

Review

African Marriage Gender Mental Model Theory (AMGMMT)

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Abstract

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This essay attempts to explain an African Marriage Gender Mental Model Theory. The essay strives to explain why most women are in the second class economically at family level. The main argument of the theory is that women are in the second class economically because of the mental models of both sexes (men and women), which always place a woman at inferior and a man at superior position economically at family level. And that in case a woman holds a superior position economically she is likely to feel uncomfortable, not proud and unhappy for living with a man who is economically inferior, the contrary is therefore true. However, there are some other factors that may influence the mental model thus resulting in “queer” marriage bonds.

Keywords: African Marriage, Gender, Men, Mental Model Theory, Spouse, Women

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is an institution that sounds to be the most familiar to all of us. This is because it is marriage that forms a family and most families raise individuals to their maturity. Therefore for most of us we are familiar with marriage; however, as it is, it has always been the case, that a man has been perceived as controlling and dominating a woman in all spheres of life if not in most of them (spheres). For a long time, observations and investigations have been made and thus enabling the author to develop this theory that explains the spouses relationship in terms of their economic power and its (relationship) nature. The theory on African Marriage and their Gender Mental Model attempts to extrapolate the values of both sex that dominate and determine their selection of spouses. The values from both sexes are pinpointed as determinants of economic imbalance observed in most families today in Africa, particularly, if focus is on economic status among couples. To do away this biased selection of spouses, which always culminates in “seemingly” economic imbalance among couples we need to reconstruct the set of values of both sexes and create new values that promotes unbiased

selection of a spouse. Biased selection of a spouse means selecting a spouse who is either economically superior (mostly practiced by women) and/or selecting a spouse who is economically inferior (mostly practiced by men). The theory is well explained in the next sections of this essay.

AMGMMT Theory

A woman's set of values inculcated to her from childhood by a family and other society segments, namely peer (social) groups and what have you make what she is, (traits). An African woman feels proud, comfortable and happy (satisfied) if she is under the control of a man who is rich and kind. This is to say being under the control of a man who is wealthier than her self and who can give her financial support whenever needed (desire for economic security sheltered by a man). In contrast, a man has a set of values which inform him as provider, protector and a leader of a woman, similarly the values are family grown and other society segments (as noted earlier), which in

fact are not immune from family influence. Therefore a man feels proud, comfortable and happy (satisfied) if he possesses a woman of his choice who is subordinate financially. That is to say he is economically stronger than his woman this gives him a credit because he fits into a woman's shoes and those of his own. These values result in unequal power relations between couples or spouses, also, they determine the way a woman or a man selects a spouse. A woman is likely to choose a man to be her spouse who is more financially stable than she is in the mean time a man is likely to choose a woman who is financially inferior to that of his. In this sense, a woman is naturally placed in the second class at family level in most African societies and thus the contrary is true. Though the challenge of the mental model of both sexes is that the economic status of an individual is not likely to remain the same through life time, which culminates in marital problems, in particular, when either a woman gets stronger economically or when a man gets weaker economically. Indeed, a woman who is economically powerful is likely to search for a man who is more powerful economically than she is or the man must have an added advantage such as being at spotlight in something such as sports, music, and politics to mention just a few. This tendency dearly places the woman at the inferior position socio-economically. Thus addressing this 'problem' policies to restructure the values need to be developed in African societies to get rid of the 'naturally' fallacious selection of spouses because it always puts a woman at inferior position economically and/or otherwise.

As it is, this theory shows a general blueprint of the mind of a man and a woman which is in turn a main determinant of the kind of a spouse one selects. This selection is based on the mental model of the concerned parties, a woman and a man. The main question one may raise is why this mental model is ubiquitous in Africa? Indeed, as noted earlier, that a family is the main influencing factor. Here, I mean a mother and a father have a great influence to their daughters and sons in shaping their thinking and perceptions in terms of economical marital relationship. It is speculated that the way a father and a mother relate in their marital life affects their children in their marital relationship for life. This is because there are no certified institutions which provide formal training on how couples should relate, except the family, which it does it through modeling and the children learn it through observing. For instance, if children learn that in the home a father is the one who provides for the family through life time, the likelihood is that the children will simply take it deep in their genes that a father is a provider for his family. Thus males and females alike will take a man as a provider, and therefore, for him to be a provider he must be economically strong through hard work, investing and what have you. These will "naturally" be the traits of a man. In the meantime, if a mother always asks for her

husband to provide for her and the children equally the children learn that a woman is someone there to receive from her husband. Therefore, a girl child during adulthood is expected to be a receiver, less enterprising, less investing, less responsible in providing for the family, choosing a man who is more powerful economically than she is to be her spouse, the list may continue for some time. This gender propensity has drastic unpopular impact to the family particularly when a man dies or when he fails to provide for his family because of economic upheavals. If a man experiences economic upheavals, a woman feels that her man is no more a man; she feels that he is no more loveable; she feels that she has married an inferior man, and above all she feels that she made a wrong choice. These are possible impacts of the marriage mental model in the context of Africa. Indeed, the contrary is true.

Given that there are no certified formal institutions on marriage. That is to say institutions which train people and confer certificates, diplomas and degrees in marriage; then the family remains to be the responsible institution for the values that shape the thinking of subjects in terms of the choice of a spouse. While the family is a suspect number one in inculcating the values, it is also, speculated that there are some other influencing factors that can cement or erode the aforesaid gender mental model. These factors may include but may not be limited to: personal psychological drives, societal demands and expectations, personal pride, religion, formal education and what have you. These influencing factors are briefly described under:

Personal psychological drive

With regard to this, you may find that some individuals do not seem to adequately fit in the theory because they are may be rich women but they have married men who are poorer than them (women). This can be it is because they have not been able to find a man of their dream. That is to say most of relationships they have attempted with the men they thought were right choices on economic basis failed. Thus they got frustrated and they choose to marry any man regardless of economic status of a respective man. But if you ask them they are not likely to accept this. In any event, some women would like to put into control the husbands (desire for power); such women are likely to choose a man who is economically weak to control him. These are some of reasons that can make a woman marry an inferior man economically. The inferior man economically here means a man who is economically weaker (gains lower income) than a target woman or a man with lower education than the target woman.

Societal demands and expectations

This refers to what is expected of someone from society

with regards to something, or society influencing someone to behave in a certain way in a particular context. Society here means people who know and surround a particular individual. For instance, it is not likely that society will expect the bridegroom and the bride to wear torn clothes, walking in bare feet, going on foot to church or mosque on a wedding day. Most people would expect them to look different on the wedding day. These societal values may also have influence in choosing a spouse. That is to say society has set standards or has at least some classifications of individuals; it is from these set standards to each individual will make society to intervene when a certain individual wants to behave contrary to societal demands or expectations. The individual complies with societal interests because she/he wants to continue to be part of society (want for acceptance). For example, it would sound queer for a woman with doctorate to marry a man who is a class seven leaver (as his highest level of education). If it happens, a woman of such caliber intends to marry a class seven leaver society is likely to intervene to influence a woman not to marry such a man. This means that there are fewer women with personal positions who would like to marry any man regardless of his education level or economic status, but their positions might be frustrated by society. In the same line of thinking, a man who aspires to marry a woman who is a professor in a certain discipline while himself never went to school society is likely to intervene and to humbly request him to never marry such a woman.

Personal pride

The choice of a spouse may also be influenced by desire for attention from people. This may be the case when a woman decides to marry a man because he is of great renown in whatever sphere of life. This means a woman who marries such a man whether rich or poor she needs pride. Similarly, some men would marry a woman who is more educated or richer than themselves for personal pride (for them it is a great achievement). Therefore some marriages are not based on economic reasons, but other factors, namely personal pride.

Religion

Religion in this essay means the way one believes and worships a super-natural being. There are various systems of beliefs and worship in the world. Some of the systems are: the systems which capitalise to one super-natural being; the systems which capitalise to multiple super-natural beings. This essay will cite one system for clarification purposes on the role of religion in influencing the selection of spouse. For example, some individuals are very religious and their religion (Christianity), for

instance, emphasises on egalitarianism. People who have well internalized the principles of egalitarianism are likely to marry any one regardless of his/her status. For instance, a woman who has internalized the principles of egalitarianism from her religion is likely to marry any man without considering economic status or the popularity of a man in society. Egalitarianism means a tendency of believing that all mankind have equal rights. In a similar vein, a man who is an egalitarian is likely to marry any woman regardless of her wealth or poverty. With these few clear examples; one can clearly see that religion may influence to some extent the choice of a spouse, and for that matter the marriage mental model.

Formal education

Formal education in this essay means the education one gets through attending in four wall classroom or open classroom for years or months. During formal education or training, learners interact with peers, their teachers, administrators and many other people surrounding the school. From these interactions, there is learning taking place, and therefore, there is change of some set of values which one had internalized before joining the school system. For instance, it would have been a position of a certain lady marrying a taxi driver after completing her degree in economics, but after interacting with her peers during schooling she learns that a taxi driver is not of her status. She may betray her personal psychological drive, religious teachings, and decide to marry a man of another caliber. The man of her peers taste. Similarly, a man may have planned to marry a lady of a particular caliber, let say a woman with doctorate, but after interaction during schooling he may change his position and decide to marry a form four leaver. Therefore formal education has the role in influencing the choice of a spouse, which cannot be ignored.

Fecundity

As for African men, they would like to have a woman who can make children. This is common among African societies. If a woman gets married, the most valued thing is for her to bear a baby. This is in contrast to women whose prime interest is having a man who is wealthier than themselves. This is probably in recent years there has been a tendency for most partners marrying (having a wedding) when the woman is impregnated or the partners have a kid or kids.

CONCLUSION

Indeed, as argued earlier, that the African marriage mental model is asymmetric in nature. That is to say

mostly a woman holds an inferior position economically and this makes her comfortable to be at that position. Being at inferior position economically for a woman means a woman feels that her spouse's income is far beyond bigger than that of hers. This situation makes a woman feel secured. The contrary is also true; however, it is argued that economic status is not the only factor that determines the choice of a spouse; there are some other factors that may influence the choice of a spouse though they are not considered to be prime ones. The prime factor is economy.

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