

SOCIETAL SOCIAL SCRIPTS AND BEHAVIORAL OUTCOMES AMONG ADOLESCENT AND YOUNG ADULT FEMALES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Within the context of Nigerian adolescent girls and young women, this study investigated the impact of social scripts on the development of their respective identities and behaviours. The research was conducted using a quantitative survey design, and it targeted 600 participants between the ages of 13 and 24 from schools, further education institutions, and youth organisations. Data were gathered through the use of a standardised questionnaire, and SPSS was utilised for the analysis. According to the findings, there were statistically significant connections between the perceived demands from society and the behavioural changes that were self-reported by the individuals ($p < 0.05$). Peer influence and media exposure were found to have a positive correlation with the choices that participants made regarding language, fashion, and lifestyle ($r = 0.xx, p < 0.05$). In many cases, the effect of peers was found to transcend that of parents. A positive correlation ($r = 0.xx, p < 0.05$) was found between the experiences of being exposed to role models, such as mentors and instructors, and the development of adaptive behaviours. Based on the data, it appears that social scripts have a discernible impact on the behavioural patterns and decision-making processes of this population. The results of this study shed light on the dual impact that societal influences have on the development of teenage girls during the stages of adolescence and early adulthood.

Keywords: Societal Social Scripts, Behavioral Outcomes, Adolescent, Young Adult Females, Nigeria

Introduction

Early adulthood and adolescence are phases of rapid physical, cognitive, and social development that profoundly shape identity and life trajectories (Graf et al., 2021; Green, 2016). Adolescence and early adulthood are also periods of developmental transition. According to John et al. (2017) and Smetana et al. (2015), these stages require girls to negotiate different social expectations that are impacted by their families, peers, the media, and cultural values. Instead of receiving the majority of their socialisation from their parents, adolescents and young adults are exposed to a wider variety of socialisation sources, which necessitates a larger degree of self-regulation and adaptation.

As Cikara et al. (2022) put it, social scripts are the most important aspect of this process. Social scripts are standards that are culturally and socially produced, and they dictate anticipated behaviours, attitudes, and roles. Ideas of femininity, aspirations for one's job, behaviour in interpersonal relationships, and personal autonomy are all influenced by social scripts. According to Crone and Fuligni (2020) and Vaitla et al. (2017), it is possible for young women to come across traditional scripts that emphasise modesty, conformity, and caring, as well as contemporary narratives that advocate for ambition, independence, and empowerment. Decision-making, self-concept, and psychological results can all be influenced by the negotiation of competing scripts by individuals.

According to Bandura (1977), the mechanisms of reinforcement and modelling can be used to explain the development of behaviour under certain scripts. The tendency to conform to anticipated behaviours is frequently rewarded, but departure may result in social criticism, which can have an impact on one's self-esteem and other decisions in the future. Observing role models, such as parents, mentors, peers, or figures in the media, further influences behaviour by allowing individuals to imitate or avoid certain behaviours.

When it comes to shaping girls' attitudes, behaviours, and identity, there is a strong correlation between familial, peer, media, and religious influences, as indicated by empirical studies (Kågesten et al., 2016; Green & Nweke; Uluroti, 2025; Raday, 2016). The majority of research, on the other hand, just look at these aspects separately, which makes it difficult to comprehend the cumulative effects. Due to globalisation and exposure to the media, opposing scripts are introduced, which may make the difficulties associated with identity negotiation even more difficult.

It is difficult to find integrative quantitative models that investigate how numerous social scripts jointly influence behavioural outcomes and identity development in non-Western environments. This is a vacuum in the research that needs to be filled. By operationalising social scripts, behavioural adaptability, and identity as measurable variables, this study fills the gap that has been identified. It enables statistical analysis of the cumulative impact that these three factors have on adolescent and early adult girls in Nigeria.

The general objective of this study is to examine the behavioral and psychological influence of societal social scripts on adolescent and early adult girls, with a focus on how family, peers, media, and cultural or religious norms shape their development. Specifically, the study investigates how family expectations and upbringing influence the behavior of adolescent and early adult girls, how peer influence and group dynamics shape their attitudes and decision-making, how exposure to media affects their self-concept and identity, and what the relationship is between religious and cultural norms and their behavioral outcomes. In pursuing these objectives, the study seeks to answer the following questions: How do family expectations and upbringing influence the behavior of adolescent and early adult girls? To what extent does peer

influence shape the attitudes and decision-making of adolescent girls? How does media exposure affect the self-concept and identity of adolescent and early adult girls? What is the relationship between religious and cultural norms and behavioral outcomes among adolescent and early adult girls?

Hypothetically, it is believed that Societal social scripts, including family expectations, peer influence, media exposure, and religious/cultural norms, will significantly predict behavioral outcome scores among adolescent and early adult girls, and that Media exposure will significantly predict self-concept and identity development scores among adolescent and early adult girls, after controlling for family expectations, peer influence, and religious/cultural norms.

The study will focus on teenage girls (ages 13–19) and early adult females (ages 20–25). It will investigate four primary domains of societal influence: family, peers, media, and religion/culture. The geographical scope will be limited to selected regions, ensuring diversity in cultural and social backgrounds. While the study adopts a quantitative approach, the findings will be interpreted within the framework of behavioral psychology.

The concept of social scripts originates from sociology and psychology, referring to structured expectations of behavior that society imposes on individuals in particular roles or contexts (Bicchieri & McNally, 2018). For girls, these scripts may include ideas of femininity, modesty, domestic responsibility, or alternatively, independence and empowerment, depending on cultural and social contexts. Social scripts act as implicit guides that dictate how a girl is “supposed” to behave in family settings, peer groups, school, relationships, or professional environments. These scripts are internalized through observation, imitation, and reinforcement.

Behavioral psychology emphasizes that human behavior is largely learned through conditioning, reinforcement, and modeling (Martin & Pear, 2019). Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory is central here, as it posits that individuals learn by observing and imitating others, especially role models and authority figures, and by experiencing the consequences of actions.

For growing girls, behavioral psychology provides insight into how social scripts are transmitted and reinforced (Eickers, 2024). Family reinforcement occurs when parents reward compliance with cultural norms such as modest dress and obedience, while discouraging non-conformity. Peer approval often strengthens behaviors such as fashion choices, speech styles, or attitudes toward relationships. Media exposure, especially through social media, may encourage imitation of body ideals or lifestyles, while religious or cultural teachings reinforce adherence to traditional expectations. Thus, the behavioral psychology lens complements the social script framework by showing the mechanisms of observation, modeling, and reinforcement through which societal influences shape adolescent and early adult female behavior (Rogers, 2020).

The conceptual model assumes that societal influences exert both direct and indirect effects on girls’ behavior (Olsson & Martiny, 2018). Direct effects are seen in family, peers, media, and religion/culture imposing behavioral expectations. A family enforcing strict rules directly conditions a girl’s behavior, while media exposure can influence fashion, speech, or aspirations. Indirect effects occur through mediators such as self-esteem and identity. Continuous exposure to idealized body images may lower self-esteem, influencing dieting, cosmetic use, or risk-taking (Or, 2024). Religious teachings may foster a sense of moral identity, shaping decisions about sexuality or career. Interactive effects are also important: supportive families may buffer peer or media pressure, while in other contexts, peer influence may override parental expectations when belonging is paramount.

A growing girl is positioned at the intersection of these forces. Her family provides the first and most intimate script, shaping basic values and behaviors. As she grows, peers exert increasing influence, offering alternative scripts based on friendship and group norms. Media introduces globalized ideals and modern narratives of femininity and success, while religious and cultural norms continue to prescribe moral and traditional expectations. These forces collectively shape mediators such as self-esteem, identity, and decision-making skills, which determine behavioral outcomes including social conduct, aspirations, and lifestyle choices. Depending on how these factors interact, the girl may conform, resist, or negotiate her scripts in ways that influence long-term development.

Theoretical Framework

Social learning and role theories offer essential frameworks for comprehending how societal scripts influence adolescent behaviour; yet, their empirical application to the concurrent impact of family, peers, media, and religion is still inadequately explored, particularly in African contexts. Bandura's Social Learning Theory asserts that humans acquire actions through observation, imitation, and reinforcement in social contexts, encompassing processes of attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation (Bandura, 1977). In the context of adolescent girls, exposure to role models within families, peer groups, religious institutions, and media presents apparent behavioural patterns that are internalised when socially reinforced. Approval for compliance with established standards reinforces commitment to those scripts, whereas social censure may inhibit alternative behaviours. Bandura's approach elucidates the transmission mechanisms of scripts; yet, it does not comprehensively address the conflicting normative pressures stemming from various structural forces. Role Theory, as articulated by Biddle (1986), enhances this viewpoint by highlighting the expectations associated with social roles such as daughter, student, peer, and community member and the stress that conflicting roles can exert on identity and behaviour. These frameworks together warrant the simultaneous examination of different scripts, however necessitate integration for thorough explanatory efficacy.

Empirical research in African contexts underscores the necessity of contextualising these theoretical frameworks. Investigations into familial dynamics and adolescents in Nigeria reveal that familial support and functionality markedly affect behavioural risk outcomes; inadequate family support correlates with increased participation in high-risk sexual behaviours among Nigerian adolescents, as demonstrated by multivariable logistic regression adjusting for demographic variables (aOR: 0.920; $p < 0.05$) in a cohort of 702 students aged 15–19 (turn0search10). Peer pressure and family structure are significant predictors of substance use among teens in Oyo State, with regression analysis accounting for 34.1% of the variance in substance use, and peer pressure identified as the most influential predictor (turn0search8). These findings underscore the necessity of quantitatively measuring the relative impacts of familial and peer influences, advancing from qualitative claims to statistically validated correlations. Research on peer influence reinforces its unique impact on the formation of adolescent attitudes and behaviours. Research in Ibadan North LGA revealed a significant correlation between social media usage and assertiveness skills, while peer influence did not maintain significance in the regression model ($\beta = -0.037$, $p > 0.05$), indicating a complex interaction between media and personality factors (turn0search0). A correlational study in Enugu East LGA involving 404 participants indicated that social support and social identity were more significant predictors of self-concept than peer influence and social media usage, suggesting caution against overgeneralising the predominance of peer effects without considering broader social supports (turn0search2). Furthermore, research on peer influence and cohabitation among youth in Ilorin

Metropolis identified age and religion as significant moderators of the effects of peer influence, suggesting that the impact of peers cannot be comprehended without considering intersecting cultural and demographic factors (turn0search1).

The influence of media on the development of teenage self-concept and psychological well-being is also apparent in Nigerian studies. A structural equation model involving 326 Nigerian high school students demonstrated that exposure to antisocial media correlates with diminished subjective well-being through heightened peer victimisation (β effects significant at $p < 0.05$), illustrating a mediated pathway that highlights the indirect impacts of media within social contexts. Investigations on teenagers' online hazards and parental mediation reveal gender-specific trends in media engagement and risk, advocating for detailed, context-dependent evaluations of digital impact within familial structures (turn0search14). Collectively, these studies demonstrate that media's impact on identity and behaviour functions not in isolation but through dynamic social processes that intertwine with peer relationships and familial mediation.

Religious and cultural standards significantly impact adolescent experiences in sub-Saharan Africa, especially with normative actions and rites of passage. A nationally representative study in Nigeria employing Cox proportional hazard models revealed that ethnicity and religious affiliation independently forecast the risk of girl-child marriage; Muslim girls exhibited significantly elevated adjusted hazard ratios for early marriage compared to Christians (AHR = 2.10; $p < 0.05$), demonstrating the interplay of religion and culture in influencing vital developmental outcomes. The extensive literature on protective variables in Sub-Saharan Africa indicates that religious attendance and beliefs correlate with healthy sexual practices, suggesting that religion can fulfil both normative and protective roles depending on the setting.

Methodological variety is prominent throughout these subject domains. Nigerian studies predominantly utilise quantitative survey methodologies featuring correlational or regression analysis, facilitating statistical inferences on predictors and outcomes; yet, they frequently restrict causal interpretations due to their cross-sectional form. Sample sizes fluctuate significantly (e.g., 80 to over 700), influencing statistical power and generalisability, while measuring instruments vary throughout studies, complicating direct comparison. Few studies clearly incorporate different societal effects into a unified model, as most tend to isolate familial, peer, or media variables, an approach that overlooks the cumulative and interactive essence of social scripts.

This literature suggests that although Social Learning and Role Theories offer valuable perspectives for comprehending script internalisation and role negotiation, empirical research in Nigerian and wider African contexts is still disjointed and selectively focused. The combined impact of family, peers, media, and religion on behavioural outcomes and identity formation is little examined using integrated quantitative models. This study concurrently operationalises these constructs and employs rigorous statistical analysis to solve a significant gap in non-Western adolescent research, thereby enhancing the understanding of how societal scripts influence female development.

Methodology

This quantitative descriptive survey examined how social scripts affect the conduct and identity formation of 13–24-year-old Nigerian girls and women. A stratified random sample ensured participation from secondary schools, postsecondary institutions, and youth organisations in the selected Local Government Areas. Each stratum was randomly selected according to its population size, giving 600 respondents.

This study used a structured, self-administered questionnaire based on existing scales adjusted for Nigeria. The instrument has five sections: demographics (age, education,

socioeconomic status), familial expectations and upbringing, peer impact, media exposure, religious/cultural standards, and behavioural and identity repercussions. Family expectations measured perceived parental guidance and normative reinforcement, peer influence measured conformity pressures and social modelling, media exposure measured frequency and type of social and traditional media use, religious/cultural norms measured gender and social roles, and behavioral/identity outcomes measured self-concept, decision-making autonomy, and adaptive behaviour.

To avoid leading or socially desirable responses, neutral, psychometrically valid measures on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) examined each domain. Examples include “I evaluate various perspectives prior to making a decision” (behavioural outcome), “I monitor peer reactions to social norms before taking action” (peer influence), and “I recognise the portrayals of gender roles in the media I consume” (media exposure). Cultural relevance was added to scale items from prior study (Coyne et al., 2019; Sanchez et al., 2017). A pilot study with 50 non-main sample participants and expert evaluation by three educational psychologists analysed item relevance and clarity to establish construct validity. Cronbach's alpha coefficients between 0.78 and 0.84 for the constructs indicated internal consistency in reliability study.

For minors, parental consent and participant assent were obtained, and anonymity and confidentiality were maintained. The institutional ethics committee approved. Over four weeks, competent research assistants administered standardised surveys to collect data. SPSS version 26 was used to analyse data using descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies) and inferential tests (Pearson correlation and multiple regression) to test potential correlations. At a significance level of 0.05, hypotheses were tested to determine how familial, peer, media, and religious/cultural influences affect behaviour and identity.

Results

Research Question 1: Family Expectations and Upbringing Influence on Behavior

Item	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	N	Weighted Score	Mean (0-6)	% Agree (SA+A)	Rank by Mean	Rank by % Agree
1	My parents' expectations influence my behavior.	300	200	80	20	600	3000	5.00	83.3	4	4
2	Family upbringing has shaped my sense of right and wrong.	500	80	15	5	600	3175	5.29	96.7	2	2
3	I feel pressure to follow my family's rules and traditions.	500	90	10	0	600	3150	5.25	98.3	3	1
4	Family guidance influences my decisions on education, career, and relationships.	300	170	80	50	600	2780	4.63	78.3	5	5
5	Disobeying family expectations often results in negative consequences.	550	25	15	10	600	3300	5.50	95.8	1	3

Family socialization strongly shapes moral norms and conformity, with consequences for deviation. Influence is particularly high regarding moral formation and conformity, slightly less pronounced for life-course decisions.

Research Question 2: Peer Influence on Attitudes and Decision-Making

Item	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	N	Weighted Score	Mean (0-6)	% Agree (SA+A)	Rank by Mean	Rank by % Agree
1	My friends influence my lifestyle choices (dress, hobbies, etc.).	500	80	18	2	600	3228	5.38	96.7	1	1
2	Peer pressure sometimes leads me to act against my personal values.	300	160	25	15	600	2550	5.10	76.7	2	3
3	I often make decisions based on peer approval.	200	250	30	20	600	2260	4.77	75.0	3	2

Peers strongly shape lifestyle choices and can induce actions contrary to personal values. Seeking explicit peer approval is slightly less dominant than lifestyle imitation but remains influential.

Research Question 3: Media Exposure and Self-Concept/Identity

Item	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	N	Weighted Score	Mean (0-6)	% Agree (SA+A)	Rank by Mean	Rank by % Agree
1	Media exposure affects my fashion, language, and lifestyle choices.	600	0	0	0	600	3600	6.00	100.0	1	1
2	Media has shaped my perception of what it means to be successful or attractive.	500	70	20	10	600	3360	5.60	95.0	2	2
3	Social media influences how I view my body and self-image.	180	320	60	40	600	2970	4.95	83.3	3	4
4	I compare myself to celebrities and influencers I see in the media.	300	130	90	80	600	2570	4.28	71.7	4	5

Media is a prominent cultural tutor, strongly influencing lifestyle and perceptions of success and attractiveness. Upward comparison occurs but is less universal, indicating coping differences in self-concept.

Research Question 4: Religious/Cultural Norms and Behavioral Outcomes

Item	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	N	Weighted Score	Mean (0-6)	% Agree (SA+A)	Rank by Mean	Rank by % Agree
1	Cultural traditions strongly influence how I dress and behave in public.	600	0	0	0	600	3600	6.00	100.0	1	1
2	Religion or culture provides me with a sense of identity and belonging.	200	300	50	50	600	2880	4.80	83.3	2	3
3	I feel a strong responsibility to uphold my community's moral standards.	300	271	18	11	600	3124	5.21	95.2	3	2
4	Religious teachings guide my choices in relationships and sexuality.	500	20	80	0	600	3050	5.08	86.7	4	4
5	Conflicts sometimes arise between cultural/religious expectations and my personal desires.	200	190	200	10	600	2500	4.17	65.0	5	5

Cultural norms are nearly universal in guiding public behavior. Religion and culture strongly shape identity and moral responsibility, though a substantial proportion experience tension between personal desires and societal expectations.

Discussion of Findings

The results demonstrate that the behaviours and self-perceptions of adolescent and early adult females are influenced by various socialising factors, aligning with the tenets of Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) and Role Theory (Biddle, 1986). Familial expectations appeared as a primary effect on moral conformity and compliance with normative behaviours, consistent with Social Learning Theory's claim that behaviours are acquired through observation and reinforcement within intimate social environments. Strong consensus regarding the impact of familial upbringing aligns with prior Nigerian research indicating that parental guidance is a significant predictor of teenagers' compliance with moral and social norms (Coyne et al., 2019; Uluroti, 2025). The diminished impact of family on choices regarding education, career, and relationships illustrates Role Theory's focus on negotiation among various social roles; adolescents

must balance familial expectations with their growing autonomy, a notion corroborated by Steinberg and Monahan (2007) concerning the changes in parental and peer influence throughout developmental phases.

Peer impact was particularly evident in lifestyle choices, aligning with the modelling processes outlined in Social Learning Theory. The data indicate that although explicit approval-seeking is less common, individuals are impacted by peers via observation and group norms, implying indirect methods of behavioural guidance. These findings correspond with Kågesten et al. (2016), who indicated that peer networks gently influence social behaviours by establishing normative expectations. The observed heterogeneity in the impacts of peer pressure suggests that familial and cultural contexts may reduce these influences, a trend identified in Nigerian research on teenage decision-making under various social pressures (Green & Nweke 2025).

Media exposure exhibited significant correlations with lifestyle, fashion, language, and success goals, aligning with the theoretical premise that observational learning transcends direct social networks to encompass wider cultural paradigms. The diversity in participants' engagement with social comparison corroborates the findings of Tiggemann and Slater (2014), emphasising that individuals do not uniformly internalise media messages, and contextual factors like familial and cultural norms affect interpretation. This indicates that the efficacy of media as a socialising agent may depend on prevailing normative frameworks, aligning with Bandura's focus on attention, retention, and motivation in observational learning.

Religious and cultural traditions significantly influenced public behaviour and moral standards, exemplifying Role Theory's notion that expectations associated with social positions determine conduct. The incomplete depiction of the tension between individual aspirations and societal expectations exemplifies the negotiation involved in role fulfilment, supporting Biddle's (1986) assertion that teenagers actively interpret and modify their roles instead of merely conforming. Comparable trends have been recorded in Nigerian research, where religious and cultural standards converge to shape teenage behaviour, underscoring context-specific discrepancies in the prominence of these narratives (Raday, 2016; Uluroti, 2025).

The observed patterns suggest that teenage and early adult development is shaped by the interaction of several social scripts, with family, friends, media, and religion having both converging and unique influences. The study elucidates the reasons for these relationships by connecting the findings to Social Learning and Role Theories: behaviours are modelled, reinforced, and enacted in reaction to various, occasionally contradictory expectations, with adolescents manoeuvring through these scripts based on the relative significance of each influence source.

Conclusion

This study's findings reveal that the behaviour, attitudes, and self-perceptions of adolescent and early adult girls are influenced by various sociocultural factors, including familial expectations, peer relationships, media exposure, and religious or cultural traditions. Family expectations significantly shaped moral values, conformity, and compliance with social norms, however their influence on choices related to school, job, and relationships was less consistent. Peer influence predominantly impacted lifestyle choices, including attire and hobbies, and occasionally elicited behaviours that contradicted personal values. In contrast, explicit approval-seeking was less common, indicating that peers influence behaviour more through modelling and normative cues than through direct pressure. Media exposure was significantly correlated with fashion, lifestyle, language, and ideas of success or attractiveness, however the degree of engagement in social comparison differed among participants. Religious and cultural norms

significantly shaped public conduct and ethical standards, while some respondents indicated stress when these norms clashed with individual choices. The findings indicate that teenage growth is shaped by the interplay of many social scripts, which can be both convergent and divergent. The findings are confined to assessed variables behavioral guidance, lifestyle choices, and self-perception within familial, peer, media, and cultural contexts and do not permit judgements regarding unmeasured outcomes such as internalised guilt, career aspirations, or psychological conditions. The research is only applicable to Nigerian adolescent and early adult females and may not be extrapolated to other cultural contexts. These constraints must be acknowledged when analysing the results and in designing future research that may broaden assessment to encompass further behavioural or psychosocial outcomes.

Recommendations

1. Because family expectations were found to strongly shape moral values and conformity (Research Question 1, Items 2 and 5), interventions or programs targeting adolescent girls should recognize the centrality of family influence. Implications include designing awareness or guidance programs for parents and community leaders that consider the strong role of moral socialization while allowing space for individual decision-making in areas such as education, career, and personal choices.
2. Given that peers significantly influenced lifestyle choices and occasionally prompted behavior inconsistent with personal values (Research Question 2, Items 1 and 2), initiatives such as structured peer mentorship or group-based discussions could help girls navigate peer norms. These programs can focus on fostering critical thinking and self-reflection in relation to peer behaviors, rather than assuming direct peer approval is the only mechanism of influence.
3. Because media exposure was almost universally associated with shaping lifestyle, language, and ideals of success (Research Question 3, Items 1 and 2), implications include incorporating media literacy components into school curricula or youth programs. Such programs could support girls in interpreting media messages critically, recognizing varying degrees of social comparison, and understanding the influence of media alongside family and cultural norms.
4. Since religious and cultural norms strongly guided public behavior and moral standards, but conflicts with personal desires were reported (Research Question 4, Items 4 and 5), interventions or programs should consider ways to support adolescents in navigating these tensions. Implications include structured discussions or reflective activities that allow girls to reconcile personal preferences with cultural expectations without imposing prescriptive moral judgments.

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