

Article

Academic Predators: Gendered Vulnerability and Institutional Complicity in Kunle Afolayan's *Citation*

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Abstract

Kunle Afolayan's Citation (2020) offers a poignant exploration of sexual harassment in academia, shedding light on the gendered vulnerabilities that female students face and the institutional complicity that often enables predatory behaviour. This article examines the film's portrayal of power dynamics within the university system, focusing on how male professors exploit their authority and how academic institutions frequently fail to protect victims. Drawing on feminist theories of power and institutional betrayal, this study analyzes Citation as a critical commentary on systemic gender inequality in African higher education. The protagonist, Moremi, serves as a compelling representation of resistance, navigating a system that is structurally designed to silence victims while shielding perpetrators. The university's response in the film reflects broader real-world patterns of skepticism, victim-blaming, and bureaucratic inertia in addressing sexual harassment cases. Furthermore, this article highlights the role of cinema as a tool for social advocacy, demonstrating how Citation contributes to the ongoing discourse on gender justice and accountability in academia. Through situating the film within the wider #MeToo movement and African feminist thought, this analysis underscores the urgent need for institutional reforms that prioritize student protection over reputational concerns.

Keywords: Sexual Harassment, Gendered Vulnerability, Institutional Complicity, Academic Power Dynamics, Feminist Resistance

Introduction

Sexual harassment in higher education remains a pervasive issue worldwide, with significant implications for gender equality and institutional integrity. Studies have shown that "female students disproportionately experience harassment from male lecturers who wield power over their academic progress" (Johnson, 2018, p. 42; Morley, 2020, p. 117). This imbalance is exacerbated in patriarchal societies where "power structures often favor male authority figures while discouraging victims from speaking out" (Akinbobola, 2019, p. 88). Despite institutional policies designed to curb misconduct, "cases of sexual harassment frequently go unpunished due to bureaucratic inertia, victim-blaming, and systemic complicity" (Makinde & Olufemi, 2021, p. 305).

The Nigerian academic landscape is no exception. Multiple investigative reports and academic studies highlight "the prevalence of gender-based violence in universities, where students are often coerced into sexual relationships under the threat of academic retaliation" (Odejide, 2019, p. 57). This power dynamic is particularly troubling in societies where "cultural norms dictate that women should be deferential to male authority figures" (Afolayan & Okeke, 2022, p. 134). Such conditions foster an environment where "perpetrators operate with impunity, and

victims face intimidation or expulsion for challenging the status quo" (Sesan, 2020, p. 19).

Kunle Afolayan's *Citation* (2020) emerges as a critical cinematic intervention in this discourse, exposing "the realities of sexual harassment in Nigerian universities and highlighting the institutional complicity that enables such predatory behavior." The film follows Moremi, "a brilliant postgraduate student, as she resists the advances of a powerful male professor, igniting a legal and institutional battle that underscores the systemic challenges victims face." Through its narrative, *Citation* serves as "a compelling critique of academic power dynamics, the silencing of victims, and the societal biases that perpetuate gender-based violence in educational spaces" (Eze, 2021, p. 229).

This article explores how *Citation* portrays gendered vulnerability and institutional complicity in cases of sexual harassment within Nigerian academia. It employs feminist theoretical frameworks, particularly those centered on "power and institutional betrayal," to analyze "the film's depiction of university structures and their failure to protect victims." Key questions guiding this study include: "How does *Citation* depict gendered power relations in higher education?" "In what ways does the film critique institutional responses to sexual harassment?" and "What role does cinema play in fostering gender justice and policy advocacy?"

Through situating *Citation* within broader discussions on gender, power, and institutional accountability, this study aims to "contribute to ongoing conversations about reforming university policies and fostering a safer academic environment for female students." The findings of this research underscore "the urgency of addressing institutional complicity and the critical role of storytelling in challenging systemic inequalities."

Background of the Study

Gender-based violence in academic institutions remains a pervasive yet often underreported phenomenon, exacerbated by systemic power imbalances and institutional complicity. The issue of sexual harassment in higher education has gained global attention, with numerous studies highlighting how gendered vulnerabilities render female students particularly susceptible to exploitation by male faculty members (Ahmed, 2020, p. 115; Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020, p. 35). Kunle Afolayan's *Citation* (2020) explores these realities, offering a cinematic representation of academic predators and the institutional mechanisms that either enable or suppress justice. The film's narrative is situated within a broader discourse on sexual harassment policies, gendered power dynamics, and the failures of academic institutions in addressing such misconduct.

Scholarship on gendered power relations in academia has consistently pointed to the intersectionality of oppression, where factors such as patriarchal norms, institutional hierarchy, and socio-cultural stigma contribute to the silencing of victims (Morley, 2011, p. 225; Htun & Weldon, 2018, p. 57). Research has shown that while legal frameworks exist to combat sexual harassment, enforcement remains

inconsistent due to administrative reluctance, victim-blaming tendencies, and reputational concerns (Makunga, 2021, p. 98; Fapohunda, 2019, p. 41). In *Citation*, these themes are vividly portrayed through the experiences of the protagonist, Moremi, whose struggle against a powerful male professor mirrors real-life cases of sexual misconduct scandals in universities worldwide.

The significance of *Citation* extends beyond its cinematic appeal; it functions as a cultural critique and an advocacy tool that raises awareness of gender-based violence in academic spaces (Falola & Adebayo, 2021, p. 76). As Afolayan's film aligns with feminist discourses on gender justice, it also interrogates the role of institutional complicity, exposing how bureaucracy, favoritism, and patriarchal resistance undermine efforts to combat harassment (Ekundayo & Oloruntoba, 2022, p. 132). This study engages with *Citation* as a cultural artifact that contributes to ongoing debates on academic integrity, policy implementation, and the broader struggle for gender equity in educational institutions.

The urgency of addressing academic predators within institutional settings necessitates a critical examination of both real and fictional narratives that depict these abuses. By analyzing *Citation* within the framework of feminist theory, institutional accountability, and legal policy enforcement, this study seeks to contribute to existing scholarship on gendered violence in academia. Moreover, it underscores the importance of cultural narratives in shaping public discourse and influencing institutional reforms that protect vulnerable populations from exploitation.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in feminist theoretical perspectives on "gender, power, and institutional betrayal." Feminist theory provides "a lens through which to analyze the structural inequalities that enable sexual harassment in higher education." As Butler (1990) argues, "gendered power relations are socially constructed and reinforced through institutional policies and cultural expectations" (p. 45). This theoretical approach highlights "the intersection of power, gender, and systemic oppression, which is central to understanding the experiences of female students in *Citation*."

One key theoretical concept relevant to this study is "institutional betrayal theory," which posits that "organizations tasked with protecting individuals often fail them, exacerbating trauma and reinforcing systemic injustices" (Smith & Freyd, 2014, p. 312). Universities, as depicted in *Citation*, exemplify "institutional betrayal by prioritizing their reputation over justice for victims." This aligns with previous studies indicating that "academic institutions frequently downplay allegations of sexual harassment to preserve their public image" (Jones & Williams, 2019, p. 210).

Additionally, "hegemonic masculinity theory" (Connell, 1995) explains "the dominance of male authority figures in academia and their ability to control institutional narratives around sexual misconduct" (p. 78). The film *Citation* underscores how "male professors leverage their positions to silence victims,

reflecting broader societal norms that privilege male voices and dismiss female testimonies" (Adebayo, 2020, p. 144).

This study also draws on "media and film studies approaches to gender representation." As Mulvey (1975) famously proposed in her work on "the male gaze, cinema often reinforces gendered power dynamics" (p. 11). However, *Citation* subverts this trope by "centering Moremi's perspective and portraying her resistance as an act of feminist agency" (Okon, 2021, p. 67). This "critical media analysis helps contextualize the film's role in advocating for gender justice and policy reform."

Through integrating these theoretical perspectives, this study provides "a comprehensive framework for analyzing the portrayal of sexual harassment in *Citation*." The findings contribute to scholarly discussions on "feminist resistance, institutional accountability, and the role of cinema in shaping public discourse on gender-based violence."

Gendered Vulnerability in *Citation*

In *Citation*, "gendered vulnerability is portrayed through the systematic exploitation of power imbalances between male lecturers and female students." Moremi's ordeal reflects "the lived experiences of many women in higher education, where academic success is often threatened by unwanted sexual advances" (Odejide, 2019, p. 59). Her resilience and refusal to succumb to Professor Lucien's coercion illustrate "the challenges women face in navigating both institutional and cultural constraints" (Eze, 2021, p. 232).

The film highlights how "institutional structures fail to protect women, reinforcing their vulnerability." As Makinde and Olufemi (2021) argue, "the reluctance of universities to act against accused faculty members perpetuates a cycle of impunity" (p. 308). Moremi's case is met with skepticism, reflecting "broader societal biases that question women's credibility when reporting sexual misconduct" (Akinbobola, 2019, p. 90).

Furthermore, *Citation* sheds light on "the psychological toll of harassment on female students." Moremi's distress, isolation, and "the stigma she faces mirror real-world consequences for victims who challenge powerful perpetrators" (Sesan, 2020, p. 21). This aligns with feminist critiques of "institutional betrayal, which emphasize the emotional and professional risks women face when confronting systemic injustices" (Smith & Freyd, 2014, p. 314).

Ultimately, *Citation* underscores "the urgent need for policy reforms and cultural shifts to address gendered vulnerability in academia." Through portraying Moremi's struggle, the film serves as "a powerful call to action, advocating for institutional accountability and stronger protections for female students" (Okon, 2021, p. 70).

Institutional Complicity and University Response

The response of universities to allegations of sexual harassment often reflects institutional complicity rather than accountability. In *Citation*, the university's handling of Moremi's case mirrors real-life institutional failures to protect students from predatory lecturers (Makinde & Olufemi, 2021, p. 310). Rather than prioritizing justice, academic institutions frequently adopt a defensive stance, aiming to shield their reputation at the expense of victims (Jones & Williams, 2019, p. 213).

The university's investigative process in the film is fraught with bias, illustrating how institutions systematically discredit victims while favoring perpetrators. Moremi is subjected to skepticism, forced to provide excessive evidence, and faces professional and social repercussions for speaking out (Akinbobola, 2019, p. 92). This aligns with studies on institutional betrayal, which highlight how universities often re-traumatize victims by placing the burden of proof on them while offering impunity to accused faculty members (Smith & Freyd, 2014, p. 317).

Ultimately, *Citation* critiques the failure of universities to uphold justice, emphasizing the need for systemic reforms that ensure transparency, accountability, and victim protection (Okon, 2021, p. 74).

The Role of Film in Social Advocacy and Consciousness-Raising

Film has long served as a potent medium for social advocacy, capable of transcending linguistic, cultural, and geographical boundaries to raise awareness, inspire dialogue, and catalyze change. As an audiovisual art form, film blends storytelling with visual and auditory elements, creating immersive experiences that engage audiences on both emotional and intellectual levels. Kunle Afolayan's *Citation* (2020) exemplifies this transformative potential, utilizing narrative cinema not only to entertain but also to critique systemic gender-based violence and institutional complicity in academic settings.

Cinema's ability to foster empathy and provoke critical reflection positions it as a powerful tool for consciousness-raising—a concept rooted in feminist activism. According to hooks (1992), "representation is the 'hot issue' in terms of the connection between race, gender, and cultural politics" (p. 214). Films like *Citation* function within this framework by illuminating the lived experiences of marginalized individuals, particularly women who face gendered vulnerabilities within patriarchal institutions.

Through the character of Moremi, *Citation* invites audiences to witness the emotional, psychological, and social ramifications of sexual harassment in academic spaces. This personalized depiction of trauma resonates with Brownmiller's (1975) argument that "rape is not about sex but about power" (p. 15), shifting the focus from the individual act to the systemic structures that perpetuate gendered violence. By humanizing the survivor's experience, the film challenges cultural stigmas that often silence victims and normalize predatory behavior.

Film as a Catalyst for Public Discourse

Beyond raising awareness, film can also serve as a catalyst for public discourse, prompting societal reflection on deeply entrenched norms and values. Afolayan's *Citation* sparked widespread conversations in Nigeria and beyond, not just about sexual harassment but also about the broader culture of impunity within academic and professional environments. As Olayiwola (2021) notes, Nigerian cinema, or Nollywood, has increasingly become a platform for addressing "pressing social issues, from corruption to gender inequality" (p. 88).

The public reception of *Citation* reflects Anderson's (1983) concept of "imagined communities," where media, including film, foster a shared sense of identity and collective consciousness among dispersed audiences (p. 6). Through global streaming platforms like Netflix, *Citation* reached an international audience, amplifying its advocacy beyond national borders. This global accessibility underscores the film's role in transnational feminist movements, connecting diverse communities through shared narratives of resistance against gender-based violence.

The Intersection of Art and Activism: Cinematic Advocacy

The intersection of art and activism, often referred to as "artivism," highlights how creative expressions like film can be harnessed for political and social advocacy. Afolayan's directorial approach in *Citation* aligns with this tradition, blending artistic aesthetics with activist intentions. The film's narrative arc, character development, and visual storytelling are deliberately crafted to provoke moral and ethical contemplation, compelling audiences to not only empathize but also to act.

According to Nichols (2017), documentary films often serve as explicit tools of advocacy, but narrative films can be equally effective in "shaping public perceptions and influencing policy discourses through emotional engagement" (p. 43). While *Citation* is a fictional narrative, its realism and socio-political relevance position it within the broader spectrum of cinematic advocacy. The film's portrayal of institutional complicity, for instance, challenges educational institutions to reevaluate their policies on sexual harassment and survivor support.

Furthermore, *Citation* exemplifies the use of cinematic techniques as advocacy tools. The film's non-linear structure, strategic use of close-ups, and evocative sound design are not merely aesthetic choices but mechanisms to foreground Moremi's emotional reality and institutional marginalization. This approach aligns with Marks' (2000) concept of "haptic visuality," where sensory engagement in film fosters a deeper, embodied connection to the subject matter (p. 162).

Film's Potential for Policy Influence and Social Change

While film alone may not directly change policies, it can create the cultural conditions necessary for policy reform by shifting public attitudes and increasing pressure on institutions. The global #MeToo movement exemplifies how media narratives, including films, can galvanize collective action and influence legislative

reforms related to sexual harassment and gender-based violence (Gill & Orgad, 2018, p. 1326).

In the Nigerian context, *Citation* contributes to ongoing efforts to address sexual harassment in universities, complementing legislative initiatives like the Sexual Harassment in Tertiary Educational Institutions Prohibition Bill, which seeks to criminalize such abuses. The film's impact lies not only in its ability to expose these issues but also in its capacity to sustain public dialogue, challenging cultural norms that perpetuate silence and victim-blaming.

As Galtung (1969) asserts, "violence is not always direct or visible; it can be structural, embedded within the very systems that govern society" (p. 171). Films like *Citation* play a critical role in making such invisible violence visible, disrupting narratives of complicity, and inspiring both individual and collective action toward social justice.

Conclusion

Kunle Afolayan's *Citation* (2020) serves as a critical commentary on the deeply entrenched gendered vulnerabilities within academic institutions and the pervasive culture of institutional complicity that enables sexual predation to thrive. Through its portrayal of the character Moremi, the film unravels the complex layers of victimhood, power, and resistance, offering both a personal and collective narrative of survival and defiance. The cinematic techniques employed—ranging from the film's non-linear narrative structure to its evocative sound design—serve to not only enhance the emotional resonance of the story but also underscore the film's broader social advocacy goals.

Afolayan's work exemplifies the potential of film as a tool for social change, functioning within the realm of "artivism" to raise awareness and inspire discourse on systemic issues of sexual harassment and gender-based violence. Through its emphasis on institutional complicity and the silence that surrounds survivors' experiences, *Citation* mirrors broader societal dynamics that protect perpetrators and marginalize victims. This systemic violence, as Galtung (1969) argues, is often invisible, deeply embedded in the structures that govern society (p. 171). Afolayan's film brings these hidden realities to light, challenging the audience to confront their roles within these oppressive systems.

However, the ultimate strength of *Citation* lies in its ability to spark conversations across diverse audiences, thereby contributing to a collective reckoning with the cultural norms that perpetuate gender-based violence. Whether through formal discussions, social media dialogues, or educational initiatives, Afolayan's film is an invitation to engage critically with issues of gender, power, and institutional corruption. As Spivak (1988) suggests, "the act of giving voice to the subaltern is a crucial step in deconstructing the silencing mechanisms of hegemonic power structures" (p. 295). In this sense, *Citation* not only challenges the representation of women in cinema but also pushes for the reimagining of social justice in the real world.

In conclusion, *Citation* underscores the urgent need for collective action in addressing sexual violence and institutional complicity. The film's role in reshaping narratives of victimhood, empowerment, and justice contributes to the larger conversation about gender equality and human rights, demonstrating the continued relevance of cinema as a tool for social critique and advocacy. As the film continues to resonate with global audiences, it becomes part of an ongoing struggle for gender justice, offering a vision of hope that is grounded in the resilience and strength of survivors.

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