

Algerian Academic Woman between Scientific Research Requirements and Authority of Social Norms: A Sociological Approach

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Abstract: This research manifests findings about the issue of the Academic woman in Algeria between the demands of scientific research and the authority of social norms (a sociological approach). It endeavors to investigate and explore the ways in which these social and cultural norms pose barriers to the woman's engagement to scientific research. It also addresses how women deal with social norms as a symbolic authority. The study revealed the following results:

- Social norms put pressure on women researchers constraining their pursuit of scientific research. This is because women are perceived to have a sacred duty to motherhood, family care and housekeeping tasks.
- According to the research findings, the academic environment is predominantly male-oriented. Additionally, traditional culture plays a significant role in shaping this academic milieu.
- The woman researcher, based on the research results, is an active social actor who is aware of her situation and objectives. Therefore, she employs negotiation strategies to bring about change in her circumstances and achieve her goals.

Keywords: Social norms, academic woman, social, structural functionalism, scientific research, negotiation strategies.

1. Introduction

The relationship between women and social norms is manifested through various phenomena, the most important of which are family matters, marriage, childbirth, social upbringing, household chores, ethics, virginity, obedience, loyalty, and femininity, among others. These norms impose both material and moral authority over women, giving the nature of social organization and the characteristics of Arab-Islamic culture. Under these frameworks, the nature of a woman's status and her role within the social structure is defined. Women are often associated with the private sphere, while men are associated with the public sphere. Consequently, women assume roles primarily focused on "consolidating and representing the ethical virtues attributed to the domestic culture (Holozi, J., 2010).

However, the changes witnessed in our societies at both the structural and functional levels have allowed for the emergence of a new form of social dynamics. This is evident, for example, in the shifting status and social roles of women. A notable example of this is the increased presence of women outside the family space, with their active participation in diverse social spheres. This can be attributed to the modern national policies focusing on community and women development, along with women's progress in the educational level. These factors have enabled women to engage in various sectors and pursue economic and social activities, empowering them to build their own personality and reshape their gender identity. Furthermore, this helped them reshape their relationships with men and various social institutions, particularly family, norms, and traditions that form the foundation of society.

Women's progress in the educational ladder and their attainment of university degree has allowed them to occupy high-ranking positions in their respective fields. We see women excelling in roles such as engineers, doctors, administrative executives, teachers, and professors, among other occupations. Most statistics indicate an increasing number of women in leadership positions.

In the midst of these structural and functional shifts for Arab and Algerian women, female researchers and academics have raised concerns among scholars as

an emerging area of study and have caught our attention giving our affiliation with Algeria's higher education and scientific research sector, as well as our field observations of different social concerns within this academic environment, particularly those connected to the humanities and social sciences. The study is also concerned with the most important norms, patterns, and institutional beliefs that shape these practices and representations.

Another point that has also drawn our attention, as a simple preliminary remark, is the interconnected relationship between the advancement of women in the academic hierarchy, (For instance; her attainment of Magister and PhD degrees) or other scientific research ranks, as a social institutional practice of the female researcher regardless of whether they are students, professors, or university researchers.

Based on the aforementioned, our research main concern revolves around the positioning of the female researcher, object of study, between the scientific research requirements such as time, discipline, focus, travel, and mobility, among other factors. It also considers the social framework, particularly within the family, with its values, beliefs, and norms that may socially constrain and limit the scientific activity of the female researcher.

On the other hand, our epistemological and cognitive approach assumes that the Algerian female researcher is a social actor who negotiates, struggles, resists, and employs practical strategies within society, especially within the family in order to achieve and accomplish her tasks and build her scientific path.

Thus; our research attempts to achieve the following aims:

- Revealing the key factors and reasons related to norms, beliefs, and social representations about women that hinder the participation of the latter (academic women) in scientific research.
- Manifesting the mechanisms to confront obstacles and challenges faced by the academic woman.

2. Methodological and theoretical approach of the study

Methodologically speaking, our research is a qualitative contribution, specifically a case study approach of a group of academic women. We adopted this methodology because we believe it provides a cognitive background and

methodological procedures that can lead us to a deeper understanding and exploration of the experiences of a group of female researchers.

Qualitative research also provides us with an explanation based on an interpretation and understanding from a sociological perspective, particularly drawing on the ideas of Max Weber. It enables us to examine the purposes of discourse based on social actors (the interviewees). On the other hand, we opted for this methodology because our goal is not to generalize the results, given the exploratory nature of the subject.

Based on this, we conducted a purposeful observation, specifically exploring a group of female professor-researchers from various humanities and social sciences disciplines. Our sample included 20 scholars, mostly from the University of Mostaganem and other Algerian universities. Age: from 34 to 55 years, marital status: married, divorced, and single.

We utilized semi-structured interviews as a fundamental technique. We initiated a general discussion on the social experience of female researchers in the field of scientific research. We then focused on the role of norms and social beliefs in the context of scientific research. Subsequently, we delved into the strategies employed by them, exploring how the requirements of scientific research are adapted with social norms and the responsibilities placed on women. We also examined how female researchers adapt social norms, traditions, family roles, and responsibilities to the demands of academic research tasks.

The discussion further extended to their relationship with the academic institution to which they belong, their position within that institution, their perceptions of scientific leadership at the institutional level for women, and their experiences in these aspects.

In addition to the interview, we employed observation, especially before selecting the topic. We utilized the structural functional theory regarding the axis of the female researcher's relationship with social structures, namely family structure followed by the academic structure, and the influence of norms and traditional culture in this context. Additionally, we applied the negotiation theory from the perspective of Anselm Strauss, who views organizations as patterns for continuous and ongoing negotiation built on interaction (Strauss, A., 1992).

Giving that the female researcher is an active social actor, her function and place are not only determined by her social upbringing. She is a socially engaged person with self-awareness, ambitions, and interests who actively resists and negotiates to achieve her objectives.

After completing the process of collecting data, the latter was analyzed based on the thematic analysis model of interviews, i.e. deducing topics based on the collected data (Blanchet, A., 2011). We have relied on the strategy of extracting categories based on the study questions and aims, then under each category, a group of topics is classified based on the nature of the data obtained from the interview with the interviewees.

3. The main concepts of the study

This study included a set of concepts that can be considered as fundamental variables for the research:

- **Social norms:** In general, norm is defined in social sciences as a set of non-official rules, regulations, and social customs that are characterized by compulsion and coercion. Norms are considered a product of social values, beliefs, and perceptions, where they serve the function of social control and guide the behavior of individuals and groups. They also facilitate social mobility by achieving social harmony and consensus.

Social norms in the framework of our study are a set of customs, traditions, and socially agreed-upon perceptions that define the status and role of Algerian women within the social structure. This includes their social roles in raising children, daily and special occasions' household chores...etc. Therefore, the concept of norms for us, based on the research problem, is manifested through the degree and nature of power and dominance exerted on academic women.

- **Academic woman:** The academic woman within the framework of our study is the Algerian woman who has attained a high educational degree, works in the academic and scientific field, whether in universities or research centers, as a professor and university researcher, or even as a doctoral student in various disciplines of humanities and social sciences.

- **Scientific research:** The concept of scientific research in the present study refers to various scientific activities and practices such as; participation in scientific

conferences, scientific publishing, and research project...etc in the field of humanities and social sciences. The concept is also utilized to refer to the management scientific research laboratories, scientific journals and so on.

- Scientific research requirement:

This concept encompasses discipline, continuous scientific activity, and allocating a considerable amount of time for scientific work.

- Negotiation: Our definition of negotiation in this study aligns with Anselm Strauss's conceptualization of the term. Within the framework of our research, it refers to a collection of negotiation strategies utilized by female academics in Algeria in order to achieve their interests and objectives. This viewpoint regards the female researcher as an active actor who engages in negotiation within familial and academic spheres by addressing and discussing the issues she faces in accomplishing her scientific tasks. Furthermore, the female researcher actively seeks ways to harmonize her conventional roles with the demands of scientific research.

4. Literature review

Contributions about this topic are diverse. However, most of them focused on the challenges faced by the female researcher. Nevertheless; we deemed it appropriate to present some researches that contributed in the investigation of this topic.

The first contribution is on "Work Pressures for Working Women and Their Impact on Job Satisfaction: A Case Study of the Scientific and Technical Research Center on Arid Regions in Biskra, Algeria" (translated from Arabic), conducted by Sihem Saad Abdel Sattar Mouafak. The study focused mainly on investigating the sources of work pressures on women working at the research center. The researcher aimed to determine whether women experience discrimination in terms of promotion and training. Additionally, the study aimed to identify the level of job satisfaction among these women.

The researcher raised a fundamental question in her research about how work pressures impact job satisfaction among women working in the field of scientific research. To address this inquiry, the researcher employed both a questionnaire and interviews as research tools. The research revealed the following results:

- There is an impact of work pressures on job satisfaction among female researchers.
- The consequences of working hours on family and personal life, as well as the complexity of duties and obligations, are among the most significant sources of work pressures among female academics.
- The phenomenon of the glass ceiling hinders access to leadership positions for female researchers at the center.
- Women experience discrimination when it comes to training and promotion.

Another research worth mentioning is a study entitled "Contributions of Iraqi Women in the Field of Scientific Research and their Leadership Role in Academic Institutions" (translated from Arabic), conducted by Iman Younis Ibrahim. The researcher began her investigation with a central question: Do Iraqi women contribute to scientific research and hold leadership positions in academic institutions?

One of the remarkable results obtained in this research is that women have a moderate level of contributions in the fields of scientific research, academic roles, and leadership. This is attributed to social constraints, particularly those related to family responsibilities and childcare. The study also manifested that female heads of departments, due to their involvement in administrative tasks within the department managements, have limited their academic achievements to the field of scientific research (Ibrahim, I. Y., 2022).

A significant contribution titled "Researchers between Two Passions: Researchers in Biology as a Model" by Catherine Marie and Erane Jonas, also addressed the issue of female researchers. The study focused on the problem of inequality and differences in the academic environment in France through the gender variable. The researchers emphasized the personal aspects of female researchers in the field of biology by presenting and interpreting the joy and pain they experience. They also explored the contradictions and conflicts faced by these researchers in their work, particularly as mothers with family-related obligations.

The study manifested several significant findings:

- Women are less productive in scientific research compared to men and are less likely to be nominated for scientific responsibilities. This is primarily attributed to

the role of motherhood and childcare, along with the responsibilities and commitments towards their families.

- Family responsibilities are not always the sole direct factor affecting women; the role of the husband plays another significant role in motivating the female researcher.

- It is noticed that men occasionally exploit women in scientific research by stealing ideas (between spouses or colleagues). This is due to the higher presence and visibility of men in scientific settings and relationships, as indicated by the study.

Last but not least, there is a French contribution that approached the same topic, titled: "Carrière des femmes enseignante et leur progression en grade supérieur au sein des universités congolaise", conducted in the higher education institute in the city of 'Bukavu': Mushagalusa Bihembie Dieudonné; Barhinjibanwa Kalembire Abraham Brazos. The study addressed the issue of the career path of female professors and their progression in academic ranks, focusing on the academic institution in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The researchers started with two questions:

- Why do not female researchers establish their professional path to the same degree and manner as male researchers?

- What prevents academic women from advancing in their careers?

The research showed the following results:

Advancement in academic ranks is challenging for women due to unsuitable working conditions, administrative delays, motherhood, and family responsibilities, as well as a lack of scientific publications.

It appears that the hindrances to academic advancement for female academics in Congo are dependent on personal, organizational, and social factors. Thus, it becomes evident that the obstacles to academic progression for female academics in Congo are related to personal, organizational, and social factors (*M. B. Dieudonné, Abraham Brazos, B. K., 2023*).

4. Analysis of the obtained data

Based on the interviews conducted with the research interviewees, the obtained data was collected and categorized as follows:

4.1. Impositions of social norms and conventions on female researchers

Women are often subject to a system of conventions and social rules that define their lives and actions in accordance with the roles and status allocated to them within the society. Despite the social changes witnessed in Algeria in terms of organization and societal culture, which have impacted women's positions within the social structure—such as women entering the workforce and participating in social activities in the public sphere, including academic and scientific settings—there is still a duality in the factors influencing women's presence in academic institutions. This is especially apparent in their conventional responsibilities related to motherhood and social upbringing, as opposed to the unique needs of scientific research in its different disciplines, which necessitate devotion, major time commitment, rigor, and other factors.

- The Society's Perceptions of the Female Researcher: The female researcher is generally perceived by society as lacking femininity, particularly in terms of family relationships. There is a perceived limitation on the level of familial bonds, a weakness in adhering to social and cultural customs and traditions, and a perceived deficiency in assuming familial responsibilities. This explains why the societal ideal image of a woman does not align with that of a female researcher.

- Practical constraints: Challenges at the family level, such as household tasks and domestic activities both before and after marriage, as well as responsibilities related to education, motherhood, etc., play a significant role. In this regard, one of the interviewees shared her experience in scientific activities stating: "there are several restrictions and pressures in participating in scientific conferences that involve travel which is often not accepted by her family."

On the academic environment level, the interviewees perceive the university as a predominantly male place. Traditional cultural influences are prevalent within the academic environment. Overall, the academic space does not seem to encourage research, both for women and men, according to the interviewees' observations.

In terms of scientific responsibilities, they are generally based on social relationships, whether for men or women. However, what is observed in the academic environment regarding scientific responsibility is the influence of the

typical and traditional image of women, assuming that they are incapable of bearing scientific responsibilities. One of the interviewees from Mustaghanem University stated in this regard: "Men generally reject female leadership even if she is competent, as they deal with her in a selective way. This is evidenced by the low percentage of women in the leadership of scientific councils and research laboratories compared to the effort they exert." Thus; Social norms and representations are influential within the university, shaping interactions within the academic institution.

It is worth noting that the interviewees are not eager to assume leadership positions within the academic setting, avoiding potential problems, conflicts, and obstacles that they might encounter as women. Additionally, their non-devotion to such roles is influenced by the fact that they are not fully committed, as leadership in the scientific field requires extra effort, the establishment and management of scientific and social relationships, and more. They prefer to dedicate their time to their families. This explains their immersion in the social upbringing they have received, conforming to social and cultural norms that have defined their roles and priorities in life. Generally, women have not been ingrained in leadership strategies. In this regard, some interviewees affirmed that they cannot bypass certain social norms, considering them as criteria that determine their life orientations. They adhere to these norms to maintain the image of an educated and conservative woman simultaneously.

4.2. Strategies employed

The most significant strategies employed in this study are:

Symbolic Resistance: This is a sort of conflict and opposition that indicates the woman researcher's reluctance to accept certain social and cultural constraints that impede her academic scientific work and production. This involves integration to the scientific system's rules and standards. Rejection and confrontation appear through continuous interaction with diverse social patterns, particularly those within the home and intellectual realms. According to one of the interviewees, this resistance frequently results in disputes with certain family members, especially when living in an extended family. Furthermore, the interviewees interpreted the

symbolism of resistance and conflict as a statement of their desire to improve their social circumstances and public opinions of them.

Discussion, justification and Persuasion: According to the interviewees, this technique is deemed extremely significant, given their cultural and intellectual background that allows them to negotiate their aims and demands about scientific activity in connection to the social and cultural peculiarity of women. Based on this, the interviewees try to persuade the family authority in particular of the uniqueness of their job and scientific activities, which need time, effort, and focus, among other things. They provide excuses and explanations. One of the interviewees stated in this regard: “participation in scientific conferences outside the institution was objected from her spouse as she needs to travel and sleep away from home.” However, after much debate, negotiation, and persistence, which took a considerable amount of time, he eventually agreed to her participation in conferences from time to time.

In the same respect, another interviewee shared her story with reading and searching. She mentioned that in the beginning, her family did not accept allocating time for reading. They believed that there was no benefit from it, and it would negatively impact her private life as a woman. However, she rejected this judgment and continuously tried to explain the importance of reading for a female researcher. She emphasized how reading is essential to the core of her work and does not impact her femininity.

Organizing time and Social Activities: This strategy aims at reducing and minimizing social conflicts and confrontations. Women, more specifically, academic women, resort to this strategy by dividing and organizing time according to their goals. The social conditions imposed on women are not an easy task; it requires personal effort and discipline, as well as collaboration with family members. In this regard, one of the interviewees responded, "Domestic burdens and tasks made me allocate the night and early morning for scientific research." Overall, the interviewees believe that time and work organization is subject to the cultural conditions of society and the family. Additionally, they depend on the skills possessed by the researcher in this field and her ability to collaborate and coordinate.

5. Results discussion

Through the manifested results of this study, we may say that this latter reinforces and align with the outcomes of previous studies in this field, whether Algerian or foreign ones. The literature of the research focused mainly on factors that hinder women's engagement in scientific research compared to men, such as family responsibilities and motherhood, as well as the presence of some traditional cultural residues in the academic environment regarding the treatment of female university researchers. European Studies have shown that academic and scientific institutions widely witness discrimination based on gender (Ouali, N., 2007).

However, our research did not only describe and analyze the social and cultural challenges experienced by academic women, but also detailed and analyzed the various strategies adopted by the interviewees as active social actors interacting within the social functionalism. This is especially visible in familial discussions aimed at accomplishing their objectives, a component that has not been explicitly and clearly defined in the past literature that the research has explores.

6. Conclusion

Through this research paper and after conducting the field study with a group of interviewees, we observed that academic women confront social and cultural limits and pressures connected to society portrayals of women in general, and female researchers in particular. According to the findings, women find it more difficult to completely engage in scientific activity, scientific production, and scientific leadership than males do because of their roles in maternity, social upbringing, and domestic obligations. However, they do not completely adhere to social practices and traditions that portray a definite and conventional picture of women. Instead, they face social conditions through confrontation and negotiation to achieve their academic and research goals and identity.

In order to answer the fundamental question of this research and meet the study's objectives, we may conclude that societal norms have a significant impact on female researchers. This effect, however, is relative, given the character of academic women as social actors.

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