# Exploring the Campus Male Dominant Presence in Female Students' Lifestyle

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*Authors' contributions*

*This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Author JN designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol, managed the literature searches and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author JK managed the analyses of the study. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## ABSTRACT

Having a way of living and being in control of how to live are ordinary human desires and aspirations. There are lots of influences on the way we live and act. These obviously indicate how we are limited in fully steering life's way. Despite researches on social, cultural, economic, political, and religious reflections in our lives, there is scarce attention rendered on how the male dominant presence at campus is reflected in female students' lifestyle. This is the study purpose. We find that the presence is reflected in the nature of knowledge interaction, negotiated identity, policy provisions, and esteem. Despite female deprivations particularly in biased policy provisions, we conclude that male dominant presence has created a commendably enthusiastic struggle for gender parity reflected in female lifestyle. We recommend that campus policies should promote equitable and flexible ease for pursuing identity-related lifestyle.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Having a way of living and being in control of how to live are ordinary human desires and aspirations. There are lots of influences on the way we live and act. These obviously indicate how we are limited in fully steering lifestyle. [1] defines lifestyle as a combination of activities, interests and opinions, with an outward expression of one's self-concept, which he says is the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings. This reflects people's self-image; the way they see themselves and even believe they are seen by others. And since lifestyle creates the unity of behavior of thoughts, emotions and actions both conscious and unconscious, it reflects the direction selected by the individual for his/her striving [2]. In the context of this study, lifestyle therefore relates to how female students deal with everyday behavior as well as their feelings, attitudes, interests and opinions. Since students' major role at campus is academic, lifestyle has been conceptualized to include all forms of activities in knowledge interactions in any organized competitive association [3,4]. At campus, operating within institutional systems and structures is paramount. Therefore, the female student's operation within the set policies as regulators of the lifestyle also constitutes a focus [5]. On inter- and intrapersonal levels, lifestyle again relates to the way the female students pursue and cherish the female identity in their day-to-day interactions [6]. Lifestyle is as well reflected in the way female students seek to maintain self-esteem [7,8]. It is, however, a fact that the academic contexts and systems within which female students operate are dominated by males, mainly in the students' enrolment, and academic and administrative staff.

Male dominance has become a global issue, and is not only a system of power that divides men and women as masculine and feminine, but also places men above women and femininity and operates to value more highly those institutions and practices that are male dominated and/or representative of masculine traits and styles [9]. Male domination could have positive or negative impression on the female lifestyle. In Makerere University, for example, some scholars have attributed female display of aggressive behaviors to male over presence in the surrounding academic context [10]. This negative impression becomes a problematic that attracts this scholarly attention.

Much of the literature on the influence of patriarchal structures and male-female's relationships on female students' lifestyle has been a subject of scrutiny to some scholars [11]. Male dominant presence in HE examines young females' perspectives on the barriers and experiences associated with their lifestyle, primarily from a sociological or psychological standpoint. Very little research, however, has been conducted on how male dominant presence at campus influences female students' lifestyle. This constitutes the main purpose of this article.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been considerable research on various influences on female lifestyle. [7]'s study revealed that academic ability and peer experiences, influence self-esteem as well as female students' identity. Higher grades indicate stronger academic potential and serve as an indicator of female graduate degree lifestyle [3, 4]. This implies that through the peer socialization experience, students are influenced personally and intellectually leading to boosting their self-esteem. This is different from [12] who contends that in Higher Education, females are influenced by gender role, teacher attitudes as well as the gendered occupation. In the same vein, [3] revealed that factors that affect girls' lifestyle in Higher Education are grounded on the family settings, parenting, siblings, and other relatives. Other factors are the student's personality and self-esteem, the school environment, friends and role models. Since ones' lifestyle is based on individual choices, characteristics, personal preference and circumstances [2], it gives direction to a way of living according to a particular person [13,14,15]. The identified strategies to enhance positive lifestyles of female students include the provision of adequate information on career choice, guest speakers, deliberate motivation for females to do well in school and a favorable environment for females to perform well and aspire for good careers [16].

Higher levels of household income and parents' education have an influence on the female students' lifestyle specifically those receiving their education in the city [17]. This negatively impacts on them since some are more likely to discontinue their education [18,19,20]. Drawing on these findings, [21,22,23,24,25] conclude that parental absence because of labor related issues and the lack of role models as well as moral guidance creates obstacles to females' development, especially in the formation of their morals which is likely to affect their lifestyle. This

was further highlighted by [26,17] that some females face financial and administrative barriers which eventually impact on their lifestyle. Although [27] stressed the importance of College entrance examination in shaping opportunities for females, it is as well considered as a policy that bears on the female choice of College, and in the long run enhancing their self-esteem.

In addition, females' life style was influenced by core and normative religious beliefs and practices since they are perceived as life preserving [28]. Such an understanding influences their attitudes and eventually helps to develop their self-esteem, since religious commitment is used to explain some of their behaviors. Thus religion facilitates their willingness to act morally upright. Many religious groups (especially churches) offer spiritual healing for mental problems, and a large number of them access services [29]. This ultimately concerns the issues of identity which allow students to reflect upon endearing questions related to otherness, marginality, and the search for belonging [6].

[30] also opined that females' lifestyle was influenced by individual factors (e.g. taste preferences, self-discipline, time and convenience), their social networks (e.g. (lack of) parental control, friends and peers), physical environment (e.g. availability and accessibility, appeal and prices of food products), and macro environment (e.g. media and advertising). Furthermore, the relationship between determinants and university students' lifestyle seems to be moderated by university characteristics, such as residency, student societies, university policies and exams [31]. This is the case because high school students display a strong identity with fewer concrete manifestations of their identity in their lifestyle. [5] refer to this as patriarchal exclusion yet structures are arranged by men to confine females to certain policies and this has had enduring effects of their lifestyle.

While much of the basic research approaches perceive influence of the male dominance as static [32,33] other deductive approaches have stressed that influence of male dominance is a dynamic process [34,35,36]. Therefore young females often choose a combination of activities, interests and opinions of men over others who they associate with a certain lifestyle [1]. This eventually influences their self-esteem through their positive activities [8]. The academic staff in

universities continues to be male dominated, particularly at the higher levels, despite the introduction of many opportunities policies [37]. This whole pattern of practices allows men's dominance over women to continue [38], influencing some conditions under which female students' lifestyle operates. According to [39], the females' modern lifestyles get dominated by the increasing patriarchal norms and traditional values of the society. This suggests that the increasing patriarchal norms not only result from a resurgence of gender inequality, but also resurgence of patriarchal stereotypes, mentality and practices [40]. It has been suggested that females have been relegated to these patriarchal norms due to colonial policies which limit their opportunities [5]. Colonial policies between the sexes and gender inequality boil down to unequal access to and distribution of power for women and men. Consequently, females are stuck in between modern, dynamic views and traditional values. Therefore, their independent lifestyle with an individualistic approach towards their identity continues to clash with the traditional expectations of their parents.

According to [41] "Cultural norms and stereotypes are quite rigid and account for a number of the obstacles facing females, such as societal notions that women are generally not decision-makers in the public sphere and women's own lack of confidence and perceptions of their dependence on men." (p.4) Expectations about such attributes appropriate to females and about the relations between female and males in other words, are shaped by culture [42]. Therefore, gender identities and gender relations are critical aspects of culture because they not only shape the way daily life is lived in the family, but also in the wider community and the workplace.

[43]'s research on Colleges has relatedly revealed that male Principals play an important role in leading educational initiatives, coping with discipline problems, subject matter mastery, and employing a variety of teaching methods which are examples to females' outstanding characteristics. However, characteristics associated with ongoing professional development and relationships with female students are deemed less prominent. Therefore, understanding the driving female students' identity, self-esteem, choices, perceived needs, and aspirations is quite inevitable, although gender lines often favor males [5]. Nevertheless, many socio-cultural, psychological, and

contextual factors affect female students' life style. Such factors have been shown to relate to social constructions of gender and gender stereotypes, social support and influences from parents, peers and role models [43,44,45] and the teaching/classroom environment e.g., the competitive nature of lessons, and the teacher [46]. In addition, female students have reported feelings of embarrassment, low perceived ability, concerns over body image, lack of interest in the activities being offered and the dominance of boys in class as affecting their self-esteem [47].

## 3. METHODS

In order to pursue the purpose of this study, we opted to use Makerere University as our contextual case where there are distinct male – female percentage ratios in administration 52.3:47.7; academic staff 73.1:26.9; and students 52.7:47.3 [48]. Banking on the assumption that there are persons who could provide sufficient information about the lifestyle in a male dominated campus, we drew on the interpretive paradigm and used focused interviews. We chose four colleges from the two disciplinary fields; two from sciences (College of Engineering, Design, Art and Technology (CEDAT), and College of Health Sciences (CHS)) and two from humanities (College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHUSS), and College of Education and External Studies (CEES)). We interviewed two female students from every college, making a total of eight individual cases. We posed questions on four factors that we developed basing on the academic context and systems within which female students operate. The factors are; nature of knowledge interaction, negotiated identity, policy provisions, and self-esteem. These have been highlighted in the introduction as precursor to the problem, and subsequently reviewed in the literature. The factors enabled us to align our exploration of how male over presence at campus is reflected in female students' lifestyle. The names herein are pseudonyms. After the transcription of data, we categorized responses according to the above four factors. We arranged the voices according to the most commonly given reason to the least. We analyzed the results which we present as findings.

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1 Nature of Knowledge Interaction

Some participants from various colleges informed us that there are more male lecturers compared to female lecturers and because of that, more course units are taught by males. With this, they confirmed that through the interaction, this male dominance has created fear among the female students. Florence and Felicity both students from CEES, Josephine a pharmacy student from CHS, and Chantal a gender student from CHUSS shared the same sentiments. Particularly Florence resonated:

> At my school, we have very few female lecturers and most of them are men. You know men are tough and when they are lecturing they embarrass the girls because of those things the girls tend to do in class like giggling. So that tends to scare them away, and end up hating some lectures and you know when you hate a lecturer, automatically you will not love what he is teaching and so that will end up affecting your performance.

However, Carol a student from the school of engineering, reverberated the competitive interaction between male and female students that existed in their college. She said that given the technical things done in their college, it was not enough to sit in the lecture room and listen to the lecturer; rather to understand more, one had to do more as a student. Male students spend much time reading. Therefore, female students have to do exactly the same. They move from lecture room to library. She shared particularly that:

> As a woman at the college of engineering, I actually have to change my way of living. I have to leave out certain things that I should do as a girl; like going for outings with friends, because I have to dedicate more time for discussions and personal reading. So at the end of the day, I find my life becoming book centered.

Shakira on the other hand also noted that there were more boys than girls in her class. She added that she experienced a supportive interaction which influenced her lifestyle. She supplemented:

> When we are in for discussions, boys are so active and there is a way they push us girls. Particularly, they push me as an individual. They call me from time to time, finding out whether I have researched or done the work. They keep pushing me to do the work. At the end of any particular assignment, I also feel

my contribution towards the work and I feel I deserve that mark because of my contribution towards the work. I am a bit lazy, sometimes I over sleep or relax, but these male friends of mine help me. They push me a lot and even instill it in me that I have to read and do any kind of work given. They even call me late in the night, for instance if we have a test. They call and find out whether I am reading.

## 4.2 Negotiated Identity

Female students cherished some values and beliefs resultant from their religious and cultural affiliations. Some of these influences were campus-based and male precipitated and others from without. These values and beliefs were claimed to shape their lifestyles. For instance, the code of dressing among some female students depicts one's culture and influences confidence and the element of presentation among others just like Chantal a gender student shared:

> The dressing code in Buganda has influenced me to dress decently. This has boosted my self-esteem, in such a way that I walk with a lot of confidence and I am not afraid to meet anyone because I am presentable. Also through culture, I learn how to respect my elders. So, culture plays an important role in my life.

Josephine and Florence ratified that the involvement of male students in religious fellowships have influenced the behaviors of female students. Through this, female students have also started styling up to being leaders, replicating what the males are undertaking. Florence in particular shared:

> At our School of Education we have Makerere Students' Christian Association called MESICA, and you find that in those fellowships there are the Papas, the prayer warriors; and through that they tend to bring people together and all that. And in a way it has also influenced the behavior of the girls because you now see most of us taking up the leadership roles for instance we now have the Mamas. It in a way replicates leadership roles between the girls and the boys.

Nevertheless, in line with gender identity, the element of gender roles was also apparent in

shaping the female students lifestyle. Carol intimated that according respect to males is a cultural and social obligation, irrespective of their age. Culturally, males are considered to be more superior than the females and in such a way girls are supposed to respect boys. This works on the way some females interact with males even at campus. They can neither set up arguments with males nor compete with them in any way. She exemplified that:

> I may be an age mate with a boy but just because I am a girl, I have to accord him some extra respect, because we all come from different backgrounds, there are some girls who come from deep the villages and they have that mentality that they can't compete with boys. So because of their cultural up bringing they tend to consider men with higher esteem than their fellow girls.

On a different plane, participants intimated that there was gender mistrust from the side of the males. They said that female students are not counted as reliable simply because they are females. This has created a resisting mentality in females. This was confirmed by Rehema when she stated that:

> For example in my school, males never trust females with anything; instead they just take advantage of us. They take us to be sex objects or something like that. Even when an idea is given by a female, it is not taken very seriously. I think religion has played part in the male dominance. Religious books carry some verses which make females feel that they are not trusted. This negativity in a way also makes some females resistant to males.

## 4.3 Policy Provisions

There are several policies at campus which cater for female affairs. However, as Chantal and Carol intimated, many females are ignorant of most of the policies. Lack of sensitizing female students on these policies has influenced the female students' life style. Mostly those in first and second years are totally green about these policies. Chantal confirmed this when she exemplified:

> A Muslim lady came in an examination room smartly dressed and during the examination, all she did was to open her skirt, and get answers since they were written on her

thighs. The girl was caught and taken to the police, but after a short time she was released, no other action was taken. This is unacceptable since it's an academic issue and one should be punished according to the examination policy. But when other students see that no action has been taken, they also end up copying the same since most of them don't want to read, yet they want good marks. So they opt for any easy way out.

Being gender insensitive when making some of the policies has also impacted on female students' lifestyle. They looked at the administrative structure of Makerere University, and realized that most of the people who make these policies are males. Possibly they formed them for mostly males and little or no consideration was put on females. So this has affected the female students' life style here at campus. Rehema shared the same thinking with Felicity that:

> In Makerere University, most of the times all the leaders are male; they are the ones who made policies and since most of the students are males, and the percentage of the females is small, this makes them to favor the male sex in most of the policies. Even if you want to take something ahead, if you are a female they will make you feel less important, hence making their policies less friendly to all students.

### 4.4 Esteem

Admiration plays a great role in boosting self-esteem and consequently shaping one's life-style. Felicity and Josephine were certain about the admiration they had towards the males. This was as a result of the hard work and good performance displayed by the males in their various schools which has influenced the lifestyle of female students. This admiration by the females has boosted their levels of self-esteem in various aspects of their lives. For instance Felicity stated,

> In our discussion groups, males dominate and they want to take up everything and we as females they consider us as inferior. So since males are the main people who dominate in everything, there are times I see males doing well in their jobs and I admire them. Through this I have gained esteem that has enabled me to perform very well as they are doing. However, sometimes they

use some insulting words like you can't make it, you are inferior, you can only be helped to go to another step; so as a person there is a way they lower my esteem down.

Carol, on the same plane, strongly asserted that male dominance has influenced the lifestyle of female in such a way that it has given them confidence in whatever they do. Confidence boosts their self-esteem as females. She said that, "male dominance has enabled me to have enough confidence, because I easily get along with gentlemen, I study and work with them and even do the same units, what they do, I can also do."

## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Nature of Knowledge Interaction

Research has been conducted on how male dominant presence influences female students' lifestyle [11]. For example, the personality and attributes of female medical students are attracted to the surgical profession due to the dominance of males in surgery [49]. This male dominance in some academic disciplines is thought to relate to lifestyle issues including concerns about the feasibility of self-esteem alongside these professions [50,51]. The females' interest in these disciplines depicts great interaction between themselves and the male professionals. This is the case with female students because they expect male professors to be more effective in their work than female professors regardless of age perhaps through knowledge interaction. Through this interaction, females are pushed to work harder to fulfill their dreams. These professionals care about students and in turn enable them to attend to social and domestic services [42]. Through these interactions, such male dominance has contributed to the molding of female identity as well as adequate access to educational resources. According to the findings, this male dominant presence has proved to be beneficial to female students, since the involvement of males in supporting females especially during their stay at campus boosts their self-esteem through educational practices, and has proved to be more powerful. This was common in some colleges where we carried out this study. Since males are more than females, participants confirmed that they experienced a supportive interaction from males which influence their lifestyle. This influence has enabled females to embrace several activities, become more

creative and even work harder in their studies. Due to this interaction, female students have dedicated more time to reading such that they too can become like their male counterparts. A participant agreed to this when she resonated:

Boys are so active and there is a way they push us girls. Particularly, they push me as an individual… they keep pushing me to do my work and this instills in me the art of hard work. For instance if we have a test, they call and find out whether I am reading in preparation for it. This drives me to be more dedicated to my studies.

Therefore, this supportive interaction between males and females has influenced the lifestyle of female students at campus.

## 5.2 Negotiated Identity

Values and beliefs are claimed to shape the identity of females. Culturally, males are considered to be more superior than females and in such a way girls are supposed to respect boys. This works on the way some females interact with males even at campus. They can neither set up arguments with males nor compete with them in any way. Carol exemplified that:

I may be an age mate with a boy but just because I am a girl, I have to accord him some extra respect, because we all come from different backgrounds, there are some girls who come from deep the villages and they have that mentality that they can't compete with boys. So because of their cultural up bringing they tend to consider men with higher esteem than their fellow girls.

Expectations such as these are attributed to the females' behaviors, influenced by the males, and are actually shaped by culture [42]. Therefore, gender identities and gender relations are critical aspects of culture because they shape the females' lifestyle. Understanding what drives female students' identity and self-esteem, is quite inevitable, although gender lines often favour males [5]. [52] supports the accepted notion of a distinct student identity and perceived divides between students and local people based on spatiality, locality, class and student habits, which also intersect with gender to produce 'locally specific' experiences of space and safety within this setting. Consequently, females are stuck in between modern, dynamic views and traditional values. Therefore, their independent lifestyle with an individualistic approach towards their identity continues to clash with the traditional expectations of their parents [1]. This has placed greater importance on ability to female identity giving worth to their lifestyle. Such male representations have contributed to the molding of female identity as well as adequate access to educational resources.

## 5.3 Policy Provisions

Observing the administrative structure of Makerere University, we realize that most of the people who make policies are males. This is not a mistake because it has its origin way back to the colonial days. Colonial policies between the sexes and gender inequality exist in most of the countries in the world through that male dominance which still prevails in the family system. It may not be so easy to achieve gender equality as male dominance is deeply rooted in society. The whole pattern of policies allows men's dominance over women to prevail. Therefore, some policies insensitively made by men impacts on female students' lifestyle. In Makerere University, policies are mainly made by males. Little or no consideration is put on females. This has affected the female lifestyle at campus. Two participants shared the same view that:

In Makerere University, most times all the leaders are male; they are the ones who made policies and since most of the students are males, and the percentage of the females is small, this makes them to favor the male sex in most of the policies. Even if you want to take something ahead, if you are a female they will make you feel less important, hence making their policies less friendly to all students.

This is vividly manifested among the academic staff in universities which continue to be male dominated, particularly at the higher levels, despite the introduction of many opportunities policies [37] This determines some conditions under which female students' lifestyle is influenced by male dominance. This whole pattern of practices allows men's dominance over women to continue [38]. This is similar to [39] who reveal that the females' modern lifestyles get dominated by the increasing patriarchal norms and traditional values of the society. This suggests that the increasing patriarchal norms not only result from a

resurgence of gender inequality, but also resurgence of patriarchal stereotypes, mentality and practices [40]. Scholars argue that females have been relegated to these patriarchal norms due to colonial policies which limit their opportunities [5]. The colonial policies between the sexes and gender inequality boil down to unequal access to and distribution of power for women and men. Therefore male dominance is also manifested in the policies set for female students.

## 5.4 Esteem

Female students, given their cultural background, find it hard to have self-esteem because they rarely believe in themselves. Yet, admiration plays a great role in boosting self-esteem and confidence in shaping females' life-style. Through these two aspects, participants have yielded hard work and good performance. For instance Felicity stated,

> Since males are the main people who dominate in everything, there are times I see males doing well in their jobs and I admire them. Through this I have gained esteem that has enabled me to perform very well just like them.

Male dominance breeds confidence and boosts self-esteem among the females portrayed in their personalities and attributes [49]. This male dominance relates to lifestyle issues including concerns about the feasibility of self-esteem alongside this demanding profession [50,51]. Therefore young females often choose a combination of activities, interests and opinions of men over others they associate with a certain lifestyle [1]. This eventually influences their self-esteem through their positive activities [8]. The females' interest in male dominated jobs place greater importance on ability to identify themselves, help people, interesting and challenging work and less important on their lifestyle. This implies that the females' admiration is assigned greater importance to gender identity, prestige, self-esteem and lesser importance to their lifestyle.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Basing on the study findings, HE male dominant presence is manifested in the female student's lifestyle through a number of aspects, namely; knowledge interaction, negotiated identity, policy provisions, and self-esteem.

Due to the interaction with the males who seem to succeed through dedicated effort in studies, female students too, dedicate more time to reading such that they also can become like their male counterparts. A healthy competitive spirit is a positive male impression reflected in female lifestyle. In addition, the patriarchal stereotypes as well as female cultural up bringing where men are held with higher esteem than females has placed greater importance on gender identity, giving worth to their lifestyle. Such male representations have contributed to the molding of female identity as well as adequate access to educational resources. Nevertheless, as a negative impression in female students' lifestyle, a pattern of policies insensitively made by males, with little or no consideration of females has greatly impacted on females' lifestyle since females are ignorant of most of them and they lack sensitization on these policies. Finally, the findings indicate that admiration of the males plays a great role in boosting self-esteem and confidence which shape the females' life-style. This is also a positive male impression in the female lifestyle. Due to the self-esteem gained, females are enabled to perform very well in their academics just like the males. In brief, based on the findings, despite female deprivations particularly in biased policy provisions, male dominant presence is commendably reflected in enthusiastic struggle for gender parity reflected in female lifestyle.

## 7. RECOMMENDATION

Basing on the findings and conclusions we recommend thatpolicy-makers in HE should make current policies flexible in order to turn them into inclusive and equitable ones to cater for both genders at campus. This could be done in consultation with female students. The policies that already cherish parity should be upheld. In brief, all policies should promote equitable and flexible ease for pursuing identity. This may boost self-esteem among females, place greater importance on uplifting gender identity, and give worth to their lifestyle in male-dominated HE.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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