is complicated by the fact that such practices are sanctioned by culture. The findings authenticate Edoho and Choughurg's (2001) argument that majority of the people in Africa share certain thoughts and cultural values which tend to influence the way they behave. The breadwinner model posits that men are breadwinners of the family. Field results of this study indicate that men are not always the breadwinners of the family in present-day Anglophone Cameroon. The majority of respondents (59.5 percent) disagree with the view that men in Anglophone Cameroon in the twenty-first century are the sole breadwinners of the family. Many of these respondents argue that both men and women provide for the household.

A sizable percentage of the respondents (47.9 percent) think that men are breadwinners of the family. They argue that men are established family heads and are obliged to provide for the family while 21.6% percent claim that it is a natural, even ascribed role and responsibility for men to provide for the family. Only a small percentage of respondents (2.7 percent) think that men are family heads because they are naturally stronger and more than women (see table 4 below).

<b>Men are those who provide for their families and they are the bread winners of the family</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Agree</b>	
It established that men are family heads and deliberately provide for the family	23.6%
It is a natural /ascribed role/responsibility for men	21.6%
From a natural perspective, men are strong and have the power. This is also religiously and culturally acknowledged.	2.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>47.9%</b>
<b>Disagree</b>	
Both men and women provide for the house	49.3%
Single women or widows provide for themselves	.7%
Some men are irresponsible and the woman becomes the breadwinner	4.1%
It depends on who works. The income generator is the breadwinner; not necessarily the man	4.7%
Gender roles are changing with time	.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>59.5%</b>

*Table 4: Distribution of responses according to men's perceived role as bread winners of the family*

*N=148*

*Source: Generated from field data: 2013*

Some of the respondents who agree with the view that men are breadwinners of the family argue that religion and culture endorse the idea of the man as the breadwinner of the family. Out of the 59.5 percent of the respondents who disagreed with the view, 4.1percent claimed that some men are irresponsible and that in such cases women have taken over the role of breadwinner while 4.7 percent argued that it depends on who works, that the partner who earns an income is the bread winner and that partner must not necessarily be the man. This finding debunks the man breadwinner model that has prevailed since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Unfortunately, most governments, including the Cameroon government, still adhere to the male breadwinner model and consequently provide social security benefits mainly through a male partner/husband.

Evidence from Cameroon, particularly Anglophone Cameroon, discloses that men have contributed to the way women are perceived in the society. Respondents stated that men have always occupied leadership positions and have been major decision-makers in the family and the community and have tended to relegate the women to a secondary position. Respondents blame male domination of women on culture which has vested so much power in men, to the detriment of women. Most of the interviewees said men's chauvinistic tendencies would not allow women to be at the same level with them. The findings equally reveal that marital status significantly influences the way men perceive women and that more married men perceive their wives as inferior, than men who are co-habiting or single. This finding confirms the radical feminists' view that it is men's domination in heterosexual marriages that has

led to the existing gender relations between the sexes (see, for example, Millet, 1968). This finding is of immense importance because it underscores the need to work in partnership with men in order to attain gender equality.

## 5. Conclusion

This study sought to determine whether culture is an underlying factor in the way men in Anglophone Cameroon perceive women. The findings signify that the majority of male Anglophone Cameroonians have at some point in their lives been told certain things about women from a cultural perspective and these views have influenced their perception of women.

Field results equally reveal that culture has a significant influence on the way men in Anglophone Cameroon perceive women. The different forms of traditional practices like myths, dances and proverbs among others which are expressions of the people's belief mirror the Anglophone Cameroon worldview. Proverbs are imbued with ideas that reflect the people's collective minds and ideas and reflect their fundamental options in life. Cultural practices seem to have accentuated the relegation of women to insignificance among Anglophone Cameroonians and thus hampered their empowerment. Such practices, particularly the oral tradition, have not only projected the woman's marginalization but have also led to acute dependence of the woman on the man. Culture restricts women's access to and control over productive resources and in various ways subjugates them, thus acting as a constraint to their socio-economic empowerment. In order to attain the goal of gender equality and inclusive development, culture dynamics need to be addressed.

Cultural and traditional knowledge building can be compared with the story of "*The Emperor's New Clothes*". This story is a reminder that collective delusions or stereotypes can be undone only by introducing fresh perspectives. For this transformation to take place and the new order to be established, however, there need to be major reforms and sensitization at all levels of society. Thus based on field results, the Cameroon government should carry out more public education and sensitization on equal rights, (from pre-primary right to university education), educate men on ethical behavior so that they can have more respect and consideration for women, and provide better educational opportunities for women so that they are empowered and enabled to collaborate effectively with men and participate efficiently towards the development of the community. On the part of traditional rulers, they should make greater commitment towards the improvement of those aspects of culture that hinder women's attainment of socio-economic empowerment. For example, they should do away with customary laws which prevent women from inheriting and owning property, particularly land, and taking part in traditional leadership positions; and should strive for a balance in gender roles. Men should share in carrying out gender roles and not leave them entirely to women. After all, these roles are called "gender roles" and not "women roles". Traditional rulers should also enforce respect of the principle of gender equality and equity.

Civil society, on their part, should help carry out sensitization campaigns to facilitate change of attitude and perception. With the increasing responsibilities assumed by women as a result of their engagement in work in both the private and public sectors, society stands to gain if women are integrated into the mainstream of development and allowed to work together with men as partners in development. Many respondents used a common Cameroonian proverb, "One hand cannot tie a bundle", to express the need for partnership. Development that is sustainable can be achieved in Anglophone Cameroon only if men work in partnership with women to eliminate gender inequality. Given that men are the custodians of culture; the attainment of gender equality will remain a dream without their co-operation. All said and done, gender inequality impedes the development of many communities, if not of all.

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