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editorial-office@sciformat.ca

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WOMEN BETWEEN SOCIAL CLASSIFICATION AND STIGMA: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY IN THE ALGERIAN CONTEXT

Laifaoui Farida

Dr., Morsli Abdallah University of Tipaza, Algeria

ABSTRACT

This study falls within the sociological fields concerned with analysing the mechanisms of social classification and their effects on the construction of status and identity. It focuses on the phenomenon of stigma as a symbolic practice that produces stereotypical images affecting the positioning of individuals within the social system. The current study addresses the issue of women's stigmatization through a theoretical approach based on social stigma theory, examining the historical and cultural dimensions that have contributed to the entrenchment of this phenomenon. It reviews some indicative models in Algerian society to understand the contexts in which social meanings associated with women are reformulated. The findings indicate that social stigma necessitates a critical reading of the dominant cultural structures.

KEYWORDS

Stigma; Social Stigma; Social Stigma of Women; Algerian Society

CITATION

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Introduction:

Social stigma is considered one of the central concepts in sociology due to its profound impact on shaping individual identities and reproducing social hierarchy. Sociologists have devoted attention to analysing stigma mechanisms as a symbolic process through which the group assigns negative attributes to certain categories, thereby excluding them or redefining them socially according to their cultural standards. Women are among the groups that have historically been most subjected to various forms of stigma, manifested in stereotypical roles and social constraints associated with sex and gender. From this perspective, the study aims to analyse the concept of social stigma towards women, highlight its dimensions and types, and apply this to some models from Algerian society. Hence, the main research question can be posed:

How does social stigma contribute to the reproduction of social inequality for women, and what is the role of symbolic and cultural standards in the formation and escalation of this stigma within Algerian society?

From this, the following sub-questions emerged:

1. What are the theoretical dimensions of social stigma as addressed by sociologists?
2. How does social stigma theory explain the mechanisms of stigma production against women?
3. What are the types of social stigma directed at women, and how have they been manifested in Algerian society?
4. What is the social history of stigma towards women, and how has it evolved over time?

Significance of the Study:

The significance of this study stems from its treatment of a sociology that touches upon the structure of social relations and the mechanisms of meaning production within society. It also gains importance from shedding light on the situation of women as social actors affected by classification and stigmatisation processes practised by the group. The study contributes to linking theoretical foundations, particularly within the framework of social stigma theory, with the Algerian social reality, thereby giving it an analytical dimension that combines theory and social practice.

1. Diversity in the Concept of Social Stigma:

Linguistically, "al-wasm" refers to a crack or fracture that is not completely separated in bone or similar objects, in a stick and everything. A spear is described as "mawsūm" when it has such a defect. It is also used metaphorically to describe a person whose lineage is flawed, meaning there is a blemish in their honour.¹ "Al-wasm" in language means a defect, and to mark something is to find fault with it. "Al-wasamah" refers to a defect in speech, a blemish, or shame. It is said that so-and-so has a "wasamah", meaning a defect.² Stigma as disgrace is an expression of negative social attitudes, beliefs, or contempt towards others, and it is a feeling that does not exist naturally but arises among individuals in societies.³ The word stigma has synonymous terms in meaning, including: backbite, detract, slander, envy, condemn, blemish, defame, insult, revile, stab, reproach, disgrace, disfigure, blame, tarnish, denounce, satirise.⁴ Its plural forms are "wusūm", "wasamāt", and *wasm*. It describes a real or unreal attribute that disgraces, blemishes, and places a mark of shame, humiliation, and ugliness, diminishing the value of the other. To stigmatise someone is to find fault with them and create a defect. Stigma also carries the meaning of fever—to be afflicted with fever causes pain, and stigma is a defect and a disgrace.⁵

Terminologically: The term stigma is of Greek origin. Erving Goffman was the first to use it in sociology, referring to the existence of physical marks revealing anything abnormal and morally reprehensible about individuals who engage in deviant behaviour, distinguishing them as deviant and ill-mannered by placing marks in the form of tattoos, burns, or carvings on the bodies of criminals, slaves, and traitors. This necessitated that members of society avoid them and stay away from them, especially in public places, as well as refraining from buying from their markets, mixing with them, or marrying their daughters.⁶ However, the uses of this concept are diverse, encompassing fields such as social psychology, criminology, and it signifies numerous undesirable cultural characteristics, whether physical, mental retardation, social factors (such as arrest), or demographic factors like ageing and obesity.

Stigma refers to the process that attributes errors and sins indicative of moral degeneration to people in society, describing them with odious qualities or traits that bring them shame or generate rumours about them.⁷ This process thus indicates more than just the formal act; it extends to society's attitude towards the member who has misbehaved or shown any notable deviation from other members.⁸ It has also been defined as the attribution or attachment of undesirable labels to an individual by others in a manner that deprives them of social acceptance or societal support because they are different from other individuals. This difference lies in a characteristic—physical, mental, psychological, or social—that alienates them from the society in which they live and makes them rejected by it, leading to feelings of inferiority in psychological and social balance.⁹ What is said of an individual also applies to a particular human group when other groups adopt a rejecting or ostracising stance towards them. Thus, stigma points to a serious social disagreement about personal attributes or beliefs perceived as opposing dominant cultural values and standards. According to Goffman, an individual is stigmatised when they possess a relatively variable characteristic compared to existing models in their immediate social environment. Goffman views stigma as the attribute that makes an individual different from others... and is evaluated in our minds from being a "complete" and "normal" person to a "contaminated" and "discounted" one. Stigmatisation is a process by which society negatively defines the specific mark as a symptom or set of symptoms of mental illness... it is an attribute that damages reputation. For Goffman, stigma involves negative, deeply rooted concepts about stigmatised individuals based on the social meanings of the mark, and the mark and associated stereotypes lead members of society to treat the stigmatised person as less than human.¹⁰ Goffman used stigma socially, racially, sexually, and religiously as marks of inferiority that strip the individual of social eligibility. Psychology has also been concerned with stigma because the stigmatised person is considered worthless; it is the most dominant characteristic that overcomes personal traits.¹¹

The Separation of "Us" from "Them": This component of the stigmatisation process emerges when social labels involve separating "us" from "them." The history and policies of the United States provide many examples of defining old-system Americans—including African American slaves, Native Americans, and successive waves of immigrants—as external groups: the "them" who are vastly different from "us." Only a few groups were entirely exempt from this. For instance, James A. Morone cites excerpts from Benjamin Franklin's notes on the influence of Dutch immigrants (the "them") on English colonists (the "us"). The English had already begun to leave certain neighbourhoods surrounded by the Dutch, annoyed by their troublesome and unacceptable ways... besides, the Dutch had a lower standard of living, and consequently lower-quality work and lower wages than the English, which greatly annoyed and disgusted them... This separation persists today, although the groups representing "us" and "them" have changed. The "them" constitutes a threat to "us" because they are perceived as immoral, lazy, and predatory. Thus, the other components of the stigmatisation

process involve linking labels to undesirable attributes, justifying the belief that negatively labelled individuals are fundamentally different from those who do not share their patterns of labelling. Simultaneously, when labelled individuals are believed to be so clearly different, stereotyping can be accomplished smoothly because attributing every bad behaviour to "them" remains a simple harm. In extreme cases, the stigmatised person is considered so different from "us" that they cease to be human altogether. In extreme cases, repeated again, every vile treatment of "them" becomes possible. In some instances, evidence of efforts to separate "us" from "them" is directly available in the nature of the labels themselves. For example, people in certain positions are seen as defined by their positions, and some speak of individuals as "epileptics" or "schizophrenics" rather than describing them as having epilepsy or schizophrenia. This revealing practice regarding this component of stigma differs from other diseases. A person with cancer, heart disease, or influenza remains one of "us," someone who happens to have a serious illness, whereas that person is a "schizophrenic." ¹² As for Edwin Lemert, author of "Social Pathology" and founder of the theory, he views stigma as a social disease that drives behavioural traits toward deviant non-normality due to social perception, and the stigma remains attached to their social history. ¹³ The World Psychiatric Association's handbook states that stigma includes negative stereotypes, harmful beliefs, discriminatory practices, and segregation between individuals' social interactions and societal ones, with dimensions and directions that harm the individual's personality through specific defects. ¹⁴ Stigma diminishes the estimation of others; labelling an opponent with immorality distorts their reputation and arouses society's disgust. ¹⁵ Social psychology and criminology are included in stigma to study and analyse undesirable cultural characteristics such as bodily and moral education and mentality, through arrest and quarantine, and natural factors like ageing, disability, mental illness, delayed marriage age, divorce, infertility, bearing daughters without sons, and attributes caused by society's perspective and culture regarding women. It points to errors and traces that express an odious moral defect, placing women on a list that brings rumours and societal indignation. Here, the Islamic religion prohibited stigma in all its forms and images, as God Almighty said: "O you who have believed, let not a people ridicule [another] people; perhaps they may be better than them; nor let women ridicule [other] women; perhaps they may be better than them. And do not insult one another and do not call each other by [offensive] nicknames. Wretched is the name of disobedience after [one's] faith. And whoever does not repent—then it is those who are the wrongdoers." ¹⁶ This verse included and detailed the multiple forms of stigma and prohibited them. Moreover, due to the gravity of the act, it specifically addressed women.

-Operational Definition of Social Stigma of Women: "It is the distortion of a thing, and stigma is a defect in speech and wording, with negative and demeaning attributes that stigmatise a woman. It is every negative attribute applied to her where there is severe social rejection for social reasons, making her marked with a specific attribute that distinguishes her from other members of society. This social stigma may arise from societal beliefs about illness, disability, physical deformity, neurological disorders, skin diseases, skin colour, race, or religion. Stigma distorts the woman, causing her psychological distress, solitary confinement, and a feeling of non-acceptance and familial and social rejection. She experiences alienation, psychological burnout, emotional isolation, and the foundations of her personality and identity are shaken. The stigmatised woman is common in our society for the slightest reasons, simply because she is female, and she is treated as less than human, enduring extremely difficult conditions."

2. Types of Social Stigmas:

Erving Goffman identified three types of stigma: first, stigma resulting from physical defects and congenital deformities; second, defects in individual attributes, such as dishonesty, inferred from records; third, the stigma of race and lineage.

The main forms and patterns of social stigma can be identified as follows:

-Physical Stigma: This is associated with physical disability, the disability that results from a deficiency or incapacity in the motor system, occurring due to cases of cerebral palsy, infantile paralysis, amputation of a limb due to disease or accident leading to bone or joint deformities, or noticeable atrophy in body muscles. These disabling factors may be hereditary or acquired. All these result in healthy individuals not feeling their pain and looking down upon them.

-Mental Stigma: This is associated with mental weakness or retardation, leading the individual to be unable to cope with the social environment in which they live. Social studies indicate the negative effects of the stigma of mental retardation on the affected individual, due to a lack of social and professional competence and an inability to be independent in all aspects of social life without supervision or oversight from others.

-Sensory Stigma: This applies to individuals who have deficiencies in one of their senses, particularly hearing and sight.

-Linguistic Stigma: This is associated with defects in language and speech usage, leading to psychological effects on the stigmatised person as an inevitable consequence of their inability to interact with others, along with feelings of inadequacy due to experiencing much social embarrassment during speech. This results in social reactions sometimes characterised by ridicule and boredom from listeners.

-Racial Stigma: This is associated with differences in lineage, nationality, and religion within the same society. The racial discrimination that previously existed in the United States is perhaps the greatest evidence of the extent to which racial differences dominate many societies.¹⁷

-Criminal Stigma: This is the process that attributes errors and sins indicative of moral degeneration to people in society, describing them with odious qualities or traits that bring them shame or generate rumours.¹⁸

3. Sociology of Social Stigma Theory:

There are those who trace the theory of social stigma back to Émile Durkheim in his discussion of suicide in 1897, where Durkheim considered crime not merely a violation of the law but an act that primarily offends society. Durkheim viewed stigma as fulfilling society's need for control and behavioural regulation. However, many researchers consider Frank Tannenbaum, an Austrian-American sociologist and historian, as the founding father of stigma theory, which emerged in 1939 in his book "Crime and Community." He developed his theory through studies of delinquent youth and concluded that the criminal individual does not differ in their tendencies and motivations towards crime from the non-criminal individual, and that the classification and labelling process carried out by society leads to greater participation and integration into the world of crime and deviance, with the individual adopting delinquency and deviance as part of their identity. Tannenbaum's solution was not more stigmatisation but rather "the dramatisation of evil," as he termed it. This theory was later developed by a group of sociologists and social psychologists, including George Herbert Mead, who established the theory through the idea of self-construction based on signals the individual receives from society and its view of them, particularly in his book "Mind, Self, and Society" published in 1934. This was followed by several attempts, including the study by American physicist and sociologist Thomas Scheff on mental illness in 1966, which demonstrated the relationship between madness and social stigmatisation processes. Scheff believed that madness is a label or attribute given to a person whose behaviour deviates from prevalent behavioural patterns in society classified as normal. Once a person is classified as "mentally ill," they receive socially stereotyped responses that are usually negatively oriented. These stereotyped responses classify the individual into a social position that requires them to adopt and perform a specific role through the social templates defined for the mad person. Over time, the person begins to internalise the role and commit to the required behaviours and roles socially demanded, and later, the role of the mentally ill person becomes the central identity of the individual. Thus, mental illness and madness can be considered a social position that requires predetermined stereotyped behaviours and grants a set of subsidiary rights, exemptions, and justifications. According to Scheff, admitting a mentally ill person to a hospital reinforces this social role and their self-perception; once placed in an institution for the mentally ill, the person is classified in the category of the insane and mentally ill, making it difficult for the deviant person to return to their previous social position. Thus, they are socially condemned to submit to and surrender to the new role.¹⁹ Among the founders of the stigma concept is also sociologist Edwin Lemert, known for establishing the concept of secondary deviance. For Lemert, primary deviance occurs first, and he developed a classification of the stages of deviant behaviour development, starting with the initial deviant act and ending with the individual's acceptance of the social status assigned by society after repeating deviant behaviour.²⁰ This returns to the idea that stigma is due to psychological rather than social reasons, but the majority of researchers confirm that it is due to social causes.²¹ Similarly, Howard Becker, who is considered Lemert's successor in stigma theory, first presented his ideas in an article titled "The Marijuana User" in 1953, followed by the book "Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance" in 1963, which focused on marijuana users and societal reactions towards them. Chapters three and four of "Outsiders," first published in the American Journal of Sociology in 1953, explained how marijuana users were classified as social deviants. Becker viewed that society creates crime by establishing rules prohibiting their violation, and society creates the deviant criminal through successfully stigmatising and labelling an individual. His final picture became clear through his book "Marginals" in 1993, in which he argued that the process of stigmatising an individual as deviant does not require more than the individual committing a single crime to be stigmatised.²² As for Erving Goffman, a Canadian-born sociologist, he is considered one of the most prominent figures in stigma theory, with his views appearing in the book "Stigma:

Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity" published in 1963. The stigma of disgrace and its synonyms conceal two perspectives: does the stigmatised individual think their difference is known or visible in the place, or do they believe their difference is unknown and not perceived by those present? There is a difference between the two situations. In the first, the individual is considered discredited; in the second, the individual is discreditable. According to Goffman, there are three types of stigma of disgrace: first, frightening body deformities; second, defects in personal character as perceived by others, which appear as a lack of will, tyranny, unnatural feelings, rigid beliefs, and dishonesty, inferred from records of, for example, mental disorder, imprisonment, drug addiction, homosexuality, suicide, or extreme leftism. Finally, there is the tribal stigma of race, nationality, and religion, which can be transmitted from generation to generation and contaminates all family members. However, in all cases, the stigma of disgrace has the same social attributes—the individual who could easily be accepted into the circle of normal social relations possesses a trait that can attract the attention of some they meet, who then distance themselves, gradually destroying their rights due to these traits. It contains the stigma of disgrace, and the unfortunate difference from what we expected. For us, and those who do not distance themselves negatively from these particular traits—whom I may call the "normals"—our attitudes and behaviour towards the stigmatised person are well known because these interactions are governed by social goodwill and should be improved. We believe that any person with a stigma of disgrace is not a human being. Based on this assumption, we will practise all forms of discrimination, through which we will effectively reduce, even unconsciously especially, for this person, explain their inferiority, and justify that they are dangerous. We build an ideological theory from the stigma of disgrace, which is sometimes used to activate institutional hostility based on other differences, class differences for example. We use everyday terms to identify the stigma of disgrace, such as bastard, imbecile, cripple, source, pictures, and metaphors. We tend to think often of the original meaning of these words. We are prone to assume in a series of words—not without specialisation at the same time—that there are desirable competencies but not the required qualities in many cases.²³ However, the modern idea of stigma owes a great deal to Goffman, who considered the stigma of disgrace as fixed on the construction of social identity, and then people associated with a state of stigma move from a normal state to a null or discredited social status. In his original discussion of stigma, Goffman included psychological and social elements, but his ideas were primarily used to analyse the psychological impact of stigma on individuals. This created an understanding of the psychology of stigma that focuses on the process by which stigma is internalised and shapes individual behaviour. However, this excluded consideration of how social life and relationships are changed by stigma.²⁴

Schur (1973) and Spector and Kitsuse (1977) also pointed to the relationship of inferiority that strips the individual of full social acceptance. Research in this field has focused primarily on the problems resulting from stigmatising individuals and groups, and on the adaptation mechanisms they use to confront these problems. The stigma attached to an individual may be severe, such as infection with sexually transmitted diseases, or documentary (a criminal record), or relational (bad company), whether attributed or acquired. Stigma is the process that causes the attachment of negative meanings to an individual, describing them with odious attributes that bring feelings of inferiority. The stigmatisation process includes more than just the formal act by formal and informal institutions towards the individual who misbehaved or showed any notable deviation from other members.²⁵

4. Interpretation of Stigma Theory:

The Beginnings of Stigma Theory: Stigma theory emerged in the early 1970s in the United States as a result of the criticism directed by followers of the critical conflict perspective at theories that were prevalent before the 1960s.²⁶ Some initial ideas of this theory can be found in the writings of Richard Quinney and William Chambliss, who pointed out that those who hold power in society use their influence to direct criminal law for their private interests, while the deviations of the lower classes face severe punishments.²⁷ The emergence of this theory in America can be attributed to internal social changes and academic reasons. Internal reasons include racial inequality, segregationist policies, civil rights movements, the Vietnam War, student movements that began in France and spread to America, liberation movements in Third World countries, and Kennedy's era with his declaration of war on poverty and the call for the Great Society. These and other factors prompted some thinkers to shift attention from the criminal, their environment, surroundings, and associates to the role of power and its misuse against certain groups, especially poor racial groups. As for academic reasons, as previously mentioned, it emerged from the Chicago School, particularly in the works of Mead, Cooley, and Thomas, as well as students of that school in the 1940s and 1950s, especially Becker, and also the works of Lemert and Merton's concept of the self-fulfilling prophecy. These scholars focused on the

importance of social interaction among individuals, its effect on the self, the vision of others, and their reactions towards people, and the meanings of those reactions associated with the act. That is, the person responds to the meaning of the act (stigmatisation) and not the act itself. This is confirmed by Cooley's theory of the "looking-glass self," which emphasises that we see ourselves through taking the role of others, focusing the individual on the self, how it appears, and how we perceive our actions through our expectations of what others see in us.²⁸ Because stigma is a social process not attributed to the deviant act itself, the act does not determine what is deviant and what is not; rather, it is the social reaction to the deviant act. In other words, stigma is linked to the social reaction to the deviant act, not the act itself. Stigma involves two parties: first, the deviant act itself; second, the social reaction towards the act. What happens after determines deviation from non-deviation—that is, continuation in deviation or not. The individual then moves from one status to another, from normal to deviant, after their relationships with the normal weaken and their relationships with deviants strengthen. In another sense, deviation does not result only from violating rules, standards, and social values (though this is not denied) but is also a product of stigma. The deviant act occurs and is stigmatised, the stigma transfers to the act, then to the individual actor as a result of their deviation. The individual then moves to a specific category within this new stigma, carrying new implications—the individual carries the content of the new stigma (deviant or criminal). This leads to losing their previous social status and acquiring a new social status against which society is biased. Consequently, this bias transfers to the individual themselves, so society becomes against them, and they adopt this new status, the new role, and all the symbols and new attributes.²⁹

Stigma theory, which assumes that labelling someone as deviant reinforces their deviant behaviour, gains particular importance because it posits that criminal or upright behaviour is not due to innate origins. Proponents of this perspective are concerned with how certain patterns of behaviour came to be defined as deviant and the reasons for applying this label to certain groups rather than others.³⁰ Stigma can also be considered a link to inhuman or degrading treatment, as stipulated in instruments including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 07), and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Article 16). Inhuman or degrading treatment is interpreted as extending beyond causing physical pain to include psychological suffering. In cases of degrading treatment, humiliation plays a more significant role than the severity of suffering, indicating close connections to how the experience of stigma is lived.³¹ Proponents of this theory consider deviance as a social construct, thereby excluding the rules, conditions, attributes, and individuals, with society's reaction acting as a separator between deviant and non-deviant. Both behaviours may be similar, and deviant behaviour may not exist or be real. As Becker, one of the most famous stigma theorists, states, the reaction that believes in the existence of deviance is what creates deviance.³²

5. Dimensions of Stigma:

Jones and colleagues identified six dimensions of stigma:

5.1 Concealability: This property refers to the extent to which the attribute can be hidden.

5.2 Course: This property refers to whether the stigma condition can be reversed over time, and irreversible conditions provoke more negative attributes from others.

5.3 Disruptiveness: Refers to the extent of stress caused by the stigma.

5.4 Aesthetics: Reflects what is attractive or pleasing in perceiving someone and what the mark causes in terms of provoking a natural reaction of disgust.

5.5 Origin: Refers to how perceived responsibility and the circumstances of a condition appear, which have a significant impact on others' unpleasant responses or punishment towards a specific act.

5.6 Peril: Refers to the feelings of danger or threats caused by the mark in others. Threat refers to fear of actual physical danger.

The stigmatisation process occurs through isolating the individual from society and their surroundings, excluding them from others, and attaching negative and socially undesirable attributes, leading people to avoid them and stay away from them.³³

6. Models of Stigma Levels

Corrigan and colleagues presented four levels:

1. First Level: Awareness of Stereotypes: The stigmatised individual becomes aware of negative stereotypes in contexts related to their group, e.g., "I believe people see me as less competent."
2. Second Level: Agreement with Stereotypes: Individuals in a stigmatised state agree with and express stereotypes towards individuals in the stigmatised group, related to the group's context, e.g., "I agree with people that I am less competent, and that makes me uncomfortable."
3. Third Level: Application: Individuals apply the negative beliefs formed by the group about themselves, e.g., "Because I am..., I am less competent."
4. Fourth Level: Harm or Damage: This presents tangible results, e.g., "low self-esteem."³⁴

Table 1. Sociology and Psychological Approaches to Stigma Through Four Categories.³⁵

	Micro Level (Psychology)	Meso Level (Social Psychology and Cultural Sociology)	Macro Level (Sociology)
Causes	Physical and mental disorders, social motives and effective incentives	Interactional and symbolic motives, cultural motives, stereotypes	Social closure, institutional practices and social environment, discriminatory laws
Contexts	Body, mind, perception, schema	Individual perceptions and attitudes, personal relationships	Policy, law, neighbourhood, workplace, built and natural environment
Consequences	Mental illness, stress, physical illness	Self-esteem, identity, value, symbolism	Group differences in mental and physical health, inside/outside group membership, economics and social inequality
Responses	Physiological coping, individual management	Personal withdrawal, psychological and social resources, cultural refra	Social movements, institutional and organisational change, policy and legal change

7. History of Social Stigma and Women:

Women's status as social beings changes with changes in time and place. They are described with noble titles at times and ugly ones at others, depending on historical philosophical thought—as weak, as a beautiful devil, as a sacred angel, and as a being without reason at times. Their nature and role are elevated and degraded. In past eras, they were marked with meaningful signs on their bodies by the Pharaohs, Indians, Greeks, Romans, and Chinese. They were deprived of education and culture, having no opinion in life, family, or society, fulfilling needs inside their homes, bought and sold by their masters, with no freedom, status, right, or inheritance. The man had authority over their wealth, marriage, and divorce, except for the upper classes who were fortunate to be esteemed as goddesses of beauty, love, and fertility. With changing civilisations, they mixed with men, and vice was permitted (in paganism). In Sparta, they had no right to property, only freedom to participate in art, education, and sport. Romans considered them intellectually deficient, unqualified to sign contracts, wills, or give testimony, and not eligible for public office except those deemed natural. The head of the family had absolute authority to own her and what she owned and to sell her until death; the law was amended to address this. In Egypt's history, women managed family affairs in the absence of the breadwinner, with rights to property, inheritance, work, contracting, practising industry, commerce, and judiciary, and to propose to whomever they wished. They occupied high state positions—mayor, king, god, priest—like Cleopatra and the Great Mother Isis, the throne's owner. Among the Babylonian Sumerians, women were associated with the temple, powerful, but without the right to divorce—that was the man's authority—as was

the house, land, and property. They had the right to inheritance and work as a source of livelihood upon their husband's death. Among the Assyrians, the king and authority belonged to man, who could deprive and divorce as he wished. The Jews considered women a curse because of the temptation of Adam (peace be upon him). In the Torah: "I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare... one man among a thousand I found, but not one woman among them all." The daughter is a servant to her father in Jewish sects; he could sell her as a minor, and she would not inherit unless he had no male offspring, or unless he donated to her in his lifetime, distinguishing between man and woman. Christianity, as an extension of Judaism, found it difficult to eliminate its influences in Christianity and what rights it granted to women, after men of religion doubted that she could be a human being—she was a curse on humanity and the source of all evils. Meanwhile, Indians believed she had no right to life after her husband's death, so she was burned with his corpse; if she fled, an eternal curse would befall her. As for Henry VIII, King of England, he forbade her from reading the Holy Book, and she had no right in 1850, not considered a citizen but a dependent of her father and husband until 1882. In China, she was worse for man, with no right except inheritance and obedience to her father, husband, and his family after his death. In pre-Islamic Arabia, they practised female infanticide.³⁶ Islam and the Quran forbade infanticide³⁷ and granted her status, freedom, inheritance, and choice of husband. She practised professions, gained appreciation for participation in pledge of allegiance and military campaigns, and the right to learn and teach religion, with her specific characteristics and the role she was created for. Islam opened horizons for earning, creativity, and financial independence, affirming her eligibility to conclude contracts of sale and purchase, currency exchange, and supported her socially, economically, and commercially. She carried the whip to discipline and forbid wrongdoing. They participated in battles, including female martyrs of Islam. But after the prophetic era, society and its view of her changed, as conflict, corruption, wars, and instability prevailed, and standards and perceptions that affirmed discrimination against women prevailed.³⁸ The woman subjected to stigma experiences a painful psychological state, especially when the stigma is lies and slander. This is illustrated by Aisha (may God be pleased with her), describing the psychological state that befell her when she was subjected to stigma in the incident of slander, where she said: "I cried that night until dawn, my tears would not stop, nor could I sleep, then I continued crying."³⁹

8. Types and Causes of Social Stigma Against Women:

8.1 Psychological Stigma: These are material, moral, or verbal threats, direct or indirect, related to the person wrongly followed, including stigmatisation due to actions of some branches of the family, with the stigma remaining attached to the family even if they did not commit any sin. This makes the woman stigmatised for a mistake committed consciously or unconsciously. The psychological state of the stigmatised person may lead them to a behavioural state that might result in deviant behaviour or perhaps return them to previous behaviour, aiming for revenge against society or escape from lived reality. "Stigma is essentially a psychological state, and this state is followed by a specific behaviour, where the person acts according to the stigmatised state. Stigma moves from the outside—outside the individual—to the inside—inside the individual themselves—here it moves from one psychological state to another, followed by specific behaviour. That is, it produces a specific feeling for the concept of stigma and turns against the self-concept, so the individual re-evaluates themselves, leading to deviant behaviour, or in short, deviant behaviours, including deviant behaviour."⁴⁰ Therefore, stigma may be a reason for the deviance of the stigmatised person or their return to crime again. Among the greatest figures subjected to stigma were the prophets, peace be upon them, the last of whom was Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), who was stigmatised with many labels: madman, soothsayer, liar, sorcerer, and others. Regarding traditional societies practising psychological stigma, which still give great weight and consideration to marrying off their daughters, this matter still constitutes a high value in society. A girl's spinsterhood and delayed marriage are not among the customs of Algerian families, who express this through rejection and embarrassment. The status of a girl remains ambiguous unless she marries and gives birth. **The divorced woman is not in a better situation than the late-marrying woman; the divorced woman becomes a "thayyib" (a woman who has been married and divorced/widowed) after being a virgin. Before marriage, virginity threatened the family, and after divorce, virginity took on another meaning that also threatened the family. The value of honour and reputation is of great importance to the female body in most traditional societies, and this value is part of the symbolic capital, as Bourdieu would say, for both men and women. Although a woman's honour is a personal matter concerning her, it represents a symbol of the honour of the entire kinship group. Despite the female occupying a secondary, even marginal, social status compared to the male, the prestige and social standing of the kinship group depend on the female's behaviour

and the extent to which she observes moral principles more than on the male's behaviour. The value of female honour is linked and encapsulated in the idea of "the hymen" or "virginity." Therefore, all measures should be taken to protect and preserve virginity; the female body must remain closed to any attempt by a man to violate her virginity. The status of women in Arab societies and Algerian society in particular has been defined by strict moral norms expressed by the tribe in the early formation, then the family, then the community. Consequently, female upbringing and morality were the discourse of groups for weighing male status. Thus, honour was presented in Arab societies as an indicator carrying the male's status through their strength in proving their honour among the group.⁴¹ A woman's virginity in Algerian society has been and still is a source of constant anxiety and fear for the family, where early marriage for the girl was the most appropriate solution to relieve fear and anxiety and the surest way to preserve the family's honour. This has social significance because Algerian society is a patriarchal society that practises a type of symbolic authority, as Pierre Bourdieu said: "it is authority that depends on a style of euphemism and concealment and cannot achieve its supposed effect and implement it effectively and positively except through the cooperation it must receive from the majority of people concerned, to whom this reality appears illusory and they do not acknowledge it."⁴²

8.2 Sexual Stigma and Femininity: Sexual stigma focuses particularly on women. The moral division between spirit and body and male and female has constituted societies due to the absence of confrontation, emotional deprivation, and prevention from achieving the feminine self. This resulted in the classification of functions, professions, and activities and their relationship to the social status defined for women's roles—a division based on sex and cultural-biological thought. Sex, from the perspective of customs and traditions, involves respect for each sex towards the other. The difference in women's physical and emotional structure from men directs the stigma of submission and weakness towards women and the stigma of power and control towards men. Additionally, women's emergence and occupation of sensitive positions and professions in education, health, administration, are based on their social upbringing. These structures result in behaviour that determines the future and affects and supports the phenomenon of stigma, both positive and negative. Over time, stigma has transformed into a desire that led to paralysis and freezing of women's capabilities and preventing them from reaching their goals, due to their isolation. It affected them psychologically and socially and undermined their characteristics. She is half of society, yet she is rejected, to become a burden upon it, and she strives to be productive rather than consumptive. Durkheim divided work and functions between the sexes in an unnatural, unbalanced, and unequal manner. Equality means women's contribution to productive work outside the home through various opportunities and the resulting mental bias and competition between the sexes, and the stigma—racial, criminal, sensory, auditory, material, economic, or otherwise.⁴³ Studies in Algerian society confirm that despite the material development it has experienced, its view of women remains traditional—the view of fathers and grandfathers governed by traditional standards. No matter what educational positions women reach, they remain associated with the home, husband, children, honour, and virginity. The Algerian individual's mentality remains captive to a traditional cultural heritage that is not easily changeable. This is, as social analyst Zoubir Arouss said: "Algerian society evolves at two speeds: a very fast material speed, and a speed **related to values and morals, which is slow, heavy**, and transformative. Women in Algerian society, regarding their material presence, have taken a very developed and rapid position. By material aspect, we mean women's status in society and their presence in jobs and laws organising this presence professionally, politically, and socially. Some sectors are almost feminised, such as education, health, media, and judiciary, but women in these fields did not enter as women; rather, they entered because they obtained qualifications enabling them for these functions, and as a result of material development at the level of education and laws."⁴⁴

8.3 Physical Stigma: The stigmatisation of women related to their physical and congenital attributes results in self and social rejection or acceptance. It reflects the practice of pressure to exploit, shun, or abandon her—for thinness, obesity, overweight, illness, skin colour, facial features, divorce, or body shape.⁴⁵ Stigma is a linguistic, cultural, intellectual, racial, professional language for a role she performs, or a prison she entered, or economic need. The stigma of obesity and excessive weight goes back to Juman and others in 1961 and 1960 for their interest in overweight children suffering from others' discrimination. Obesity is defined as a flaw (Flaw) that makes its bearer feel rejected and unwanted, resulting in negative responses and lack of self-esteem. The stigma of obesity affects emotional relationships, friendships, and marriages, and constitutes social rejection, as it may be a cause of spinsterhood and a distinctive mark. The person interacts with it, aware of its danger—whatever its type—and tries to control it, to avoid the discrimination, blame, laziness, gluttony,

recklessness, and weak will that result from it. A study by Latner and Stankard⁴⁶ showed that people with obesity suffer from depression, suicidal tendencies, and a desire to separate from spouses, due to the insults and harmful comments they receive that degrade body image and self-esteem. It also showed that men respond less than women to the laws of stigma due to their rebellion and disregard for cultural custom, while Sharia and Sunnah reject ideas of mutual insult and boasting about appearance over substance, except what leads to beneficial speech and good deeds.

Sociologists have given clear attention to the importance of the body and its relationship to the social environment, such as the French sociologist Émile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, and Robert Hertz. They went beyond this to interest in "the social meaning of the body", where the body is no longer a purely physiological entity but has become an entity reflecting diverse social meanings resulting from this body's interaction with the surrounding social environment.⁴⁷ This leads us to say that "women's delayed marriage or divorce" is met with several meanings attributed by the group. Many Arab and Algerian studies have confirmed that "delayed marriage for women is considered one of the social abominations". This is what researcher Raghdah Sharim concluded in a study on social attitudes towards unmarried women, indicating that marriage is known in all societies and that men and women usually marry at some point in their lives. She also found that a girl's delayed marriage makes society view her negatively with pity, diminishing her value and social status, regardless of what women have achieved in educational and professional advancement.⁴⁸ According to a study by Mustafa Butfinusht and Radiah Tawalibi, "early marriage raises women's social status, in addition to elevating their families' standing. Conversely, a girl's delayed marriage leads to anxiety and worry about her future."⁴⁹ Nasirah Amour confirmed that Algerian society views a woman who marries late with a low regard, manifest in criticism, disapproval, mockery, hurting her feelings, and doubting her morals... Dalilah Kawwash mentioned in her study that spinsterhood has a negative impact on the Algerian family and feelings of frustration among girls.⁵⁰ These studies confirm what was previously stated, that the problem is not so much about marriage as it is a "problem related to the woman's body for not being married". There is a defect attributed to her, a meaning imposed by society, and she is stigmatised as an "old maid" or "Bayra" (a dialectal term for an unmarried older woman). Suspicion surrounds her honour, as an unmarried female threatens the honour of the Algerian family, or as expressed in popular culture (with "Al-Nif"—meaning pride/honour). Honour is considered one of the important values due to its impact and association with female purity and cleanliness on one hand, and its connection to the continuation or cessation of her life on the other. Honour has great significance in the Algerian family, considered one of the fundamental values to be preserved, because its standing in society is measured only by this value. If this value is shaken, its status in society is shaken, and for this reason, the family's honour is linked to the girl.⁵¹ From the above, it becomes clear that society determines stigma through social consensus, establishing certain rules whose violation is considered deviance from the perspective of that society's construction. Deviance is not a property of the act committed by the individual, but rather a matter related to the social meanings attached to the act by society's culture and through the view of others. In other words, deviance is not a quality described of behaviour itself but an attribute that society attaches to a specific behaviour in light of prevailing values and standards.

Conclusions

This article addressed the issue of social stigma directed at women in the Algerian context through a sociological analysis based on the foundations of stigma theory as formulated by several of its pioneers, notably Becker, Goffman, and Lemert. The study proceeded from the hypothesis that stigma is not so much an individual trait as it is a product of social interactions that produce normative classifications contributing to identity formation and the reproduction of social hierarchy. The article also shed light on manifestations in Algerian society through examples that reflect the presence of value judgments and stereotypical representations in determining women's status and roles. The analysis concludes that stigma represents an indirect social control mechanism that perpetuates patterns of symbolic exclusion, which calls for rethinking the cultural structures and social standards that give it continuity.

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