

Popular Women's Magazines in Nigeria: A Study of Discourses of Gender in Identity Formation



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1. Introduction

This study examines popular Nigerian women's lifestyle magazines to ascertain whether and in what ways they reflect, reinforce or contradict the African feminist agenda in their content. This research is based on the fact that, due to its role in putting forward the African Womanist cause, African women's literature enjoys large analytical coverage at the hand of African feminist discourses, while other forms of media that produce knowledge for and on women, like that of women's lifestyle magazines, have not enjoyed the same level of inquiry. In addition, representations of women in the mass media, including and specifically women's magazines, have widely been challenged as detrimentally stereotypical and destructive to instances of positive identity formation in women, but these studies are largely quantitative in nature and based solely on images, ignoring other content. Based on text rather than images, this study seeks to take an interdisciplinary approach to women's magazines, applying context-specific feminist discourses from literature to the mass media to ascertain whether, like literature, Nigerian women's lifestyle magazines can act as a vehicle for women's positive identity formation. This inquiry is thus situated within broader mass media studies and specifically within the Nigerian media landscape.

1.1 Context of the Study

Out of various options for studying the mass media in Africa, Nigeria, with its new status as the largest economy in Africa, as well as its position as the disseminator of media cultural products in the the form of popular music, videos as well as print magazines to the rest of West Africa, the influential nature of the Nigerian media stands as an appropriate landscape for analysis. The political history of Nigeria, especially Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, serves to contextualize developments in print media in the country. The years preceding this change were characterized by censorship decrees and instances of detentions which greatly affected the output and stability of the industry (Olukoyun 2004:76). The democratization of Nigeria signified a period of growth in the print media with the launch of new titles in the newspaper sector which

has, in part, led to it becoming the biggest press community on the continent, followed by South Africa and Kenya (Olukoyun 2004: 73-74). Census figures at the end of the 1990's estimate the number of publications to be 78 regular newspapers, 45 magazine titles, 52 television stations and 31 radio stations (Olukoyun 2004: 74-75). However, print media circulation figures started to decline as early as the 1980's following the economic downturn that Nigeria was experiencing. Circulation figures are also highly affected by advent of online editions of newspapers and magazines as, due to the cost of print media in relative to the average income, online readership has become a preferred avenue for accessing these publications. Yet, despite this, the Nigerian Press Council estimated that, in 2013, Lagos State alone produced 40 newspapers and as many as 65 magazines (Nigerian Press Council, 2013: 73-103), suggesting that Nigeria's press community remains a resilient one on the continent, one that is looked to as a source of authority and influence over its neighbours in Anglophone West Africa.

The geographical, historical and social context of Nigeria relating to the media involves discussions surrounding the apparent North-South divide which informs arguments for a regional perspective of the print media since it is mostly located in Lagos. Although Lagos is the smallest state in Nigeria, the city itself is known throughout Africa as the economic, financial, commercial and industrial centre of the country, having served as the capital before it was moved to Abuja (Rasaki 1988: 4). This geographic concentration of commerce in Southern Nigeria in general and Lagos in particular is also reflected in its historical and social contexts which have implications for the media institutions, the bulk of which is located in Lagos. Due to its concentration in the south-west, the media has, according to Olukoyun (2004: 77) long been charged with not being pluralistic or not serving the entirety of Nigeria, only concentrating on the interests of the Yoruba society of which it is part. As each geographical region would arguably be driven by its own ethno-political motivations, accusations against the south-western print media of serving sectional interests are common in media discourses. Since the media serves as a tool for shaping public opinion by representing issues, people and events in society in a certain way and from a distinct perspective, such divides within the national media could have implications for what ideological discourses these publications espouse in their role as vehicles

for representation in society (Daramola et al 2013: 1). However, while such sectional interests do exist, the most successful publications are the ones whose content are orientated towards Nigerian culture as a whole. Therefore, even though publications might identify with the south-west in terms of their publication origin, news and magazine publications with a national outlook in their content are generally more popular than those that serve sectional interests. As it pertains to issues of perspective, popular women's magazines are then largely concerned with Nigerian women's culture as a whole, despite originating from the south-west.

Changes in African media after the advent of independence and democracy also contribute to the socio-cultural context from which the print media writes. Previously characterized by a large influx of foreign magazines, most notably from the British colony, the print media available on the streets of Nigeria did not reflect the interests of Nigerian people. Later on, some of these foreign publications were replaced by local magazines and newspapers, however, the content of these publications still focused on international media and celebrities. A discursive shift in the content of local publications from the focus on international content to local content did not occur until the late 1990's and thereafter. According to Ngugi (2007: 3) in his study on popular periodicals in Africa, the continent saw a resurgence of pride in all things African which was evidenced in the tendency to no longer have celebrities from abroad, but rather high achievers from Africa on the front covers of publications. This shift to more African-centered content signifies a shift towards claiming an African identity that is less dependent on Western images of Africa in order to define itself. The question of whether this African-centered perspective is also reflected in women's lifestyle magazines in Nigeria is paramount to the interrogation of gender representation of women in Africa. Do these magazines similarly exemplify this shift, creating periodicals suited to the African woman in her locale and, importantly, how is this achieved?

This localization of the media is also evident in other forms of print at the time, particularly in the production of novels, contributing to the corpus of publications focused on more domestic topics. Popularized in the 1950's and 1960's around independence by the first generation of writers such as Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, the English novel in Nigeria garnered a lot of

international attention in its explication of African issues pertinent to Nigeria's history (Umaisha 2010: 1). This was followed by a second generation that included female writers such as Flora Nwapa, followed by Buchi Emecheta in the 1970's among others, who, through their work in prose, delineated the spaces that women occupy while taking up issues relevant to the Nigerian context (Umaisha 2010: 1). The production of literary content that serves the interests of the local market by delineating the specific issues that contribute to their identity formation, illustrates that literary production in Nigeria played a part in the move away from Western images of Africa for self-definition. Within this shift, successive generations of female writers have continued to contribute to the reconstruction of African histories while exhibiting a commitment to the explication of women's roles in this history. The continuing success with which Nigerian novels have created literature suited to the African woman in her locale is exemplified in writers such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, whose novel *Half a Yellow Sun* was awarded the Orange Prize in 2007. A self-proclaimed feminist and known public intellectual, writers such as Adichie demonstrates to other forms of print how the creation of woman-centered content can be successfully achieved.

1.2 Statement of Problem

The centrality of the mass media thus lies in its function as a major vehicle of representation in society, one that has the ability to repress as well as to liberate (McQuail 2005: 81) pointing to the importance that should be placed on what information is circulated in a given society and to whom. The supposedly inherent influential power of the mass media and the significance of its content are then also pertinent in terms of how gender is represented to the consumers of media products. Especially relevant is the manner in which different depictions of gendered discourses are able to affect transformations in the lifestyle choices and socio-cultural tastes of women (Laden 2004: 248). While various attempts have been made by academic studies globally as well as within the African continent itself to account for gender disparities in various media-related settings, there exists a dearth of scholarship that accounts for an appreciation of African female gender representation as it is espoused specifically by media cultural products written by women, about women and for women in the African context.

In light of the existing literature and scholarship in Gender in Media and Communication Studies on female representation in the news media in Africa as well as the contributions from Literature Studies centred around female identity formation in African literature, it is important to consider what the effects of an interdisciplinary approach to African female identity formation are as it is expressed in print media such as women's lifestyle magazines. Considered from the African Womanist perspective developed primarily in the context of in Literature Studies, can the content of African Women's lifestyle magazines be seen to act as a vehicle for the positive representation of female identity formation in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general? Viewed within this framework, does media content produced by African women for African women positively contribute to the social processes involved in the formation of gendered identities in Africa? Does the inclusion of the content produced in popular women's print media within the discourse of Media and Communications Studies contribute to the dialogue on women's empowerment? This paper aims to delineate that, similar to the way in which African literature has become a vehicle for expressing a discourse on a specifically African form of female identity formation, African women's magazines in their role in the media as agents of social change, have the potential to contribute to a similar Womanist discourse and to popularize it.

Considering these questions in African feminist media research, this study aims to examine sectional women's media in the form of popular women's magazines from an African feminist perspective to determine what representations and meanings of femininity they produce. As the objective of this study is to analyse discourses and practices of femininity within the Nigerian context, it focusses on a textual analysis of content as well as focus groups and interviews to determine the extent to which magazine discourse is reflective of femininity in the everyday experiences of Nigerian women. Focusing on two leading Nigerian women's lifestyle magazines, *TW* and *Genevieve*, this study aims to answer the following two questions:

1. What ideas of femininity are produced in the content of women's lifestyle magazines and are these representations affirmed or contradicted in practice?

2. Do these images reflect, reinforce or contradict the African feminist agenda?

1.3 Social Significance of the Problem

Through the combination of Media and Communication Studies, Gender Studies as well as theories from Literature Studies, this paper will take an interdisciplinary approach to analysing representations of women in the media in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. With the success of Literary Studies in theorizing female African identity at the hand of context-specific criteria that is distinct from Western feminist considerations, the content of women's magazines are viewed from the Womanist methodological framework applied in Literature Studies.

Moreover, as women's magazines are understood to be representative of their female demographic in that they construct an implied reader who is at the same time produced and subjected by the text (Ballaster 1991: 2), an exploration of what these texts interpolate, aids in contributing to an understanding of the social processes involved in the formation of gendered identities in Africa. Due to the central role of the media in espousing societal discourses and influencing reform agendas (Gadzekpo 2009: 70), the inclusion of popular media such as women's Magazines is thus essential to the dialogue on women's empowerment.

1.4 Outline

The discussion in this paper is divided into five chapters. Chapter one outlines the importance of African feminist thought in the discussion of femininity in the African media. Following that, chapter two provides a discussion of the current representations of femininity in Nigerian literature and the media while reviewing previous research on the subject. Chapter three provides an outline of methods, including a methodological framework and a theoretical framework. Next, chapter four provides a thematic discussion of the findings from analysing discourses and practices of femininity. Finally, chapter five gives a conclusion to this study.

2. African Discourses of Femininity: the Significance of Womanism within in the Global Feminist Context

“There’s something inside us that makes us different from other people. It’s not like men and it’s not like white women.” (Morrison in Parker, 1979: 255)

2.1 Not just Woman but Womanist: The Necessity of Context-Based Feminism(s)

Feminism, as defined by Deepka Bahri in *Feminism in/and Postcolonialism* (2004: 200), “examines the relationships between men and women and the consequences of power differentials for the economic, social and cultural status of women [...] in different locations and periods of history.” Taking into account the divergent factors that impinge on women’s lives in the different locations and socio-cultural spaces they inhabit, such a definition of feminism implies the existence of a variety of feminisms, rather than just one all encompassing feminism, opening up a wealth of possibilities for women in the articulation of their existence across the globe. Consequently, as groups of women identify shared cultural and historical experiences within their unique social contexts, different options within the global feminist discourse become available. One of these feminist discourses, borne out of the shared experience of womanhood as it is lived in Africa, is called African Womanism. As an African feminist discourse, the conceptualization of Womanism is primarily based on its socio-cultural context and location in Africa and on the differences it exhibits to Western feminism and African American feminism. However, instead of viewing these differences as a phenomenon that divides the women of the world (Kolawole, 2002: 92), it can and should be seen as increasing the diversities and options, each providing a balanced representation of womanhood. In both its definition and assertion of difference, African Womanism provides a localized feminist perspective with its own distinct paradigms from which to approach gender in the Nigerian media context.

2.2 ‘Not just Woman, but Womanist’: Towards a Definition of African Womanism

Borne out of the need to delineate a space for African women that is able to facilitate their empowerment while sensitive to their socio-cultural context, African Womanism was pioneered

by a number of women scholars and writers in the 1980's. Among them the most well known are Chikwenye Ogunyemi who coined the term Womanism, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie's creation of *Stiwanism* (Social Transformation Including Women in Africa), and the Womanism of Mary Kolawole (Arndt, 2000: 712). While far from a complete accumulation of the discourses of femininity on the continent, they serve as a starting point from which to define the axioms of African Womanism. For both Ogunyemi (1985: 64) and Kolawole (2002: 96), African Womanism is steeped in the belief that gender can only be dealt with in the context of other issues relevant to African women, defining African Womanism as a discourse that, at its root, contextualizes the criticism of gender relations. With this definition in hand, African Womanism is positioned in such a way that is it able to delineate

“A specific African feminism with certain specific needs and goals arising out of the concrete realities of women's lives in African societies [...] examines African societies for institutions which are of value to women and rejects those which work to their detriment and does not simply import Western women's agendas.”
(Boyce Davies, 1986: 8-10)

This awareness of the peculiarities of African society thus allows for an approach to gender that does not denigrate the lived experience of women, but values their everyday experiences.

This consciousness of socio-cultural issues produces the pluralism and inclusivity that is characteristic of African Womanism. Firstly, the “pluralist struggle” (Kolawole, 2002:95) implies that gender is considered alongside issues including race and racism, colonialism and neocolonialism, imperialism, politics, national concerns, economic instability, ethnicity, class and tradition (Kolawole, 2002: 95; Ogunyemi, 1985, 64, 71; Arndt, 2002: 32). More specifically, Ogunyemi (1997: 4) posits that African womanists deal with particular issues such as interethnic skirmishes and cleansing, religious fundamentalism, gerontocracy and in-lawism, reaffirming that the myriad of levels of oppression faced by women in Africa have to be considered simultaneously towards women's empowerment. Gender alone is thus not the defining characteristic of womanhood, but one that exists in tandem with a host of other oppressive institutions. Secondly, African Womanism is inclusive of men in the gender struggle. This stems

from the fact that women recognize a “common struggle with African men for the removal of the yokes of foreign domination and European/American domination” (Boyce Davies, 1986: 8) while, at the same time, challenging men to be aware of those aspects of women’s subjugation that differ from the general oppression of African people as a whole. This resistance to separatism is explicated in Ogunyemi’s understanding that, if women consider themselves and their issues in isolation, they will inevitably find men unchanged in their consideration of gender issues. However, if men *and* women can identify that something is amiss within the system, they can work together to change the status quo (Ogunyemi in Arndt, 2000: 717).

This definition of a context-based African Womanism reflects the importance of the particular standpoint from which the complexities implicit in women’s navigation of gender issues in Africa are articulated. Its focus on local practices and history to contextualize women’s empowerment is illustrative of feminist standpoint theory which dictates that knowledge is particular rather than universal and that the location or standpoint of women are privileged (Cranny-Francis et al., 2007: 69-70). Taking the particular African feminist standpoint into account is pivotal to any analysis of gender on the continent as it provides a vantage point that reveals the truth of social reality. This African Womanist standpoint was first articulated within the pages of African women literary writers who connected African women’s everyday lives with the social institutions that shape life (Cranny-Francis et al., 2007: 69), thereby, through their communication of an African femininity, formed the basis for many early interpretations of what today constitutes African Womanism. Based on these interpretations from women’s literary writings and articulated from an African standpoint, African Womanism’s aim is thus, according to Ogunyemi (1985: 72) the dynamism of wholeness and self-healing that is evident in the positive, integrative endings of womanist novels on the continent. It is then due to this particular standpoint that a differentiation from Euro-American feminism is required to produce a balanced representation of African womanhood.

2.3 'Not Like White Women': Womanism as a Reaction to Western Feminism(s)

Due to its Africanist standpoint, Womanism can, in part, be seen as a reaction to Western feminism in its conception of 'woman' as a universal group. This is because, within Western feminism, gender is used as an explanation for all women's subordination and oppression. By using gender as the defining category that constitutes 'woman', Western feminism effectively universalizes 'woman' and her subordination, suggesting that this is sufficient to account for women across the globe in articulating their oppression (Oyewumi, 2002: 1). Nigerian scholar Oyeronke Oyewumi (2002: 1), however, questions this utilization of gender as the defining characteristic of women to the exclusion of other categories like race or class. She argues that using the category gender to the exclusion of other forms of oppression is insufficient to define all women, as gender itself is a social construct, one that will encompass different characteristics according to different social contexts. Therefore, because gender is inflected with other forms of oppression, the category 'woman' is not universal and cannot be called upon to account for the subordination of women worldwide (Oyewumi, 2002: 2).

The incompatibility of Western feminist theory to the African reality is exemplified in the negative effect its application has on the interpretation of women's literature produced in the third world. Mohanty (1984: 53, 57) suggests that such applications result in the Self/Other divide in which discourses of developing nations, as they are expressed in literature, are considered politically immature and underdeveloped. This is reiterated by Ward (1990: 85) who sees the feminist reading of African women's texts as reestablishing the image of Africa as the dark continent rife with primitive cultural practices that need to be guided by enlightened Europeans into more productive practices. These primitive cultural practices are then the source of women's oppression which can only be turned into more productive practices by Western feminist consciousness and education. However, African women writers time and again illustrate that women cannot be emancipated by the enlightened European approach as is seen in, among others, Tsitsi Dangaremba's coming of age novel *Nervous Conditions* where the application of Western feminist thought to the lives of women in Africa is detrimental to the empowerment of

women instead of liberating them as Western feminist theories would suggest. This application of Western feminism to the lives of women in African contexts thus result in what Oyewumi describes as “distortions, [...] and often a total lack of comprehension due to the incommensurability of social categories and institutions” (Oyewumi, 2002: 4). Because of this incompatibility, the label ‘feminist’ and the association with feminism itself has garnered a negative reputation throughout Africa. Often affiliated with radical feminism, this white woman’s feminism is stereotypically equated with the hatred of men, penis envy, the promotion of lesbian love, the rejection of marriage and motherhood, the non acceptance of African traditions and the endeavour to invert the power relations of the genders (Arndt, 2002: 54; Arndt, 2000: 710). It is due to these negative connotations that many African women writers and scholars actively disassociate themselves from the label ‘feminist’ and that any examination of gender in Africa needs to be sensitive to this standpoint.

2.4 ‘Not Our Bedfellows’: Womanism as Distinct from African American Womanism(s)

African Womanism’s particular standpoint results in a similar disassociation from African American conceptions of Womanism with which it is often confused. Predicated upon Alice Walker’s ‘Womanism’ and Clenora Hudson-Weems’ ‘Africana Womanism’, African American conceptions of Womanism rose out of the need to demarcate a space for black women to theorize their own existence, formulating a specific approach that focuses on black women’s identity (Arndt, 2000: 711). For Walker, a womanist is a “black feminist or feminist of color [...] who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually [...] committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female” (Walker, 1983: xi). Included in Walker’s definition of Womanism is the assertion that, as black women with their own distinct identities, womanists are not only concerned with gender issues, but also with issues pertaining to racial and socioeconomic oppression. For Hudson-Weems, ‘Africana Womanism’ also provides a space for black women to view their agency and empowerment as it is centered around African values, defining their agenda in a way that is reflective of their particular experiences of African culture. Hudson-Weems explicates the characteristics of ‘Africana Womanism’ as being “strong, family-centered in concert with the men in the liberation struggle, genuine in sisterhood, whole,

authentic [...] mothering, and nurturing” (Hudson-Weems, 1995: 18). Especially Hudson-Weems’ essentializing impulse that collapses ‘blackness’ to mean ‘Africanness’ sees an attempt to put forth Africana Womanism as a single African identity, an ideology that encompasses black people the world over (Johnson, 2008: 120).

However, while these images of African American Womanism do, at certain points in their definition, intersect with the concerns of African Womanism, the mere experience of being a black woman, of having a black identity, is not sufficient in the articulation of an African feminist identity. According to Nigerian scholar Chikwenye Ogunyemi (1996: 114) this supposed shared racial heritage overlooks African peculiarities and cultural diversity and is unable to account for issues relevant to African women and not to African American women:

“Issues like extreme poverty and in-law problems, older women oppressing younger women, women oppressing their co-wives, or men oppressing their wives. Religious fundamentalism is another African problem that is not really relevant to African Americans -Islam, some Christian denominations, and also African traditional religions. These are problems that have to my mind to be covered from an African-womanist perspective.”
(Ogunyemi in Arndt, 2000: 714-715)

Ogunyemi thus affirms the centrality of an African standpoint in the formation of an African feminist agenda since it is not just identity politics based on black womanhood, but the localized knowledge that comes from experiencing the African locale as a woman, that defines Africa’s feminist orientation. Due to the salient differences from even African American Womanism, Ogunyemi, like many of her contemporaries, articulates the need for the formation of an ideology that in no uncertain terms demarcates and emancipates African Womanism from both white feminism and African American Womanism (Ogunyemi, 1996: 114).

2.5 ‘Reading Like a Woman’: The Significance of Womanism in Meaning-Making

Any feminist investigation into discourses on women in Africa therefore necessitates the application of Womanist epistemologies to be able to come to an understanding of the representation of African women in their social context. Reading discourse from the African

Womanist perspective enables a process of fruitful meaning-making that aims to improve the situation for African women without any misconceptions (Arndt, 2002: 32). Such a reading, according to Susan Arndt (2002: 32) in her synopsis of the issues under consideration in African Womanist readings, is based on paradigms that include,

- An inclusivity of men in the gender struggle that sees men and women working together on a complimentary basis;
- An affirmation of motherhood and the family;
- A critique of patriarchal manifestations in the society under question that does not diminish African traditions, but considers which of these traditions are, or could hold benefits for women and which disadvantage women to such an extent that they should be abolished;
- A discussion of gender roles in the context of other forms of oppression, including racism, neocolonialism, imperialism, socio-economic exploitation and exclusion, gerontocracy, religious fundamentalism, and dictatorial and/or corrupt systems;
- An identification of the traditions and modern alternatives available to women which would aid in overcoming their oppression.

By valuing the everyday experiences of women, African Womanism forms sustainable ideologies and critiques that open up avenues for the exploration of African women's representation. In this way, African womanism stands as a discourse of African femininity that is able to redefine African women's participation in discourse while simultaneously making new meanings for women on the continent (Gqola, 2001: 15, 17). Following Arndt's summary of the main concerns of African Womanism, this study similarly utilizes these local forms of feminist knowledge in its analysis of the discourses of African femininity in Nigerian women's magazines in an effort for interpretations to be reflective of the African feminist standpoint.

3. Representations of Femininity in African Literature and the Mass Media: the Nigerian Example

3.1 Nigerian Women's Writing: Approaches to Literature for the Advancement of Gender Concerns

Posited as the pioneering texts from which the African Womanist epistemology emerged, Nigerian and other African women's literary writings are central to an understanding of the ways in which the African feminist discourse is constructed in women-centered texts. As this paper is concerned with whether Nigerian women's lifestyle magazines are similarly able to act as a vehicle for the positive representation of African femininity, the gender issues these women writers dealt with towards the establishment of a Womanist discourse stands central to the discussion. Delineating how writers took up the task of reconceptualizing the African woman in textual discourse, evolving to become one of the principal channels of communicating and (de)constructing images of femininity, women-centered media can similarly be evaluated for their expression of such a Womanist discourse.

The period surrounding the advent of independence in Nigeria in the 1950's and 1960's saw a surge in the production of African novels written in English. The infamous 1958 publication of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* signaled the start of a rich literary tradition that defined itself in opposition to the stereotypical images of Africans depicted in European literature such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*. Pioneering writers such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and J.P. Clark as well as successive generations of male African writers set out to correct these distorted representations by reflecting the everyday lives of African people in their works (Hewett, 2005: 76, Sylvester-Molemodile & Mba, 2010: 108). However, as Sylvester-Molemodile & Mba (2010: 112) observe, these works are definitively masculine and culturally aligned with the patriarchy, suggesting that, in their quest to place Africans at the center of their own narratives, these writers produced distortions of womanhood in the process. The rise of early women writers like Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta in the mid-1980's, and later Akin Adesokan, Chimamanda Ngozi-Adichie, Sefi Atta

and Adimora-Akachi Ezeigbo, saw feminist discourses gradually start to emerge, providing a counter-narrative to the faulty images of women in male-generated literature. Through their work in prose, early women writers sought to redress the misrepresentation of African womanhood in the literary corpus (Mekgwe 2007:166). Analogous to male novelistic interests, Nigerian women writers decried the degeneration taking place in the post-colonial state; they sought to expose the oligarchical regimes of the country; and lambaste the sub par performance of educational and social service infrastructures. However, in addition to these issues, women writers added the matter of limiting patriarchal frameworks under which women exist to redirect attention to the significance of the feminine element (Kroll, 2010: 137).

The import of Nigerian women's literature as a channel of communicating images of femininity is located in the fact that it was the first public medium to be appropriated for the explicit purpose of correcting misogynistic images of African womanhood. In its representation of discourses of femininity, it challenged a society that had placed limitations on women in an uncharacteristic way, a challenge that would later be taken up by a number of other mediums (Akung, 2012: 115). Nigerian women's literature created a site in which to locate an African discourse of femininity that is uttered by the woman herself, effectively rendering the African woman from the 'inside' (Solberg, 1983: 249). Through this unearthing of the feminine voice, women's literature was able to tackle the problems of misrepresentation firstly, by deconstructing gendered stereotypes and secondly, by reconstructing an image of African womanhood that is sensitive to African socio-cultural realities and traditions while communicating alternative avenues for forging an identity as a woman.

Firstly, concerned with the distorted stereotypes of African womanhood created by male literature, women writers like Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Chimamande Ngozi Adichie set out to provide a counter-discourse to outdated and misogynistic constructions of African womanhood through the use of tactics of 'appropriation' and 'inversion', effectively deconstructing entrenched stereotypes in their revisioning of African womanhood (Hewett, 2005: 80). This is exemplified in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, where the subject of violence against

women by men is presented from the perspective of a female character (Hewett, 2005: 80). By voicing the experience of physical violence as it is experienced by women, it is removed from the patriarchal lens, deconstructed and reframed within a feminine discourse, allowing the reader a look into the African woman from the inside. Similarly, Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* and Buchi Emecheta's *Joy of Motherhood* display appropriations and inversions that reject the conventional stereotypes of womanhood by voicing of women-centered perspective on motherhood. Both novels challenge the stereotypical images of ideal motherhood by unveiling the constraints and burdens that it places upon the woman (Sylvester-Molemodile & Mba, 2010: 112). As women writers give voice to, deconstruct and reformulate what it means to be a woman in Nigerian society, they break the stereotypes entrenched by the dynamic of patriarchy.

Secondly, women's novels communicate avenues for forging an identity as a woman that is sensitive to African realities and traditions. In reference to Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, Sylvester-Molemodile & Mba (2010: 108) note that these novels are progressive narratives that depict women as they move from forms of victimhood to instances of women's access to power within the socio-cultural and political realities of Nigeria. Moreover, Olufunwa (2012: 26) notes this development towards agency in the works of Sefi Atta and Chimamanda Ngozi-Adichie whose characters courageously respond to the prejudices and challenges that deem women inferior to men. In these journeys towards empowerment, women's writing create a space for women to negotiate the construction of their identities within their specific socio-cultural context. Adimora-Egeizbo's *Children of the Eagle* communicates how women bridge the gender gap they perceive as, while they work hard for change to achieve advanced, self-fulfilled gender parity, women continue to support the community and its conventions, constituting a discourse of femininity that is sensitive to the African socio-cultural reality and traditions (Sylvester-Molemodile & Mba, 2010: 114). Similarly, Nwapa's *Efuru* and Emecheta's *Nnu Ego* traverse patriarchal institutions in such a way that they are able to reach an understanding of the fact that other possibilities and definitions exist for women, suggesting that it is indeed possible to claim individuality as well as a place in society (Nadaswaran 2012: 147). Nigerian women's novels thus depict characters that adapt to their respective situations, changing inadequate

approaches when they are seen to be ineffective and bearing forward in the forging of their identities within their socio-cultural contexts, defining the terms of their existence themselves.

Finally, by delineating characters in their progression from stereotypical silence and docility to vibrant and assertive individuals, Nigerian women writers explore new dimensions of femininity on the continent, thus containing

"a body of ideas that underline the need for a positive transformation in society, such that women are not marginalized but are treated as full citizens in all spheres of life." (Mekgwe, 2007: 166)

and reflects their own, female-conscious social visions alongside their interrogation of their colonial legacy and domestic politics (Kroll, 2010: 143). Through their representation of femininity, the literary writings of Nigerian women can be seen as a mechanism for the early expression of an African Womanist epistemology.

3.2 'Turning the Other Cheek': Approaches to Media for the Advancement of Gender Concerns

The success of Nigerian/African women's literature to "correct and re-direct attention to their own ideals, worldview and to the significance of the feminine element" (Sylvester, 2005: 41), has led a number of scholars, among them Jonas Akung (2012: 114) to affirm that Nigerian women's literature has set the bar for exploring new dimensions that support the African woman's cause. While Akung sees this exploration as still residing within the realm of women's literature, the strides made for African women raise questions of whether these gains can and are being reproduced in other forms of women's media. The centrality of such an exploration is articulated by African feminist scholar Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, who undoubtedly affirms the media's power to make and unmake the image of women, a power which has undeniable implications for the progress of women in society (Ogundipe-Leslie in Daniel & Akanji, 2011: 227). So central is the media to women's development, that the world plan for the International Women's Year and Decade 1975-85, (Awe, 1991: 2) emphasises the need to explore the African media for its potential to be a vehicle for social change. The media's capacity to aid in removing prejudices and stereotypes and accelerating the acceptance of women in society in their new and

expanding roles, suggests it has a central role to play in the promotion of gender equality on the continent (International Women's Year and Decade 1974-85 In Awe, 1991: 2). Such a declaration would then suggest that, just as African women's novels situated itself as vehicles for the representation of a context-based African womanhood that aided in putting forward the woman's cause, women's media in Nigeria and Africa has the potential to do the same.

Gender approaches to Media and Communication Studies have, however, remained focussed on the statistical representation of women in the African media. Studies conducted by individual scholars and monitoring agencies such as the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) consistently find that African women are underrepresented as the reporters of news in print, radio and television as well as in decision-making positions like management, suggesting that women have limited say in how news is defined (Daramola et al, 2013; Gadzekpo, 2009). Selecting quantitative approaches to delineate the grim status of women, research into women in the media on the one hand, predominantly focus on workplace representations. On the other hand, statistical studies also extend to research on women as actors in media such as newspapers and news magazines when compared with men. Yet again, research across the continent indicates that women are underrepresented, with the GMMP finding that only 19% of news subjects in African media are female (Gadzekpo, 2009: 72), the same trend reflected in Nigerian studies (Okunna, 2005: 7-8). Focussed on numerical data, these quantitative studies do ignore what constructions of African femininity are being conveyed. In a move towards content-based analysis of African femininity in the mass media, gendered media scholarship has aimed to explicate what images of African women are projected and where these images can be found. A recent study by Nwaolikpe (2014) on women's photographs in Nigerian newspapers concludes that women's pictures are more likely to appear in lifestyle sections such as entertainment and fashion than politics, economy or education (2014: 46). In addition, the roles in which women are presented see them in terms of domesticity or sexuality, supporting the findings of Okunna's (2005: 9) study in Nigeria a decade earlier. Akin to the conclusions of other scholars and institutions such as the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women report (Morna: 2002), Nwaolikpe's study affirms the fact that the mass print media in Africa in general, and

Nigeria in particular, colludes in confining women to roles traditionally demarcated for them and actively objectifies and sexualizes them through negative stereotypical images (2014: 46).

While statistical studies such as these provide insights into some severe gender inequalities, it presents two problems. Firstly, these quantitative studies are centered around newspapers or news magazines while neglecting other forms of media. As they have established, the content on women in these media are, by and large, defined and produced by the men who make up the majority of the media workforce. Therefore, in order to locate alternative discourses on femininity, the gaze needs to be turned to other forms of media that are produced by women themselves and aimed at women as their receptors like that of women's sectional media so that representations of women constructed by women themselves can be evaluated. Secondly, while these quantitative studies are useful in delineating media-related gender issues on a global scale, its exclusive use of statistical measures make it unqualified to give a more meaningful account of gender portrayal (Bosch, 2011: 28; Opoku-Mensah, 2001: 31). Quoting Mattelart, Opoku-Mensah (2001: 31) suggests that, as the media are increasingly being implicated in the definition of reality in the representation of women, quantitative measures are unable to account for the meaning and significance of such issues. To account for these issues, Bosch (2011:29) proposes that methods in the analyses of women's media should be rooted in an interpretative paradigm to better explore the relations between knowledge and power. Such a paradigm would eschew statistical approaches in favour of qualitative methods to analyze women's media representation (Bosch, 2011: 29).

3.3 Representations in Women-Centered Media Content: Shifts in Methodological Approaches

Towards a more representative study of gender in the media, a small number of studies base themselves on qualitative rather than statistical methods, incorporating women-centered media like women's magazines. Such studies are able to provide a more in-depth analysis of how African femininity is constructed through their use of interpretative methods such as content analysis. Elizabeth Lownik's (2006) investigation into the prevalence of women's images depicting the Western beauty ideal in media and advertising in Kenya, serves as one of only a

few examples of research that include women's magazines from Africa. It focuses on the effect these images have on women's self-perceptions and self-evaluations by using qualitative methods, and finds that the prevalence of the Western beauty ideal in various forms of mass media consumed by young women result in poor self-image and a tendency towards eating disorders (Lownik 2006: 21). Using an interpretative paradigm, Lownik is able to explore the relation between power and knowledge and the implications this has for the everyday experiences of the women subject to these images. She finds that the Western definition of women's realities cause "disruptions across generations in the formation of cultural identity" in young women in Kenya (Lownik 2006: 9). As this cultural identity is specific to the African context in general and Nairobi in particular, Lownik's evaluation implicitly points to the need for an African approach to gender identity formation. It cautions that, while Western cultural norms are fast spreading across the globe within non-Western media, there exists a specificity within the African context that calls for its own set of criteria to be evaluated against, one that is not centered around Western feminist constructions of identity. Through the use of interpretative methods and the inclusion of women's alternative media, this study is able to more fully account for the significance and impact of women's realities as they appear in the media. Although both inclusive of women-centered media and interpretative in methodology, studies such as these are nevertheless limited in their ability to account for the significance and meaning that is produced by constructions of femininity. Firstly, they still narrowly confine themselves to pictographic images of women in the media, ignoring a wealth of other possible discourses. Secondly, as the pictographic subject under study is sourced from, among others, predominantly male-produced forms of media, it is not surprising that the significance of the female element cannot be located here. Therefore, focussing analysis on pictographic images in the mass media is not sufficient and calls for alternative feminine discourses in African media to be explored.

Moving towards an analysis of alternative representations of African women in women-centered media, Ghanaian scholar Opoku-Agyemang (2000: 49-60) explores how women are depicted to handle personal relationships as they are portrayed in textual narratives in the Ghanaian women's magazine *Obaa Sima*. Valuing the women's magazine as the object of study as both a popular

outlet for a clearly defined demographic of women readers as well as the fact that the gendered narratives under discussion are exclusively written for women by women, Opoku-Agyemang's study focuses on love stories to provide a counter-discourse to stereotypical representations of African womanhood in terms of love. Through qualitative content analysis, the researcher is able to outline a number of themes on womanhood that emerge, and concludes that women are depicted as characters who want to love and be loved on terms that obliterate their individual strengths (Opoku-Agyemang, 2000: 58). Ultimately, Opoku-Agyemang contends that, by limiting themselves to these narrow depictions of love, the women writers responsible for these stories miss an opportunity to "delve into the forces that have created their class and to propose changes to existing structures" (2000: 58), effectively missing an opportunity to act as a vehicle for the representation of African womanhood that forwards the woman's cause. Taking African women's magazines as the object of investigation, studies such as these can more confidently assume the gendered position from which the content is defined and produced. Furthermore, the application of qualitative methods allows for an evaluation of the meanings produced in these textual spaces and an assessment of how this space is used in order to delineate discourses on African femininity. That being said, the narrow focus on narratives and a limited theme like love to the exclusion of other content is not representative of the vast array of discourses that are produced in women in magazines, necessitating an examination of broader concepts.

Essentially, qualitative studies like those by Lownik and Opoku-Agyemang are stepping stones for broader and more meaningful interpretations of African femininity. Especially Opoku-Agyemang's focus on textual discourses in women's magazines is exemplary of the fact that alternative discourses have the capacity redirect attention to the feminine element in its production and critique. Evident from the discussion of these two studies is the fact that content analysis in African feminist media studies is lacking and limited in the subjects they analyse, providing the need for further investigation into what constructions of femininity are produced in women's sectional media. Women's magazines thus stand out as a site in mass media where African discourses of femininity might be found. Because the intended readership of these publications are more clearly defined than other forms of mass media, it allows for investigations

into the ways discourses of femininity are received by audiences and to which degree it represents their life views. African women served through these sectional spaces can thus be seen as the site in which to locate the communication of African women's concerns and explore new dimensions that support the African woman's cause. This is due to the number of ways that Nigerian women's lifestyle magazines intersect with that of Nigerian women's literary writings in its expression of an African feminist discourse. Just as Nigerian women's novels written by women, about women and largely for women, espouse discourses of context-based self-definition for women, Nigerian women-centered magazines can function in the same way. Women's magazines in Nigeria offers a space that mirrors the literary in terms of its gendered production, content and audience in the mass media. Therefore, Nigerian women's lifestyle magazines can be evaluated through a similar approach of text-based content analysis to ascertain in what ways their depictions of African femininity are similar or different from the literary. Ultimately, Nigerian women's magazines offers a space that can replicate the strides made in Nigerian women's literature in their early interpretations of a context-based African Womanism, thereby playing the same role as its predecessor in promoting the African feminist agenda to the audiences it aims to represent.

4. Analysing Discourses and Practices: Approaches to Gender Studies in Literature and the Media

A large proportion of feminist media research focussing on the depiction of women's realities work from the post-structuralist assumption that the media shapes reality. Media gender studies are thus concerned with what kinds of realities are being constructed for women as they produce and constitute understandings of the world (Gill, 2007: 12). Taking this constructionist view of the media into account, discourses of gender expressed in Nigerian women's magazines and how these expressions are received by audiences can be analysed to understand how cultural constructions are connected to patterns of inequality, domination and oppression (Gill, 2007: 7). To this end, a number of methods for data collection and analysis were employed.

4.1 Methods

4.1.1 Analysing Discourses in Nigerian Women's Magazines: Selection and Description of Sample

Two mass circulating Nigerian-based women's lifestyle magazines were selected following Hazell and Clarke's 2008 study based on two popular magazines. *Today's Woman (TW)* and *Genevieve* magazine were chosen due to their lasting popularity when compared with similar magazines on the market and the fact that their editorial teams are headed by women. Founded in September of 2007, TW is published monthly with a circulation of 5 000 copies per month as well as a high pass-on rate (*Today's Woman*, 2015). Similarly, *Genevieve*, founded February 2003, is a monthly publication with a circulation of 15 000 copies per month. The latter estimates their pass-on rate at 70% (*Genevieve Nigeria*, 2015). Since its inception, TW has had Adesuwa Onyenokwe as its woman editor while *Genevieve* is headed by Betty Ibrador who functions as CEO and Editor in Chief. The editorial of *Genevieve* is, however, problematized by employing contributing editors, assistant editors and editors, one of which has been male. For the purpose of this study, the editor responsible for the definition of content i.e. the gender role socialization that occurs, will be taken as the person writing the editorial of that issue of the magazine. Both

magazines focus on women's lifestyle and fashion and include cover and feature articles, articles on beauty, fashion, career, health, relationships and money matters as well as regular columns. The reader profiles for these magazines are quite similar in that their demographic include women from the ages of 25-60 who are well-educated and gainfully employed.

The study was based on a sample of 13 issues, 6 from *TW* and 7 from *Genevieve*. As online back issues were not available for either of the magazines, hard copies were locally sourced in Nigeria over a two month period. A range of issues were obtained from the publishers themselves in Lagos and supplemented by copies from readers. Issues for analysis were selected in a purposefully random fashion from all available issues of both magazines to yield a small sample size for in-depth qualitative examination and to ensure credibility (Patton, 1990: 178). For both *TW* and *Genevieve*, every second issue was selected, skipping special issues when they occurred. The rationale behind selecting the sample from the entire lifespan of the magazines rather than either focussing on all the issues in one year or a select issue from each year of its lifespan rests mainly on the availability of hard copies and the difficulty in obtaining them. The final sample thus includes the August 2009, May 2013, July/August 2014, November 2014, September 2015 and December 2015 issues of *TW* magazine and the May 2008, December 2008, March 2010, July 2010, June 2013, September 2013 and September 2015 issues of *Genevieve* magazine. As is evident from this sample, the availability of copies between the two magazines seldomly overlap, cluster around certain years and are not representative of the inception years of either of the magazines. Nevertheless, as this study is explorative and qualitative in nature, such a random, limited sample is sufficient for interpretative purposes and using issues from different years contributes to making the sample representative.

In all, a total of 44 articles (13 cover- and 31 feature articles) were selected for coding, 23 articles from *TW* and 21 articles from *Genevieve*. The selection of cover and feature articles was done firstly to limit the scope of the study to a small sample size following Stella Okunna's (2005: 7) selection strategy in her 2002 study of news magazines. Secondly, cover and feature articles are a mainstay of both *TW* and *Genevieve* and therefore ensures consistency across the

magazines and allows for a high degree of comparability. Thirdly, this purposeful limitation ensures consistency over time, as regulars and columns tended to change or be replaced, but covers and features remained. Following Clarke (2010: 172) in her study of *Today's Parent* magazine, cover and feature articles were predominantly identified in the index, with the exception of the August 2009 issue of *TW*, the June 2013 and September 2013 issues of *Genevieve* where cover articles were not explicitly identified in the index. In these instances, cover photos were replicated in the index and accompanied with a page number as well as being tagged as 'cover' on the articles themselves. In addition, if, on occasion, regular columns were categorized under the 'features' section in the index, they were disregarded on the basis that they were not labeled as 'features' within the pages themselves where the article appears.

In terms of analysis, this study is qualitative in nature and utilizes a deductive method of content analysis. It favours qualitative over quantitative measures to delineate the contextual meanings that are produced in narrative data and thereby provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study (Hseih & Shannon, 2005: 1278). These meanings cannot be produced through the limited numerical analysis of texts based on the frequency of its appearance used in quantitative content analysis (Kohlbacher, 2006: 30). Therefore, this study employs a qualitative method defined as "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hseih & Shannon, 2005: 1278). A deductive approach to analysing the cover and feature articles was used and closely follows Hazell & Clarke's (2008: 11) methodological approach to the qualitative study of magazine content. The texts were read for their dominant themes as they pertain to the representation of African womanhood and noted down. Categories for coding were generated by combining these themes with the review of literature of the paradigms under consideration for readings of femininity outlined in African Womanist discourses. The following categories emerged from which a coding sheet was generated: women in careers; women as entrepreneurs; participation and exclusion of women in the public sphere; motherhood and the family; marriage; work-life balance; expressions of femininity; and issues of gender equality.

Cover and feature articles were then reexamined and their content categorized according to these coding categories. Illustrative quotations for each theme was noted from the articles. If the same theme presented itself in a single article, the occurrence was only noted once unless this theme referred to a different person. For example, if ‘women in entrepreneurs’ presented itself in reference to the person under discussion and they referred to their mother as entrepreneurs as well, the theme was noted twice and its differences or similarities noted. If the same interviewee presented in different issues of the same magazine or across both magazines, similar themes were only noted once. For example, model Agbani Darego is featured on the cover of the May 2013 issue of *TW* as well as the September 2013 issue of *Genevieve*. While both articles were coded, duplications of themes within these articles were discounted. Ultimately, these coded categories were further distilled into dominant themes for discussion. This thematic organization resulted in four main themes, namely, opportunities in the public sphere, ideals and role models, work-life balance, and ideas of femininity and gender equality within the global context. Finally, due to similarities in procedure, this study follows Clarke (2010: 172) in her approach to concerns of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability that needs to be attended to in qualitative content analysis. Credibility was ensured through the purposefully random sample selection from the data. Transferability to a wider population is attended to in the selection of cover and feature articles for analysis. Dependability is reflected in the research design and execution as the categories selected were appropriate to a number of different articles. Finally, confirmability is reflected in the direct quotations used to illustrate arguments in the findings.

4.2.2 Analysing Practices of African Womanhood: Focus Group Discussions

For this study, focus group discussions (FGD’s) were used to build on the discourses arising from content analysis. Due to the interest in social context in this study, FGD’s were used to explore how the constructions of femininity in magazine texts were processed and understood by audiences (Kitzinger, 1994: 104). The aim of the FGD’s was therefore to generate the experiences and reasoning behind the participant’s beliefs, perceptions and attitudes as they pertain to constructions of femininity in the Nigerian media and the gendered practices they

represent (Powell & Single, 1996: 499-500). The advantage of using FGD's is that they provide insights into the sources of complex motivations (Morgan, 1996: 139). They also produce an atmosphere in which participants can question each other and explain themselves to each other, producing rich sets of data for analysis (Morgan, 1996: 139).

Three FGD's were conducted between 12 and 21 March 2016 in the Department of Communication and Language Arts at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria and conducted in English which all participants were fluent in. Women university students were selected based on the fact that they would most likely, in the near future, represent the demographic of *TW* and *Genevieve* magazines as being in their mid-twenties, gainfully employed and married with families of their own. Participants were recruited by selected year four women students at the University and, aside from being advised on gender and age requirements, were free to select any students from the University. The resultant participants in the respective groups were not friends, but loosely connected by either academic interest or on-campus housing. Ultimately, groups were composed of five women students each currently enrolled mostly in Humanities courses from 2nd year to Master's level, mostly Christian and, as they were enrolled in tertiary education, these women students were assumed to come from relatively similar socio-economic backgrounds. Focus group discussions employed a fixed research design that relied on a consistent set of predetermined questions that were replicated and used across each FGD. This standardized approach was used because it allows for a high level of comparability between the groups (Morgan, 1996: 142). As thematic categories were already identified through textual content analysis, these same thematic categories were used as discussion topics for the discussion guide and drew on concrete examples from the magazines to illustrate the topic to the participants. As suggested by Powell & Single (1996: 501), questions were sequenced from less to more sensitive, starting with a general discussion on perceptions of the media and moving to more complex and sensitive representations of aspects of femininity.

Group sizes consisted of 5 participants each, following Kitzinger's (1995: 302) suggested group size of between 4 and 8 participants. As suggested by Morgan (1996: 146), the benefit of smaller

groups is that it gives each participant more time to discuss her views and experiences on the topic. This was beneficial for the study as the type of data that was desired was elaborations on dominant themes of femininity that were generated from the content analysis of *TW* and *Genevieve*. Small groups were also easier for the moderator to manage and resulted in high levels of involvement from and between the participants. Although a small number, after three FGD's a desirable level of saturation had been reached as, on a number of topics, duplicate responses had been recorded. Finally, as this is not the only data set examined and is one of two methods for obtaining information regarding gender practices along with interviews, the small number of focus groups are sufficient for the purpose of this study.

In terms of analysis, this study follows Powell & Single's (1996: 502) summary of the editing approach to analysing raw FGD data in that transcribed FGD's were coded and classified using the discussion topics from the discussion guide. Data was then further regrouped and their categorization diversified according to the already established categories that emerged from the textual content analysis of magazines. These predetermined categories proved sufficient to categorize data from the FGD's as no new categories emerged in subsequent reviews of the data. Within these categories, data were differentiated according to the stance participants took on the topic. This data was then used to get a better contextual understanding of the knowledge, attitudes and practices of femininity as they were expressed in the magazine content (Morgan, 1996: 133).

4.2.3 Analysing Practices of African Womanhood: Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews

In addition to FGD's, qualitative interviews were conducted with a select number of respondents to explore the meanings and perceptions surrounding practices of femininity and gain a better understanding of these issues in the Nigerian context (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006: 314). This was done in order to obtain rich descriptions of gender issues by allowing respondents to become a part of the meaning-making process of the study (314). The aim of these interviews was to focus on how gender is practiced and how the respondents, in their various professional capacities, viewed practices of femininity. This was then used to supplement information

obtained from FGD's and provide a more holistic picture of gender practices in Nigeria. Interviewees were selected based on their professional roles and experience of media and gender relations in Nigeria. Ultimately, three women respondents were selected, including a member of the editorial staff at a leading Nigerian women's magazine in Lagos, a professor in the Department of Communication and Language Arts at the University of Ibadan, and a professor in the Sociology and Gender Studies Department at the University of Ibadan. Interviews were conducted at the offices of the interviewees and lasted approximately 90-120 mins each. Interviews took the form of semi-structured in-depth interviews and were organized around a set of predetermined open-ended questions relating to practices of femininity in the media and in everyday life (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006: 315). During the interviews, digressions on the part of the interviewees were encouraged and followed up in order to follow the interviewees' interest and knowledge in that particular area.

Interviews were analysed in a similar fashion to the transcribed FGD's by using an editing approach to identify patterns and organize text (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006: 318). Transcribed interviews were classified using the interview questions and the already established thematic categories from magazine content analysis. Data was sorted into relevant thematic sections, depending on the discourses that emerged from the individual interviews. As interviews were conducted across differing professions and perspectives on discourses and practices of femininity, these semi-structured interviews do not have the high degree of comparability as is the case with FGD's. Instead, they constitute ideological positions on gender issues in Nigeria espoused from the different subject-positions that these women interviewees represent. In all, perspectives on gender practices in the Nigerian context were gained that further added to an understanding of the discourses and practices of gender in Nigeria.

4.2 Theoretical Concepts

While there exists a number of approaches from which to interpret the abovementioned discourses and practices, a select number of theoretical concepts have been useful in the analysis of gendered discourses in both media and literature. These concepts can be used in the critical

reading of the construction of femininity across the thematic categories that emerged from *TW* and *Genevieve* magazine. The theoretical concepts of gender analysis outlined below provide a useful margin for evaluating the themes that emanate from discourse and practice as it provides a uniform way to ascertain whether these discourses and practices indeed express the African Womanist discourse in its construction of femininity.

The first concept for analysis is the gendered gaze, a historically established and powerful, gendered and engendering structure of control and dominance that operates within culture. Feminist theory understands the gaze to be male and has to do with male appropriation and commodification of women (Visser, 1997: 277). The gaze embodies a system of control and is a fundamental factor in what Teresa De Lauretis calls the ‘technologies of gender’. As texts like women’s magazines are one of these technologies of gender that has influential power over the reader, the gaze is an important aspect to consider in gender analysis (227). The importance of considering the gaze is summarized in Berger’s (Berger in Visser, 1997: 282) assertion that the gaze is embedded in culture and that it has succeeded in controlling, subjecting and constraining women as it established boundaries of what is and is not acceptable. Berger also reiterates that the consequence of the gaze mechanism lies in the fact that it is internalized, which, for women, means an estranging influence on their sense of selfhood (Berger in Visser, 1997: 283), since women internalize this male gaze to the detriment of their own gender concerns. An important factor in the gendered gaze is then how the traditional structures of this patriarchal gaze can be eliminated. According to Visser (1997: 285), the female gaze is deconstructive and reconstructive. This means that it sets out to expose and undermine the male gaze in order to bring those texts that were suppressed under that regime to the center. Through alternative ways of looking and reading, the female gaze is there to expose the male gaze as disciplining, controlling and oppressive; as the invisible law that shapes the identity of women in culture (Visser, 1997: 285). It is, much like the paradigms of African womanist discourses, ideologically committed to struggle aligned in resistance to the debilitating effects of the male gaze. The use of the gendered gaze in analysing discourses and practices of femininity allows for a consideration of the relationship between patriarchy and gender construction in women-centered media and

measure the extent to which these texts are able to correct and redirect attention to their own ideals (Visser, 1997: 277).

A second theoretical concept, the utilization of stereotypes in gendered discourse, is employed to evaluate to what extent stereotypical discourses of femininity is upheld or deconstructed in women-centered texts. Per definition, a stereotype is “a radically reductive way of representing whole communities of people by identifying them with a few characteristics” (Cranny-Francis et al., 2007: 141) and, by implication, relates to the maintenance of certain relations of power. The act of constructing and circulating a certain stereotype gives one group the power to name and circumscribe the other - how it will be seen and how it will see itself (Cranny-Francis et al., 2007: 142). In the construction of gender stereotypes concerning women, it is important to consider who has the power to name, who is producing these stereotypes, what is the effect on women’s access to power, and how do they ultimately come to see themselves because of these stereotypes.

A third concept, embodiment, provides a way of exploring difference in terms of subjectivity and identity in the discourses and practices of femininity. In embodiment, the body itself is seen as a site where experience is realised. These experiences might be interpersonal or institutional, or the consequence of ideas or value systems that emanate from the socio-cultural context (Cranny-Francis et al., 2007: 83). An illustration of how experience constitutes the body can be seen in how young women are taught by experience to modify their behaviour so that they do not appear too masculine (like sitting with their legs crossed) or where young men are taught to modify their behaviour so that they don’t appear too feminine (not to cry). They thus develop bodies, creating certain postures, mannerisms, physical abilities and limitations through their acceptance of a range of learning experiences. They have embodied a range of social and cultural demands related to gender (Cranny-Francis et al., 2007: 83). The fullest extent of this embodiment, termed biopower by Foucault, sees the complete institutionalized control of the body and is able to produce very specific kinds of social bodies through practices such as categorization, measurement, definition and validation (Cranny-Francis et al., 2007: 188). As

gendered bodies are understood to be socially and culturally produced (Cranny-Francis et al., 2007: 84), the acceptance and/or rejection of certain learning experiences as they pertain to socio-cultural understandings of femininity in the Nigerian context in women-centered media is important. Especially as these texts are produced from a female subject-position, the extent to which these culturally inflected norms are reflected in their content is illustrative of whether or not they collude in the control of their own bodies and if their representations constitute a rejection of the more debilitating socio-cultural constructions that hamper the progress of women in society.

Fourth, public and private spaces of enunciation is a key analytical concept in the interpretation of discourses and practices of femininity. Public and private spaces are social constructs that conceptualize different domains of everyday life and are demarcated by what is acceptable to do and say in either sphere in accordance with the socio-cultural norms of, in this case, the Nigerian context (Giesecking et al., 2014: 1). Of interest here is what discourses and practices are permitted in the public sphere of enunciation and which are relegated to the private sphere, unable to be presented in discourse or discussed in relatively public forums like FGD's and interviews. Social constructions of the public and private sphere, where the one begins and the other ends in terms of discussing images of African femininity, allows for an evaluation of the issues presented in the public sphere and what these issues say about a construction of African femininity.

Finally, an analysis of women's media at the hand of concepts such as the gendered gaze, portrayals of gendered stereotypes, the embodiment of gendered norms and private and public spaces of enunciation, aid in delineating how discourses of femininity are constructed. The reading of these different constructions produce a reading of the text that either accord with the values it articulates or resists a mainstream reading thereof, thereby producing a resistant reading of the discourse portrayed (Cranny-Francis et al., 2007: 117-118). The importance of resistant reading lies in the fact that it reveals the different discourses articulated by a text. It shows that reading is not a value-free, neutral or objective activity but a political activity through which certain meanings and values are propagated and established as socially correct or normative

(Cranny-Francis et al., 2007: 119). Using the concept of resistant reading, gendered assumptions and representations from textual discourse can be compared with the actual lived experience of being a woman of the female reader (Cranny-Francis et al., 2007: 121-122).

Through an analysis of the discourses and counter-discourses produced through texts and lived experiences, a presentation of which constructions of femininity are produced and whether or not they direct attention to women's ideals and concerns can be estimated. Discourse, referring to textual discourse from magazines, and practices, referring to the lived experience accessed through FGD's and interviews, are not viewed in opposition to each other, but rather as two entities that overlap: practices are communicated through discourse, while discourse itself also forms part of social practice. As texts and lived experience can be seen as constituting each other, these concepts of gender analysis can be used in the analysis and interpretation of both, as one is reflective of the other. In addition, these concepts of gender analysis correspond with approaches to the gendered content analysis in African Womanist texts in that they also deal with issues like bringing the private into the public, redressing stereotypes, exposing limiting patriarchal frameworks that have been embodied and in themselves provide counter-discourses to established norms. By using analytical concepts familiar to the analysis of Womanist texts, images of femininity can thus be analysed at the hand of theoretical concepts that aid in a contextual understanding of how these gendered discourses and practices are constructed in media texts. Such an analysis would then be able to determine the extent to which women-centered media content is able to correct and redirect attention towards the feminine world-view and communicate African women's concerns in terms of their subjectivity and identity.

5. Findings

Three dominant themes emerged from the categories present in discourses of femininity in women-centered media. These themes were chosen due to the high frequency with which they occurred. An additional category was added for the discussion of the overall conceptualization of femininity in terms of gender (in)equality from these contexts.

5.1 Opportunities in the public sphere

Opportunities in the public sphere are defined in terms of careers and different forms of entrepreneurship which provide women with traditional as well as modern alternatives to gainful employment. Discourses of women in the public sphere see a definite drive to define women in terms of economic participation and presents criticisms for instances of economic exclusion and/or exploitation where access to the educational mechanisms that facilitate women in employment are denied.

5.1.1 Women in Careers

In terms of careers, women are highlighted as being professionally active and successful thereby effectively resisting patriarchal stereotypes that seek to relegate them to the private sphere of the household where they are happily raising children and providing a soothing environment for their husbands out in the taxing world of work (Cranny-Francis et al., 2007: 144). Discourses on the career woman presents them as active in different forms and levels of employment, representing a strong urge to resist stereotypes that would exclude them from access to power and prestige, despite the entrenched nature of certain stereotypes of women in work (Cranny-Francis et al, 2007: 148).

Regardless of the topic of the article or the capacity women appear in, they are, first and foremost, identified by their professions and work-related achievements. For example, a feature article on women reader's opinions on artistes in the Nigerian entertainment industry in *Genevieve's* September 2013's issue, identifies each contributor by name and occupation, among

them a journalist, IT expert, student, interior decorator, actress, graphic designer, P.A., lawyer, media consultant and youth corp member (Olike, 2013: 32). Women are primarily defined in terms of the place they occupy in the national economy, citing a range of public roles they are engaged in. The centrality of the construction of femininity in terms of economic participation is further exemplified in an article on Grace Egbagbe in *Genevieve's* December 2008 issue. When questioned on her elegance and fashion, Egbagbe responds,

“the only reason I’m going to be addressing this question on fashion is because you have taken time to explore and talk about more serious issues such as my work and career achievements”

(Egbagbe in Alaka, 2008: 52).

actively resisting a construction of herself as an object only appreciated for what she adorns her body with. She exclaims, “There’s more to me than fashion!” (Egbagbe in Alaka, 2008: 52) providing a counter-discourse to an age long misrepresentation of women that seeks to denigrate their participation in the public discourse of work. Egbagbe’s resistance is also reflected in the fact that, out of an entire three-page interview, only one short paragraph is dedicated to fashion, while at least six times this amount focuses on her career achievements.

Discourse on the working woman further sees women traversing institutional hierarchies and moving into gendered work-spaces traditionally thought of as the reserve of men. Firstly, while a large proportion of cover and feature articles focus on personalities in the entertainment industry, even here they are not relegated to typecast roles as models, actresses or singers. Women are equally represented as the drivers of production in these professions and are depicted as screenwriters, composers, marketing directors, PR professionals and the owners of their own fashion and/or music labels. Secondly, women are singled out for their achievements in corporate and political roles, public spheres that are traditionally seen as masculine domains. Women are represented in the workplace as lawyers, in politics and in bodies of government, however few and far between these depictions may be. This foray into previously gendered spaces is also noted by Professor Abiola Odejide (Odejide, 2016) who affirms the push of Nigerian women journalists themselves into so-called masculine careers. Breaking into areas

such as sports commentary as well as engaging in careers in agriculture, politics and sports, she affirms the correlation between the discourse of women in work and practice. Thus, not only are women portrayed as active in the workforce, but overcome hierarchical constraints and enter gendered places that are perceived to be masculine like that of the economy, the polis and the state (Cranny-Francis et al, 2007: 213), thereby solidifying women's place in the public sphere.

Notwithstanding women's successful participation in the workforce, the economic viability accorded to them is not portrayed in utopic terms alone, highlighting instances of negative stereotyping to bring these challenges into public discourse. Gbemi Olateru Olagbegi, featured in *TW's* November 2014 issue for her achievements as a radio broadcaster, stresses one of the difficulties faced by women as, instead of acknowledging her position as a professional in the entertainment industry, she finds that "people who do not know any better sometimes lump you with the fame seekers and groupies" (Olagbegi in Adesanya, 2014: 78). Such a pronouncement suggests that certain gendered stereotypes still operate in the workplace that must be redressed. Nevertheless, the very act of featuring Olagbegi for her professional achievements works to counter such misconceptions by emphasizing the prevalence of women's professional participation in the entertainment industry, thereby reducing the number of 'people who do not know any better' through this kind of exposure.

Women respondents fervently affirm the existence of negative stereotyping in the workplace, specifically ascribing them to male generated structures of control and dominance that work to limit women's power. One respondent disappointedly recalls a male acquaintance's negative stereotyping of successful women bankers in Nigeria in his opinion that, "if there is a woman banker and she has four children, two of those children are not her husband's" (Du Plessis, focus group B, 2016). In affirmation, another respondent relates the supposed male-driven societal view that "women that are big, that are up there, they have opened their legs or they have one *baba* (older man) who has done some *juju* (witchcraft: favours) for them" (Du Plessis, focus group B, 2016). Women respondents thus unanimously assert that women who have achieved success in the public sphere are painted to have done so by sleeping with their male superiors,

effectively turning them into sexual objects to strip them of their power. They particularly identify men as the perpetrators of these debilitating stereotypes in order to provide an explanation for a woman's success thereby retaining power over them and reinforcing the structure of control and dominance (Visser, 1997: 277). Women's achievements are thus stereotyped not to be predicated upon their own merit or hard work, but access is granted by the men who have the power and access to these positions. Despite these debilitating stereotypes, the difficulties women face in the workplace are directly addressed within discourse and practice. Such a public enunciation of these negative constructions suggests that issues of stereotyping are part of the public discourse on women in work in the Nigerian context. By raising these issues, discontent with such gendered practices are voiced to overcome it as a form of oppression.

5.1.2 Women as Entrepreneurs

Even more prevalent than the Nigerian career woman, is the representation of women as entrepreneurs which functions as a more traditional alternative to conventional careers. Entrepreneurship is presented as a realistic possibility for self sufficiency for all women and portrayals range from pepper-selling in the market to owning a high-end fashion boutique. Discourses of women in business constructs them as self-reliant, self-starting and industrious individuals who, through hard work and determination, are able to overcome very specific socio-economic challenges within the Nigerian context, thereby establishing an image of the strong Nigerian woman in business. The Nigerian woman entrepreneur is presented as a long-established traditional route to financial independence that is and has been available to all women, regardless of their social class or educational background. Generations of women are depicted as rice traders and boutique owners who travelled cross-country buying and selling merchandise (Ohai, 2013: 54); the owners of fishing boats who would bring in fishermen, providing food and accommodation for work (Emmanuel, 2015: 90); textile traders conducting business out of the family home (Akinyemi, 2013: 84); and small catering business owners running shop out of the house kitchen with the help of their daughters (Akinyemi, 2013: 82). Women entrepreneurs are continually established as a mainstay of the local economy as a way for women to empower themselves financially and, although the types of entrepreneurial

ventures might have changed, Nigerian women in various forms of business are in no way a new phenomenon on the economic scene.

The current generation of women entrepreneurs are constructed as talented individuals with a self-starting drive who possess the industry to turn their dreams into reality. Expressed within the “grass to grace” narrative, businesses are oftentimes depicted as having a small start out financial necessity and/or desire that, through hard work and perseverance, is able to grow into successful ventures. One such example comes from Patience Ozokwor in *Genevieve’s* March 2010 issue who describes “waking up at 3:00 am to make meat-pies and snacks for sale, before going to work” as a teacher, taking up the challenge of being the sole financial provider of her family when her husband passed (Ozokwor quoted in Oladipupo & Keshi, 2010: 25). On starting a business, Ozokwor asserts that,

“You don't need a shop to start your business, all you need are customers [...] I took up the challenge and we survived. You can do the same.” (Ozokwor quoted in Oladipupo & Keshi, 2010: 25)

This home-based initiative developed into a well-known fast-food eatery in Nigeria, Wendy’s Café, suggesting that, through hard work and resourcefulness, women can achieve their entrepreneurial goals. Ozokwor also criticizes religions that exclude work as a possibility for women positing that, according to the Bible, a virtuous woman provides for her family, not just the man (Ozokwor in Oladipupo & Keshi, 2010: 25). The idea that religious women are precluded from work is thus dispelled, encouraging women “to go out there and look for what to do” (Ozokwor in Oladipupo & Keshi, 2010: 25) and follow the example of scores of other women who take up the challenge to become financially self-sufficient. Bringing even the religious context to bear on the matter of women in work, women as participants in the public sphere is presented as open to all. Not simply focussing on the big business or store-fronts in Lagos, but also the small start in the home-kitchen, constructions of women in entrepreneurship roles reflect local businesses as having their start in spaces accessible to most of its readers.

However, due to the unique socio-economic context these ventures operate in, women's entrepreneurial journeys are by no means depicted as an easy feat. An inherent characteristic of the Nigerian woman entrepreneur is the necessity to endure a number of challenges and the willingness to persevere to overcome obstacles. Speaking on the garment industry in Nigeria in *Genevieve's* June 2013 issue, Deola Sagoe comments on the limiting circumstances within which garment businesses like hers have to operate in as,

“If only we could have the government give us maybe tax breaks or electricity - we need all these things to make our lives better. No rules and regulations, people can blatantly copy your work with no repercussions.” (Sagoe quoted in Chinkata, 2013: 64)

These issues are similarly raised in *Genevieve's* September 2015 issue by Nigerian woman garment business owner Lisa Folawiyo, who decries the “lack of support for the industry as a whole from the government and corporate institutions hinders our progress [...] because of infrastructure and logistics problems” (Folawiyo quoted in Alara, 2015: 49). Difficulties arising from structural issues and a lack of institutional support thus characterise the challenges women entrepreneurs have to overcome. However, despite the oppositions they face, they are nevertheless, according to Sagoe,

“doing amazing things, the grit and tenacity through which people are going forward and doing things are amazing” (Sagoe quoted in Chinkata, 2013: 64)

Women respondents display a strong affinity with this construction of the innovative and hardworking Nigerian entrepreneur within the ‘grass to grace’ narrative as it shows that “someone who is currently in a grass position can become something else” (Du Plessis, focus group A, 2016). Aside from this inspirational narrative, respondents unanimously and enthusiastically confirm their support of women entrepreneurs who reside in a grass subject position as a valued part of this discourse. From a plethora of examples, one respondent cites the common occurrence of the woman roadside pepper seller who wants to feed her family, but does not have the wherewithal to set up something bigger, so works hard and sticks to a business that will allow financial independence (Du Plessis, focus group C, 2016). The synonymy of the

Nigerian woman with self-reliance is attributed to the fact that they are more entrepreneurial than men, more innovative, industrious and “like to go out of their way to get what they want” (Du Plessis, focus group A, 2016). Comparing Nigerian women to women in other parts of West Africa, one respondent passionately cites a certain “vigour” (Du Plessis, focus group A, 2016) inherent to Nigerian women that sets them apart from others in their ability to commit to hard work to achieve their goals. This image is bolstered by an interview with Patricia Taiwo (Taiwo, 2016) in the Department of Sociology at the University of Ibadan who notes that Nigerian women’s ability to achieve is tied up with their surroundings as, even within this “rough and rugged” system, women are able to achieve so much, so imagine what they could do if everything worked? They are achievers and achieving, strong and resilient, supporting the image of the strong Nigerian woman in work.

5.1.3 Participation and Exclusion in the Public Sphere

The primacy of the definition of African femininity in either conventional careers or forms of entrepreneurship suggests that women encouraged to seize opportunities available to them in the public sphere. Moreover, with the exemplary way career women succeed in forging a place for themselves in the workforce despite gendered stereotypes, and the grit and tenacity with which women entrepreneurs establish and grow their businesses in spite of the difficult socio-economic climate, there seems to be little reason for any woman to abstain from participating in public life. The construction of women as economic participants thus stands as an exemplary model for young Nigerian women that pushes them towards participating in the public sphere. Discourse and practice see women themselves as the drivers behind women in work in their strong critiques of instances of exclusion and non-participation. This is most aptly illustrated in magazine discourses on women in education and personal discourses that affirm women’s participation as a form of empowerment.

Firstly, discourse posits that neglecting women’s education neglects a potent factor for social as well as individual growth and development (Afolami in Omogbenigun & Ezenwofor, 2014: 93) as when a woman is educated, she can have access to better paying jobs, which benefits her and

her family (Lesi in Omogbenigun & Ezenwofor, 2014: 92). As education is understood to give women power and access to jobs that contribute to their families and the economy, expressions that reaffirm the importance of education for women abound, and are intertwined with the discourse of women in work. As differing forms of education and training are understood to enhance opportunities for the economic participation of women, there exists a similar drive to question the conventions that impede their education. Issues such as cultural and religious practices in certain geopolitical zones across Nigeria that favour the education of boys over girls due to a preference for early marriage, are criticized as a form of gendered exclusion and oppression that needs to be addressed (Lesi in Omogbenigun & Ezenwofor, 2014: 92). In addition, the need to train women to enhance their economic viability (Ibrahim in Alaka, 2008: 49) is seen as central to ensure their participation in forms of self-employment and contributes to the drive to see all women take part in public life.

Secondly, women respondents describe participation in terms of the financial independence and power it accords women like themselves, especially as it pertains to their dealings with men. Asserting that, “in this day in Nigeria, you don’t wait for a man to provide for you” (Du Plessis, focus group C, 2016), respondents express a sense of pride and dignity in women who are able to make their own money. An important aspect of this self-sufficiency is that,

“You can tell a man, ‘Go to hell, please.’ You have something to negotiate with. Nobody can mess with you and nobody can devalue you. [...] I think that’s the driving force behind every Nigerian woman.” (Du Plessis, focus group C, 2016)

This ardent proclamation suggests that, when respondents are financially in control of their own lives, they will not be forced to be dependent on men. Seizing opportunities in the public sphere thus allow women to undermine the traditional structures of the male gaze in order to focus on their own goals (Visser, 1997: 285), thereby thwarting the structures embedded in culture that aim to constrain women in their dependence on men.

The image of the working woman is, however, also a product of the invisible law that shapes the identity of women in culture in terms of the male gaze (Visser, 1997: 285) as women are made to understand that this is a desirable attribute of African femininity for men as well. Respondents overwhelmingly reinforce the idea that, in considering their life partners, men value working women, wanting someone who can contribute to the household income. Reflecting on what she perceives men want, one respondent comments that, “men are thinking, ‘I don’t want to marry a woman who will be a liability in my house’” (Du Plessis, focus group A, 2016), pointing to the desirability of working women. The desire for women to include work in the construction of their own femininity is therefore also driven by what they perceive men want, suggesting not only that this construction is at least in part defined by men, but that women themselves have internalized this male gaze on women. Some respondents even go so far as to criticize a subset of young women who just want rich men to feed them (Du Plessis, focus group C, 2016) hinting at a degree of laziness on the part of these women not working towards becoming financially self-sufficient subjects within society. This male definition is evidenced in the fact that women respondents articulate their own financially empowered position as working women from the male point of view. The effect of this male gaze, explicated by Berger (1975: 47), sees men looking at women, and women watching themselves being looked at by men, producing a construction of the working woman that is, in essence, defined by men. Expressed in these terms, the working woman is the product of the embodiment of ideas and value systems that emanate from the socio-cultural context, a context that is often defined by men, producing the law that shapes women in culture (Cranny-Francis et al., 2007: 83).

5.1.4 Conclusion

African femininity thus finds one of its primary definitions in the construction of women as active and full participants in the public sphere. This construction is, however, one that is situated within a patriarchal social structure co-created by both genders that validates the working woman as a form of empowerment within society. Within this structure, discourse provides women with traditionally established and new alternatives towards personal agency in terms of entrepreneurship and having a career that is firmly supported in practice. It sees them

breaking stereotypes that seeks to relegate them to the private sphere; breaking through institutional hierarchies and entering previously gendered spaces in the workplace; and pushing against negative stereotypes that seek to control and limit women's power to ultimately construct an image of the strong, hardworking Nigerian woman that, through her industriousness and perseverance, is able to achieve her goals despite the unique challenges presented by her economic class, religious, cultural background and socio-economic context. This ability to excel despite limiting societal and gendered structures creates the impression that the Nigerian woman in work is a model of femininity that should be aspired to.

The drive to see women as full participants in the public sphere also sees discourse and practice publically denounce instances where women are excluded from and oppressed in work. By bringing these issues into public discourse so that they can be overcome, women assert that such practices are no longer acceptable to them, thereby directing attention to their own concerns and worldview. The construct of the strong Nigerian woman in work is a position for women that is valued and that should be pursued since seizing opportunities in the public sphere, whether in careers or forms of entrepreneurship, is a way for them to empower themselves and accrue a form of cultural capital they can use to negotiate their position in society to their own benefit. Finally, the focus on women in the workplace serves as a point of protest about their status quo and position in the public sphere and mirrors one of the central drives of African Womanist thought in its push to provide a counter-discourse to negative stereotyping and structures that seek to limit women's power and provide alternative constructions of women.

5.2 Ideals and Role Models

The thematic recurrence of ideals and role models of African womanhood serves as an expression of the ways women are socialized to act and want out of life and is expressed in terms of motherhood and the family as well as marriage. These stereotypical and traditional ideals are a consequence of an embodied range of social and cultural demands related to gender (Cranny-Francis et al., 2007: 83), demands that women are expected to embody in society. These traditional ideals can then be analysed at the level of society, in terms of the degree to which

these gendered learning experiences are accepted and/or rejected. As discourses and practices are produced from a female subject position, the degree to which these culturally inflected norms are reflected in their content is indicative of whether these ideals function as a form of Foucauldian biopower that seeks to control women through their acceptance thereof (Cranny-Francis et al., 2007: 83-84). Ideals and role models thus focus on how femininity is constructed in these terms, how this image is received and interpreted by women as participants of this society and whether these constructions succeed in directing attention to women's own world-views and ideals.

5.2.1 Motherhood and the Family

Constructions of femininity is overwhelmingly associated with women's conventional roles as mothers within the family. Motherhood is depicted in discourse as a preferred and natural life choice for all women:

“Motherhood naturally brings inexplicable joy to a woman and I wish it for all women [...] watching the child grow brings a lot of fulfillment and I think it also makes you a complete person.”

(Fahm quoted in Keshi, Oladipupo & Oseni, 2010: 37)

Motherhood is epitomized as a natural, innate drive, that associates women with their biological function to bear children and is presented as universal, applicable to 'all women' in society. The woman as mother is 'fulfilled' and 'complete', suggesting that a woman without children would be unnatural, producing an incomplete individual. Such a pronouncement is affirmed by a mother's proclamation that, “If I was childless, then my life would have been totally meaningless” (Egbagbe quoted in Alaka, 2008: 56). This is reinforced in magazine discourse as, regardless of the context a woman appears in, the mentioning of a woman sees an almost mandatory accompaniment of the number of children she has or would like to have in the future.

Similarly referring to the “African notion that having children completes you” (Du Plessis, focus group A, 2016), women respondents fervently affirm that there is no basis for not having children, no matter what the reason, as a woman is 'completed' through this process. Because “giving birth is a natural thing” (Du Plessis, focus group A, 2016), one respondent even suggests

that this natural inclination is so strong that even nuns, somewhere in their hearts, actually want to be mothers, but because of their religious position, they are unable to do so (Du Plessis, focus group A, 2016). Aside from this natural and universal mothering drive, women respondents stress the socio-cultural affirmation of motherhood through practices in Eastern Nigeria where, after having a number of children, a mother is celebrated by having a cow killed for her and receiving gifts from the kingsmen of her community (Du Plessis, focus group C, 2016). Celebrated in her role as mother, the woman is bestowed certain cultural privileges. Motherhood thus stands as an ideal that is so deeply entrenched in the socialization of women, it has become mandatory in its definition by women themselves. Such an internalization of discourse is illustrative of the workings of the Foucauldian disciplinary power that sees the woman-subject direct and apply this cultivation of femininity inward (Feder, 2007: 61). The construction of woman as mother can thus be seen as an objective of certain relations of power in society (Feder, 2007: 61), a function that women take upon themselves to fulfill.

Moreover, conventional motherhood in particular is affirmed through discourses that resist alternative forms of motherhood, especially that of adoption. In *Genevieve's* March 2010 issue, Patience Ozokwor alludes to the social stigma associated with adoption in Nigeria as, even after having her own biological children, "When I started this adoption, I had some problems but people are getting to understand it better" (Ozokwor quoted in Oladipupo & Keshi, 2010: 25). Women respondents affirm that even when a woman has had her own children first and then adopts, families are still apprehensive at the prospect of having non-biological children in the home that are not relations (Du Plessis, focus group B, 2016). Respondents unanimously attest to the cultural resistance to non-biological children, citing that "It's a Nigerian thing, you must give birth to your own children" (Du Plessis, focus group C, 2016). This resistance is ascribed to the Yoruba adage that says, 'The home is peaceful', meaning that biological children grow up and do not destroy the home (Du Plessis, focus group B, 2016). Conversely, adopted children are seen as destroying the home, leading to family members fighting against it, even if the woman is barren or cannot find a husband. A conventional discourse on motherhood as central to the definition of womanhood is thus expressed in the socio-cultural affirmation of motherhood and

resistance to alternative forms that would strip women the power accorded to them through childbearing. The acceptance of this traditional ideal is thus tied up with the African context. In her examination of motherhood in the Nigerian context, Remi Akujobi (2011) places motherhood as a sacred and powerful component of the African woman's life, asserting that conventional motherhood bestows a certain power to women in society as it comes with associated privileges and entitlements (Akujobi, 2011: 3). It is understood that motherhood defines the woman as responsible, and is a prerequisite for social acceptance (Akujobi, 2011: 3-4). Within this cultural framework, women use motherhood as a traditional route to empowerment within the community, thereby affirming African practices.

Despite social validation of the conventional discourse on motherhood, the very fact that these alternatives are presented in discourse acknowledges that other forms of motherhood do exist and that these forms of motherhood are accepted by a number of women. This is not only reflected in the depiction of women who opt for adoption, but also in the validation of adoption as a legitimate form of motherhood:

“Every true mother deserves praise o! I say “true” not by virtue of biology, but by the nurture they provide to those they mother; because raising children, biological or otherwise, is a lifelong activity.”

(Onyenokwe, 2013: 96)

Women respondents, despite the desire for their own children, expresses an awareness of the pervasive way in which culture defines motherhood in their tentative admission that adoption is “meant to be OK, but it's not” (Du Plessis, focus group A, 2016), providing a counter discourse to the embodiment of conventional motherhood. While this is not validated in either discourse or practice, the very act of featuring these alternatives in public discourse speaks to a resistance to the complete disciplining power the conventional discourse of motherhood has on women.

However, despite the affirmation of conventional motherhood, magazine discourse also provides a glimpse of the realities of motherhood and the options open to women embarking on this journey, thereby refocusing attention to women's own worldviews. Firstly, the construction of

femininity in terms of conventional motherhood is not executed through the mystical patriarchal representation thereof that sees women, according to Ogundipe-Leslie “self-sacrificing and suffering willingly and silently” (2011: 3). Instead, magazine discourse acknowledges the challenges they face, breaking patriarchal stereotypes in their construction. Speaking on the time and effort devoted to rearing children, Chinelo Chukwueke grants that “motherhood is always a challenge” (Chukwueke quoted in Keshi, Oladipupo & Oseni, 2010: 30), suggesting this task is at times a trial. Women are thus not seen as willingly surrendering their own lives for that of their children and bearing the burdens of motherhood in silence. Instead, the difficulties women experience are highlighted as part and parcel of motherhood, leading to a demystification of (perfect) motherhood inherent in male discourses on African motherhood, thereby refocusing attention to women’s own worldviews.

Secondly, discourse sees a negotiation of how and when motherhood is defined. Young women are depicted as actively deciding to have a small number of children, citing that they are “only going to have two kids” (Chukwueke quoted in Keshi, Oladipupo & Oseni, 2010: 32). This is reflected by women respondents who, while affirming the Nigerian spirit of large families (Du Plessis, focus group A, 2016), see the tradition of bearing many children applicable to previous generations. One respondent even explains that, before, large families were the norm because women were not educated. “But now, since we are getting enlightened, I wouldn’t want to have seven kids” (Du Plessis, focus group C, 2016). Depending also on the preference of the husband, women respondents would like to have two to three children on average, with the exception of one who would only like to have one child and another who prefers fewer biological children because she also wants to adopt (Du Plessis, focus group B & C, 2016). In addition, women respondents resist cultural practices that prescribe when women should have children. One respondent condemns the practice at weddings where family, friends and even informal acquaintances pray that they are able to attend the naming ceremony of your first child within nine months (according to Yoruba custom, the naming ceremony of children take place seven days after the birth), effectively pushing the ideology that women should have children as quickly as possible after marriage. Confounded by this, the respondent wonders what if she and

her husband have other plans before having children (Du Plessis, focus group B, 2016), finding affinity with expressions in discourse that sees family as something that will come in its own time (Darego in Akinyemi, 2013: 95). Motherhood, while an example they wish to incorporate into their construction of femininity, is seen as something that can be negotiated in terms of number and timing and not a perfect ideal that needs to be epitomized in every aspect.

Affirmed in both discourse and practice, conventional motherhood as a natural and universal ideal is held up as exemplary in African society. The extent to which the ideal of motherhood is internalized suggests that it functions as a form of biopower. Motherhood as a gender stereotype is accepted and perpetuated by women themselves through their expression of the ‘selfish’ and ‘unnatural’ nature of women who choose not to engage therein (Du Plessis, focus group A, 2016). Therefore, motherhood is a manifestation of culture that allows women access to a form of power and privilege, a power that is positive in light of the alternative social ‘punishments’ women describe. Traditional and stereotypical motherhood is, however, challenged through alternatives like adoption, but are seen as peripheral. This inclusion points to the fact that the discourse of traditionally patriarchal expressions of motherhood is not internalized without question, and speaks to an understanding that society shapes expectations of women. In addition, depictions move beyond patriarchal discourses on motherhood in the demystification thereof to include the real-life challenges women face as mothers as well as instances where women resist certain definitions of motherhood in their negotiation of some aspects thereof. Finally, the dominant discourse that emerges is an affirmation of the ideal of motherhood and the family as both a societal and personal pursuit in the construction of African womanhood.

5.2.2 Marriage

A prerequisite for conventional motherhood and the family, marriage is similarly depicted as desirable for all women. Discourse mostly synonymizes wifedom and motherhood and women are seen to have achieved a desired status in society upon entering matrimony, assuming parenthood will follow. Smith (2013: 3) affirms this traditional ideal for women as most young Nigerian women seek marriage and parenthood as the ultimate expression and fulfillment of their

ambitions for themselves as persons. As with motherhood, marriage accords women with a certain respect and privileges within society, leading them to embody a host of cultural values towards the procurement and maintenance of this title. As with motherhood, this discourse is internalized and espoused by women themselves resulting in prescriptive constructions of femininity as it pertains to marriage.

In the attainment of marriage, discourse presents women with a host of socialization practices to embody, specifically learning domestic skills and upholding the values of chastity. Firstly, *TW* and *Genevieve* magazine chiefly describes the potential bride as socialized to effectively execute domestic chores, especially cooking. One mother comments on the importance of guiding her daughter “through domestic chores, daily routines and simple social courtesies like respect for elders, kitchen skills and academic works” (Chukwueke quoted in Keshi, Oladipupo & Oseni, 2010: 37), reflecting the range of domestic and social practices future wives should embody. Women respondents explicate their experience of this gendered socialization in their own lives with one respondent describing her frustration with her role within the household as follows:

“I’m the only girl of four brothers. I hear things like, ‘you’re the woman’, ‘you’re the girl’, ‘you should do the cleaning, you should do the washing, you should do the sweeping, you should do everything’, and these guys will get married and have someone do this for them. It doesn’t matter if they don’t know how to do it, but you must know how to do it.” (Du Plessis, focus group B, 2016)

The same respondent recalls being admonished by a family member for accidentally burning the evening meal with the exclamation, “future wife, you are burning the food!” (Du Plessis, focus group B, 2016), reifying the gendered stereotypes that divide labour in the home. Providing a counter-discourse, Eugenia Abu says of gender equality in the kitchen:

“Cooking is inherently a woman’s thing because we are socialized that way but that doesn’t mean they alone should cook. In my culture people are horrified to see my husband cook, but he does if he wants to and I don’t see anything wrong in that” (Abu quoted in Orekoya, 2009:111)

Featured in *TW*'s August 2009 issue, this proclamation resists the stereotypical perception of the kitchen as the woman's domain and works against this embodied practice to present alternatives for women. However, it simultaneously reaffirms the extent to which these social roles are embodied as it is resisted by culture at large, through people who are 'horrified' at seeing a man cook. Women respondents similarly attest that a handful of their fathers do things in the kitchen, but "they can't say it in public" (Du Plessis, focus group C, 2016) for fear that doing women's work might diminish them in the eyes of society. While women might negotiate the social order of domestic responsibility within the privacy of the home, public discourse strongly sustains this traditional ideal.

Secondly, a traditional ideal is constructed around young women as chaste and pure when entering matrimony. Sexual conservatism in Nigerian is the result of both traditional cultural views and religious conservatism that value chastity in women, resulting in the negative stereotyping and stigmatization of those who do not follow this prescription. In terms of traditional cultural views, discourse records a mother's homegrown parable for teaching chastity:

"When a chicken sees a bottle of guinea corn ... it will peck away until the corn spills and it eats all it wants. Then the chicken is tired, it will use its claws to scatter the rest and then walk away, disinterested. That is what sex is like." (Abu quoted in Orekoya, 2009: 108-109)

Clearly directed at women personified as the bottle of corn discarded once the chicken has had its fill, premarital sex is presented as negative for the woman. One woman respondent delineates how chastity is enforced by describing the gifts her parents received for her two newly married sisters. Receiving an abundance of gifts for one, but only a small token for another, parents are honoured for their daughters' chastity.(Du Plessis, focus group C, 2016). Working in conjunction with traditional culture, religion aids in promoting chastity. In a roundtable discussion on premarital sex in Nigeria in the August 2009 issue of *TW*, one discussant suggests that Nigeria's maintenance of sexual conservatism lies in the fact that it tries to do things according to the Bible (Okojie, Nwosu & Awosema, 2009: 98-99). The role of religion in promoting chastity is affirmed in *Genevieve*'s July 2010 issue where an interviewee suggests that, if people live a life

of obedience to God, they would understand that one can't have sex with anybody and everybody (Ralph in Alaka, 2010: 51).

In addition, women respondents divulge that, while it may be understood that some young women engage in sexual practices in private, when this knowledge enters the public sphere they are harshly condemned and stigmatized to the extent that other young women will not associate with them (Du Plessis, focus group B, 2016). On the other hand, respondents also disclose that when women publically declare themselves virgins, they are either not believed or looked down on as old-fashioned, a fact that frustrates them to no end. For respondents, these competing stereotypes are the result of competition between social conservatism and the influence of commercial Western culture which brings with it an acceptance of premarital sex (Du Plessis, focus group A, 2016). Moreover, while the traditional ideal of chastity is upheld for young women, it is understood that young men do not face such social repercussions, alluding to a double standard in premarital ideals.

Due to the cultural value placed on marriage in Nigerian society, the maintenance thereof, once achieved, is of the utmost import. Women are constructed as vested with the responsibility and power to navigate any difficulties that may arise to protect the institution of marriage and their own position as wives and is most often illustrated within the context of extramarital affairs. Positively stereotyping men as naturally inclined to want to try new things, cheating husbands are celebrated in society for their vigour, resulting in women respondents affirming that, even as they enter marriage, women are faced with the very real possibility that their husbands will be unfaithful (Du Plessis, focus group A, B & C, 2016). Speaking on her own mother, Joke Silva, featured in *Genevieve's* March 2010 issue, admires her mother's strength to stay in her marriage after her husband cheated:

“When my dad was having an extra-marital affair and dared her to leave, she stood her grounds and remained in the marriage. Divorce was never my mum's option at all.” (Silva in Oseni, 2010: 40)

By standing their ground, women are celebrated as strong individuals with the will to overcome challenges to preserve marriage. In practice, women respondents appropriate the stereotype that men like to try new things in order to empower themselves. Women are constructed as having the ability to keep their husbands from venturing outside the marriage by bringing new and innovative things in. Respondents suggest that they themselves make things possible in the marriage, positing that “it’s in our hands, we have the power” (Du Plessis, focus group A, 2016). Due to the debilitating stigma of divorce, African femininity is constructed as vested with the power and responsibility to ensure the maintenance of marriage in Nigerian society. This supposed power that women hold exposes marriage as a form of biopower that exerts institutional control over women’s bodies (Cranny-Francis et al., 2007: 188). While, on the one hand, subjected to the traditional marital ideal through allusions of responsibility that women themselves uphold in both discourse and practice, women also question overtly patriarchal manifestations that allow a double standard for men, suggesting that it disadvantages women to such an extent that it should be abolished. However, due to the centrality of marriage to women’s participation in African society women look for alternatives that can help them traverse these limitations by focussing on the everyday experiences of women who find themselves in this situation, thereby presenting alternatives which would aid them within this institution.

5.2.3 Conclusion

Femininity is constructed as pursuing the traditional ideal of marriage and motherhood and presents an image of African womanhood as a lifelong preparation for the successful execution of these roles. Within the discourse of ideals and role models embodiment and biopower are strongly at work, are accepted and perpetuated by women themselves, and still pursued by women for the power and privilege they bring in society. Ultimately, traditional ideals and roles models succeed in producing what is referred to as the responsible woman, while women themselves find ways to negotiate their position within these discourses so that, while they are participating in community life through marriage and motherhood, they are able to negotiate some of the terms of these institutions to their own personal benefit. This discourse is tied up with the centrality of marriage and motherhood in African life, reinforcing the African Womanist

paradigm that affirms motherhood and the family as contributing to the empowerment of women within the specific socio-cultural context. (Arndt, 2002: 32). Both discourse and practice construct femininity as vested with the power to achieve and maintain these traditional ideals for herself while questioning oppressive and/or debilitating practices in the process.

5.3 Work-life Balance

Opportunities in the public sphere and ideals and role models culminate to construct an image of African femininity as the working wife and mother. Opportunities in the public sphere are deconstructive and reconstructive in nature and undermines the male gaze in order to bring women's ideals to the center (Visser, 1997: 285). Ideals and role models, on the other hand, sees both a societal and personal drive towards marriage and motherhood that imbibes women with cultural currency within the African context. These discourses meld together to form a competing imperative for African femininity that presents them with an almost impossible image to live up to, and the question arises of how women are depicted to deal with this challenge?

Within magazine discourse, these diverging images are depicted as existing side by side to produce what one magazine editorial staff member calls the 'all-rounded woman' (Adollo, 2016). Mimicking magazine demographics, the Nigerian woman is both family oriented and career focussed: she prioritizes and delegates responsibilities at work and at home to look after the balance of wife, mother, career and self, producing the all-rounded woman. As can be expected, discourse places the woman on a pedestal who is able to "effectively juggle her responsibilities with those of an entrepreneur, wife, church worker, etc and still establish a wonderful loving bond with her children and husband" (X-adebija, 2013: 88). Articles such as "Recipe for Balancing your Career and Marriage" (Ikenma, 2010: 78-79) provide advice on how to achieve balance through effective organization and delegation. Articulated from the perspective of women's media culture, women are constructed as being capable of producing in themselves all-rounded women, using modern technologies and outlooks towards this end. The image of the working wife and mother displays an astute similarity to the Western feminist ideal of the New Woman that emerged at the end of the 19th century. Delineating the woman's right to

a public role while upholding their traditional domestic function (Clements, 2004: 426), the all-rounded Nigerian woman is built on a similar discourse. Both constructions see women straddling two horses and riding them both to a victorious finish: one of which is a career and the other, domestic responsibilities including caring for children and being a good wife (Clements, 2004: 427). The idea of femininity presented is that this task of balancing is not insurmountable, and that every woman who manages both has made her own life more free and more noble. Expressed from the position of commercialized media culture in Nigeria, the Western feminist notion of the New Woman is dressed in an African idiom that presents a construction of African femininity as vested with the wherewithal to incorporate these divergent discourses into her identity, a construction that sees her life as one equated with success and freedom.

This all-rounded woman is, however, situated within a patriarchal socio-cultural context that values one expression of femininity over another. One interviewee posits that, at present in Nigeria, very few career opportunities take into account that women are wives and mothers as well which would enable them to have a family and a career at the same time. Because of this, it is still very much a choice between one or the other instead of a balance between the two (Taiwo, 2016). In affirmation, women respondents assert that one of the aspects ultimately suffers (Du Plessis, focus group C, 2016), and that women predominantly sacrifice their jobs or get another, more accommodating job so that they can take care of their children (Du Plessis, focus group A, 2016). Likewise, according to “Recipe for Balancing your Career and Marriage”, discourse suggests that considering a new, less demanding job is an option (Ikenma, 2010: 79). While women’s media promotes the all-rounded woman as a viable ideal, social context dictates that, if balance cannot be achieved, the family should take precedence, following a more patriarchal construction of femininity.

Constructions of femininity in magazine discourse thus sees a large degree of complexity and disjunction in its depiction of the all-rounded woman, espousing feminist and patriarchal worldviews. These conflicting discourses about femininity in women’s media can be understood as a reflection of the socio-cultural context in which they are produced: just as the society

contains within it conflicting voices, so too does the text that is produced by this society (Cranny-Francis et al., 2007: 109). In other words, just as Nigerian society contains both woman-centered and male-centred thought embodied and espoused by both genders, so too does women's sectional media. Faced with these competing discourses, women pursue a version of the all-rounded woman that is sensitive to the socio-cultural context that allows them to have a career and a family and be satisfied with both. This entails, as Patricia Taiwo suggests, for the mindset of women to change (Taiwo, 2016) to women-centered thought in order to tip the scales in their favour. Reflective of the female gaze that is ideologically committed to redirect attention to their own ideals, Taiwo (2016) suggests that this change is achieved gradually and that it starts with turning attention to their own ideals early on and plan the trajectory of their lives so that they can achieve their personal ideals of marriage, motherhood and a career. This gradual change is reflected in more recent discourse in *TW* magazine's December 2015 issue by Jennifer Olize who states that,

"I'd always said I wanted to establish my career and then focus on family because I didn't want a situation where I'd be struggling with my career and going into my matrimonial home that way"

(Olize quoted in Emmanuel, 2015: 97)

In pursuit of the all-rounded woman, young women time their careers and families so that they can achieve balance. Overwhelmingly supported in practice, this method of planning is preferred by many young women in that it is "what we are actually doing" (Du Plessis, focus group A, 2016). As work is time-consuming and stressful at the beginning, establishing a career before starting a family is seen as positive. This way it is easier to return to work after the children have reached a certain age (Du Plessis, focus group A, B & C, 2016). Conversely, women respondents cite examples of young women who, immediately after graduating university, want to get married and give birth to children in close succession so that they can start their careers after the children have been 'taken care of' (Du Plessis, focus group B, 2016). As small number of women respondents also choose careers that will allow them the flexibility to be both a career woman and a mother at the same time. Citing this as her reason for wanting to become a university lecturer, one respondent suggests this will allow her to set her schedule around family

life (Du Plessis, focus group B, 2016). Also considered a career choice that offers women more flexibility, entrepreneurship is seen as an option that facilitates balance (Du Plessis, focus group B, 2016). A final option presented by Deola Sagoe in *Genevieve's* June 2013 issue is to have family members, your mother or father-in-law, help out with taking care of children while you work (Sagoe in Chinkata, 2013: 63). This option is however, outright resisted by all women respondents in their opinion that the mother has to be the one to take care of the children. Displaying a high level of internalization of women's social responsibility, respondents boil it down to the following: "basically in Nigeria, if the child goes bad, it's for the mother, if the child is good, it's for the father" (Du Plessis, focus group C, 2016). While this discourse is resisted in practice, its presentation in magazine discourse suggests that it is an option for some women. However, driven by the wish to avoid negative social stereotyping, women respondents look for ways to achieve work-life balance while adhering to cultural standards of motherhood. Taking into account the options open to them, young women are thus deal with the image of the all-rounded woman through early planning and preparation for the roles of working woman, wife and mother, while careful to adhere to certain traditional ideals of motherhood and the family.

5.3.1 Conclusion

The image of femininity constructed of the working wife and mother sees women faced with a high degree of socially and personally driven pressure. While this image is, in theory, constructed to empower them within the public as well as the private sphere, the centrality of marriage and motherhood within the socio-cultural context threatens to destabilize them in this pursuit. Although respondents confidently assume that, through their own planning, they will be able to achieve this balance, discourse and practice seems to suggest that this balance is either a choice between, on the one hand, having a 'big' career and help with the children or, on the other hand, having a 'small' career and fulfilling the traditional ideal of assuming responsibility for children. While not explicitly stated, Nigerian culture expresses a preference for the latter, suggesting that the all-rounded woman is a bit more rounded to the one side than the other. Despite the fact that it affirms women's right to a public role towards her empowerment, this career-based empowerment is somewhat limited. However, women express this ideal as a form

of woman-centered thought, as something they associate with benefits they themselves desire. Therefore, women still aspire to become all-rounded women, with planning and consideration of the context. To deal with this image, women thus consider the context and formulate a strategy that puts their ideals in the center and sees what can be done to tip the scales in their favour.

5.4 Ideas of Femininity and Gender Equality Within the Global Context

Through its representatives, commercialized media culture embrace an idea of African women that “are so together now it’s unbelievable, it’s amazing. Women have come up, dynamic women who are taking charge of themselves” (Adollo, 2016). Women’s magazines are thus presented as fulfilling the function of teaching women to appreciate themselves and their abilities, offering a platform for women to celebrate themselves and stand tall (Taiwo, 2016), highlighting femininity in a positive way. Looking at descriptions of women featured in *TW* and *Genevieve*, women’s commercialized media qualify them as, “a woman of substance” (Orekoya, 2009: 107) and “a force to be reckoned with” (Ojekwe, 2014: 90), presenting an image of the 21st Century woman as “calm, sure but forceful [...] and well aware of her presence” (Orekoya, 2009: 107). Speaking from a similar position that adopts the feminine gaze, women respondents attest that women’s sectional media bring them into the limelight, providing a platform to express themselves (Du Plessis, focus group C, 2016). These positive images and the resultant positive reception thereof is due to the fact that this form of media is sectional, written for women, about women and by women and is able to present a discourse of femininity from the point of view of the female gaze. As the agent of constructing femininity, the female gaze is reconstructive, brings femininity to the center of discourse and is valued because the national mass media like newspapers and news magazines represent a gendered regime that suppresses these discourses in their exclusion of the feminine element (Visser, 1997: 285). In this light, women’s magazines, with *TW* and *Genevieve* serving as an example, can be seen as committed to resisting the the debilitating effects of the male gaze espoused by the Nigerian mass media.

The woman who “explores different possibilities to develop her potencies” also does so “without losing her identity” (Akinyemi, 2013: 95), situating the 21st century woman within the

Nigerian/African context. While the African discourse does not stand out as an individual dominant theme, it is undoubtedly inflected in all discourses on womanhood as women,

“Celebrate and appreciate many of our traditions [...] I integrate what I have learned around the world, but stay rooted in my ‘Africanism/Nigerian-ness’” (Olayinka Shorters in Akinyede, 2015: 69)

Weaved into discourse, the centrality of the Nigerian/African identity is constructed as part and parcel of the image of femininity within the global context. In affirmation, magazine representatives see the Nigerian context as very specific to their product and focuses on what people need to hear related to their own issues (Adollo, 2016). Women respondents confirm their positive reception of more traditional representations of Nigerian women in that “we Africans are looking up to those women who are bringing out who [they] are” (Du Plessis, focus group A, 2016). This affinity with localized representations sees women respondents negatively regard more recent magazine covers, associating their perceived Westernization with neo-colonial tendencies that do not represent the Nigerian woman (Du Plessis, focus group A, 2016). For respondents, recent covers embody what magazine representatives define as emerging, contemporary things blending with local or traditional things which also blends with international style (Adollo, 2016), affirming that local women’s magazines also look to the global market for inspiration. While, in content, magazine discourses are still situated within the African context, according to respondents, however, the representation of femininity on the covers too closely resemble similar products on the global market and they would prefer to see more pride in the African heritage (Du Plessis, focus group A, 2016). Despite situating itself within the Nigerian context to present a localized image of femininity, global, Western culture increasingly influences local cultural products in certain aspects of their expression, suggesting a degree of modernization at the expense of tradition. However, while this change is important to note, African discourses are still strongly reflected in content, constructing a femininity that operates from within it’s own unique locale.

An image of femininity as rooted within Nigerian/African culture thus describes a particular standpoint from which it is articulated. This position is reflected in expression of feminist ideals

in both discourse and practice, where women decidedly differentiate themselves from global discourses on gender (in)equality. Eugenia Abu defines her position in *TW*'s August 2009 issue in that, while she sees herself as feminist, she realizes that standards for feminism differ:

“I think it’s overwhelming to use that word, as it is interpreted across countries and cultures differently. I certainly will not be saying I am feminist and so I endorse lesbianism, which is what it is to them.

Feminist to me means that if I am qualified for the job more than a man, then I should get it!”

(Abu quoted in Orekoya, 2009: 110-111)

Resistance to the feminist label, without qualifying your definition thereof as not associated with Western feminism or concepts such as liberation or emancipation, is reified in practice where women respondents confirm the societal antagonism to feminists positing that if you are a feminist, you are a quiet one (Du Plessis, focus group B, 2016). Clarifying this position is one of the founders of the Gender Mainstreaming Project at the University of Ibadan, professor Odejide who posits that, “naming it liberation or emancipation, we are against it [...] Don’t put -isms on it” (Odejide, 2016). Instead, Odejide suggests that when feminist discourses are localized, when it is expressed in terms of agency, in the sense that everyone has potential, then it becomes more palatable (Odejide, 2016). Ultimately, even commercialized women’s media assert that they wouldn’t call this African brand of feminism ‘liberation’ (Adollo, 2016), creating an overall consensus that the female gaze needs to firmly situate itself within the local context when approaching issues of gender (in)equality. The need for such a localized expression stands as an articulation of feminist standpoint theory in its insistence on the centrality of local practices and history to contextualize women’s empowerment. It defines knowledge as particular rather than universal, suggesting that the location, the standpoint of women is privileged as it provides a vantage point that reveals the truth of social reality (Cranny-Francis et al., 2007: 69-70). The importance of the group-based experiences of Nigerian/African women is reflected in Odejide’s articulation of an African feminist discourse,

“It’s about looking where we came from and the benefits and disadvantages that came from that and evolving from that. It is contextually based and empowering to both sexes in every facet of society. It’s a culturally grounded approach to gender.”

(Odejide, 2016)

Not white, not male and not elite, the Nigerian approach to gender (in)equality localizes discourse and favours the unique standpoint of the women who live these experiences.

This standpoint provides a basis from which to consider how the roles of men and women are perceived. Afolami Oludolapo explicates the feminine position on gender equality in *TW's* July/August 2013 issue in that, rather than pitting the natural differences between men and women against each other, we should aim at harnessing the synergy in the complementarity of both sexes (Oludolapo, 2014: 93). Discourse reaffirms this complementarity by presenting the male point of view in affirmation. Quoted in *Genevieve's* March 2010 issue, Fauzi Fahm defines gender roles as “a symbiotic relationship between men and women” (Fahm quoted in Keshi, Oladipupo & Oseni, 2010: 31). Women respondents similarly contend that “working together is better than when you just take a stand” (Du Plessis, focus group A, 2016), capturing professor Odejide’s sentiment that “we don’t polarize men and women, we see how it can be improved by working together.” (Odejide, 2016). This view is illustrated in the practical application thereof in women’s movements that advocate for empowerment. Employing the position of her office as Gender Mainstream Specialist with the Society for Family Health in Nigeria, Ada Agbasimalo targets female youth in unison with their male counterparts in an effort to uplift the girl-child and the woman of tomorrow (Alaka, 2008: 49). The inclusivity of men in the gender struggle is illustrative of one of the defining features of African Womanist discourse and affirms the centrality of location in contextualizing the feminine gaze within its particularly African reality.

Aside from affirming the need to work in conjunction with men, discourse presents sharp criticism of women who do not support each other in their efforts toward equality. In *Genevieve's* December 2008 issue, Grace Egbagbe comments on the opposition she experienced from other women in her career, suggesting that “women are their own worst enemies” and that “the only limitation a woman will have in her bid to get up the corporate ladder is to rely on another woman for support” (Egbagbe quoted in Alaka, 2008: 56). Women respondents attest from their own experiences that women keep other women down since, if a woman at the university runs for SR president, girls, like themselves, will say that she is not capable enough

(Du Plessis, focus group B, 2016). According to Patricia Taiwo, women oppose other women because, while young women are mentally changing by the day and growing with an awareness of gender equality, they still see themselves as ‘underneath’. Therefore, women don’t support other women as some still believe that women should be ‘underneath’ (Taiwo, 2016). In public and private life women judge and condemn each other for not adhering to their supposed gendered roles so that, even though men want to stand for women, they are antagonized by women who do not support this (Taiwo, 2016). It is then up to women themselves to allow the support from men as well as them supporting each other that gender equality can be achieved. However, far more prevalent in discourse is the depiction of solidarity in empowering women through women’s movements that uplift them to be full participants in society alongside men. Scores of articles in both *TW* and *Genevieve* feature women who are committed to programs that raise women in society through education and training, not only towards the empowerment of women themselves, but also the societal growth and development that comes along with it.

5.4.1 Conclusion

Overall, an image of femininity is created where women’s standpoint within the African reality presents an outlook from which to approach gender roles and gender equality within the context of their local practices and history, creating a unique subject-position from which to tackle issues toward women’s empowerment. Sectional women’s media thus stands as a direct challenge to the gendered regime of the mass media that excludes them and takes up the feminine gaze to create a platform for the expression of an African femininity. Aside from minor neo-colonial tendencies, discourse and practice support women’s magazines in their expression of woman-centered thought towards gender parity. Taking up standpoints related to the inefficiency of Euro-American feminism for African women, the need to work together with men, and the very real phenomenon of women oppressing other women, discourse aligns itself with the axioms of Womanist thought, a position affirmed in practice. Aside from these challenges, discourse reiterates the drive to improve the situation for women in society, an improvement that not only benefits them, but contributes to the work of national development itself, benefitting all of its people.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to examine popular Nigerian women's lifestyle magazines to ascertain whether and in what ways they reflect, reinforce or contradict the African feminist agenda. This research was based on the fact that, while much attention is paid to the strides made by African women's literature in the development of African feminist thought, other forms of media that produce knowledge for and on women, like that of women's lifestyle magazines, have not been scrutinized for their potential. In addition, representations of women in the mass media, specifically women's magazines, have widely been challenged as detrimentally stereotypical and destructive to positive identity formation in women, but these studies have largely focussed on statistical approaches to pictographic content. Based on text rather than images, this study sought to take an interdisciplinary approach to women's magazines, applying context-specific feminist discourses from literature to the mass media to ascertain whether Nigerian women's lifestyle magazines can act as a vehicle for women's positive identity formation. In light of this gap in feminist media research, the objective of this study was to analyse discourses and practices of femininity to answer the following two questions:

1. What ideas of femininity are produced in the content of women's lifestyle magazines and are these representations affirmed or contradicted in practice?
2. Do these images reflect, reinforce or contradict the African feminist agenda?

The main empirical findings are summarized into three main themes and a discussion on images of femininity and gender (in)equality. The three themes converge to answer the first research objective:

1. What ideas of femininity are produced in the content of women's lifestyle magazines and are these representations affirmed or contradicted in practice?

Firstly, opportunities in the public sphere construct an image of Nigerian women as full participants and push against negative stereotypes and economic exclusion that threaten to limit their power. Women claim the image of the working woman as a form of cultural capital to

negotiate their position in society to their own benefit, in spite of the social and economic challenges in Nigeria. Secondly, the construction of women in terms of traditional ideals and role models, specifically that of marriage and motherhood, work to produce the ‘responsible’ Nigerian woman. Women themselves are the co-creators of these gendered ideals, but they also negotiate their position by questioning and adapting certain practices. In embodying the role of the responsible Nigerian woman, women are seen to reconstruct this gendered stereotype so that it becomes a role that does not simply oppress them, but allows them freedom of choice within this societal institution. Thirdly, women are defined in terms of their success at achieving the personal and social ideal image of working wife and mother or ‘all-rounded’ Nigerian woman. As social structures are not accommodating to this ideal as yet, women deal with this image by adapting the way this space is traditionally constructed by either planning the timing of work and family or relying on the extended family structure. Ultimately, discourse constructs an image of femininity that accepts and perpetuates gendered stereotypes as they exist in society. As the co-creators of these gender roles along with men, an image of femininity is constructed of the all-rounded and responsible woman that does not always work towards their own empowerment. However, both discourse and practice converge to highlight the women who actively carve out spaces for more freedom of choice and achievement within these structures. In all, an image of femininity is constructed in accordance with Patricia Taiwo’s views on women in Nigeria, that sees them mentally changing and growing with an awareness of gender equality (Taiwo, 2016), and works within the structure co-created by them that stereotypically sees women as ‘underneath’ towards a form of empowerment.

With this image of femininity in mind, the fourth and final discussion on feminist interpretations of gender roles and gender (in)equality converge to answer the main research question:

2. Do these images reflect, reinforce or contradict the African feminist agenda?

Commercialized media culture in Nigeria in the form of women’s lifestyle magazines provide a platform for the adoption of the feminine gaze. From this platform, women's empowerment as an expression of African feminism is defined, which coincide with the paradigms considered within

African feminist discourses. Evident from the discussion on images of femininity in discourse and practice, women negotiate freedom of choice within institutionalized structures and are presented with new and traditional alternatives to overcome their oppression. These constructions critique overt patriarchal manifestations and also look at gender roles in the context of other forms of oppression that are shared in society like that of economic issues, neocolonialism, socio-economic exclusion and religious fundamentalism. In all of this, they prioritize working together with men towards gender parity, and do so from a woman-centered perspective that values the everyday experiences of women. Images of femininity can therefore be said to reflect the African feminist agenda in its presentation of sustainable ideologies and critiques that open up avenues for the exploration of women's representation in the African context. However, due to increased global influences on commercialized media culture over time, women's magazines are also representative of changes taking place as less traditional constructions of femininity in Nigeria becomes more and more prevalent. While this critique is levelled more at images of women on the covers of magazines than their content, such changes can undermine the power of women's magazines to fully reinforce the African feminist agenda. However, it is important to note that these changes are also symptomatic of a changing society where traditional ideals are one of a number of discourses on African femininity. While they might represent the dominant discourse, they do not represent all constructions of femininity in Nigeria.

In addition, compared with African women's literary writing, images of femininity in terms of alternatives towards empowerment in magazines are not found to be as potent as its literary counterparts. This is illustrative of women's media as situated firmly within the socio-cultural context with its influences and restrictions on women, reflecting the degree to which patriarchal ideals are embedded in society and embodied by women themselves. This is due to the fact that, where women's literary writings display a critical attitude towards gender practices, women's magazines do not express such a strong critique of the status quo. While literature might, for example, question the traditional ideal of marriage and discard the practice in favour of women's empowerment altogether, magazine discourses predominantly work within this practice and

present women with alternatives and avenues that would benefit them positively. In other words, magazine discourse reflects already extant positive images of femininity within the social structure whereas women's literary writings are critical of the social structure itself. In this way, magazines can be said to constitute vehicles that convey positive images of femininity, not necessarily constituting a platform where critical attitudes towards gender practices are instigated. Therefore, while they have been shown to deal with similar issues, compared with the fictionalized content of literary writings that is free to construct more forceful and explicit images of empowered femininity within its pages, women's magazines cannot be said to strongly reinforce the African feminist agenda as much as it can be said to reflect its concerns. Ultimately, this leads to the assertion that Nigerian women's lifestyle magazines act as vehicles for the positive identity formation of women that are affirmed by women's own reception of these discourses.

In light of these findings, this research contributes to the existing understanding of the ways in which women are represented in the media in African feminist media studies. Broadening research on the subject by using women's lifestyle magazines rather than just newspapers and news magazines, as well as analysing the textual representation of women rather than just how they are presented in images, this research analyses different representations of femininity as they appear in women-centered media. In addition, eschewing quantitative methods in favour of qualitative methods allows for an evaluation of the meanings generated in these textual spaces as they are produced for women, about women and by women. Building on the work of Ghanaian scholar Opoku-Agyemang who focussed on how women are represented in love stories in a local women's magazine, this study attempts to broaden the discussion by evaluating representations of women in general to come to an understanding of the potential role women-centered media can play in their empowerment. Finally, by using an interdisciplinary approach - drawing on a gendered approach to the media based on paradigms emerging from African women's literary studies - this research attempted to contribute to the current shifts in methodological approaches to feminist media studies.

Due to difference in the object of inquiry (text not images), methods (qualitative) and approaches (African feminist), this study differs in perspective from other studies in mass media. Instead of debilitatingly stereotypical and degrading to women, this study finds that women's lifestyle magazines present them with an image they predominantly affirm as socio-culturally positive and accurate, and also inspires to them to empower themselves even further. When applying African feminist interpretative paradigms to local representations, results thus differ from other studies on women in the media, pointing to the importance of applying local forms of knowledge to local subjects.

The degree to which alternative approaches to representations of femininity in the media produce new meanings and understandings suggest that these alternative approaches could be applied to other forms of emergent women's media to diversify feminist media research. Future investigations based on qualitative methods that incorporate local forms of knowledge has the potential to unearth other under-investigated forms of media that could contribute to women's empowerment on the continent, among them being women's pages in newspapers and new forms of media like blogs and social media pages. The need exists for more local studies to ascertain which forms of media can act as carriers of the African feminist agenda and the ways they can be appropriated and exploited for the positive representation of women in society. Future research into other, more accessible forms of women's media like that of radio could also reveal how the media can be seized by women in order to bring reconceptualizations of femininity to more women that just the literate, educated urban demographic represented by these magazines.

As a consequence of the chosen methodology of this study, a number of limitations need to be considered: Firstly, in terms of data collection (*Genevieve* and *TW* magazine), this study is based on available hard copies of the magazines from their inception to the final date of fieldwork. Due to the lack of back copies online, the magazine sample is small, was not unable to cover all the years of publication, and the dates of the issues analysed do not overlap with each other. However, the use of a systematic random sampling strategy of the data set as well as discounting any special issues, ensures reliability of the study. In addition, the study employed deductive

content analysis, did not require a large data set as is the case with quantitative analysis, so a small sample size was sufficient. Secondly, the choice of women's lifestyle magazines narrows the representativity of the study to a group of literate and educated women who reside in large urban areas. This medium was chosen as an example of media written for women, on women and by women to ascertain what images of femininity women themselves circulate. However, the reliability of this study allows it to be replicated in other settings, for example in other West African and African countries for comparative studies as this form of media fulfills the same role across countries and cultures. Thirdly and finally, its focus on cover and feature articles to the exclusion of other content places a limitation on the scope of the study. However, as this is the content that commercialized women's media culture highlights in each issue, it is taken to be representative of the ideology of the magazines and sufficient for the purposes of qualitative analysis.

Examining popular Nigerian women's magazines, this study set out to determine whether this form of mass media is able to act as a vehicle for a positive, localized expression of African femininity. Contrary to the standard point of view on women's magazines as presenting detrimentally stereotypical representations of femininity, this study finds that, through the application of local forms of women's knowledge, women's magazines can indeed be seen to reflect the African feminist agenda in its content that is reinforced by the women they are aimed at.

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