

**AMBIVALENT SEXISM IN NOLLYWOOD MOVIES**

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**Abstract**

This study investigates ambivalent sexism in the language of Nollywood characters using the framework proposed by Glick and Fiske (1996, 2001). The objective of the study is to find out the types of ambivalent sexism used in the movies and to determine the more prominent gender discussed in the movies. The study is qualitative in design and the data are collected from six Nollywood movies. The findings reveal that the movies exhibited elements of ambivalent sexism through hostile and benevolent sexism, that hostile sexism is the dominant type used in the movies, and that women are the most prominent discussed gender in the movies.

**Keywords:** Ambivalent sexism, Nollywood, hostile sexism, benevolent sexism, gender.

**Introduction**

Sexism in language is a social phenomenon that occurs in society. It can be said to be the failure to give equal right to a particular gender's interests, especially, women's interests. Sexism involves attitudes or ideologies which include beliefs and ideas that hold one group as superior to the other group on the basis of their sex or gender. Vetterling-Braggins (qtd in Mills 1995:83) asserts that "a statement is sexist if it constitutes, promotes or exploits an unfair or irrelevant or impertinent distinction between the sexes". Thus, any use of language that encourages or urges discrimination based on sex is deemed to be sexist. For Weatherall (2002:76), sexism is "an aspect of language-use that in different ways diminishes women and makes them invisible". Sexism is thought of as hostility toward women, perpetrated by men. However, both men and women can (and often do) endorse sexist beliefs about each other and themselves. While sexism has historically disadvantaged women, there are negative consequences of sexism for both men and women. Rigid gender roles can be damaging to women and men alike, restricting opportunities and promoting gender-based prejudice. Sexism in language can be found in different aspects of life and people are exposed to sexist language in everyday life: at home, at school, in the street and through the media such as television, cinema and magazines or newspapers and in the movies.

The word 'ambivalence' is used to describe the coexistence of opposing attitudes or feelings towards a person or idea. Ambivalent sexism has the belief that women are wonderful and must be protected by men. Its underpinnings lie in traditional stereotyping and masculine dominance, and its consequences are often damaging. Ambivalent sexist ideologies are as a result of the simultaneous existence of male structural power and female dyadic power (Glick and Fiske, 1996). This type of sexism has both positive and negative attitudes toward women. Its theory examines the interaction between hostile and benevolent sexism, and how both men and women embody this discourse as an incarnation of cultural norms. Sexism, generally, is largely based on traditional gender norms, which place men in positions of authority everywhere. However, women are expected to submit to male dominance in the majority of cultures, but there have been increasing numbers of women who do not conform to these traditional, male-dominated gender norms. This non-conformity brings about the basis for ambivalent sexism.

Ambivalent sexism has two types: hostile and benevolent sexism. Hostile sexism seeks to justify male power, traditional gender roles, and men's exploitation of women as sexual objects through derogatory characterizations of women. Begany and Milburn (qtd in Mastari *et al*, 2019) are of the opinion that it is expressed in a blatant and resentful way towards women who violate traditional rules. Hostile sexism

seeks to preserve men's dominance over women by underlining men's power. It is founded on the belief that men should hold social roles of power, including specifying that men should possess the authority in the family (Gaunt 2012). In other words, hostile sexism reflects overtly negative evaluations and stereotypes about gender, for instance, the ideas that women are incompetent and inferior to men.

Benevolent sexism, on the other hand, is a subtler form of sexism expressed in a seemingly positive way. Glick and Fiske, (1996:491) define it as:

a set of inter-related attitude toward women that are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles, but that are subjectively positive in feeling tone (for the perceiver) and also tend to elicit behaviours typically categorized as pro-social (for example, helping) or intimacy seeking (for example, self-disclosure).

Connelly and Heesacker (2012:433) note that benevolent sexism is instigated through "paternal and traditional beliefs that perceive women as beautiful and pure, yet delicate and precious, and therefore needs protection provided by men". They go on to add that it is also an inconspicuous mechanism that perpetuates gender inequality. For Glick *et al* (2000:763), benevolent sexism is "a subjectively positive orientation of protection, idealization, and affection directed towards women that, like hostile sexism, serves to justify women's subordinate status to men". According to Montanes *et al* (2013), it has been shown that benevolent sexism encourages women to prioritize relationships (family, children, etc) over pursuing educational or professional goals, and undermining women's perceptions of their competencies and performances.

Benevolent sexism relies on kinder and gentler justifications of male dominance and prescribed gender roles; it recognizes men's dependence on women, and embraces a romanticized view of sexual relationships with women. A woman toward whom benevolent sexism is enacted may recognize that, for instance, a man's unsolicited help reflects an assumption that he is more competent than she. The man, on the other hand, may not be aware of the sexist assumptions implicit in his actions. This present study investigates sexism in Nollywood movies with the aim of finding out the types of ambivalent sexism in the language of the characters.

### **Nollywood Movies**

Nollywood is a name that refers to the Nigerian film industry. Onishi (2016) says it is like Hollywood or Bollywood, but in Nigeria while Schultz (2012) understands Nollywood as the Nigerian video film industry whose content is made up of the familiar stories that accord with local sensibilities, reflecting and preserving them rather than contributing to global monoculture. According to Udosimor and Sonuga (2012:30), Nollywood movies have come to assume "an authority over the values of people's lives, such that what people see in them comes to be taken not just as fictional projection of imaginative consciousness, but as the true, authentic mirror of what the society is; a veritable market of what the society represents, and much worse, of the ideal that it aspires, or must aspire, towards". Abah (2008:339) concludes that although African women are celebrated in Nollywood movies as they depict the women in varying roles, the movies nevertheless "issue dire warnings for women who exceed the limits placed on their dreams by construed tradition as well as women who fail to meet the expectations placed on their domestic roles by cultural institutions". Thus, this study explores the influence of ambivalent sexism in six Nollywood movies since movies are a reflection of the way society works. The purpose is to identify and analyze the different forms of ambivalent sexism as used by the characters in the movies.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Sexism in language is one of the major issues in sociolinguistics. The major problem is rooted in the ways sexism has been weaved into the language system so subtly that people end up submitting to the sexist views without even realizing it. This status quo has filtered into the Nollywood films and there appears to be no middle way in Nollywood's negative representation of women since the image of women in movies is a fictional construct borne out of repressed desires and imaginations of patriarchy. This study therefore deems it worthwhile to investigate ambivalent sexism in the language of Nollywood movies using Glick and Fiske's classification (1996, 2001). The choice of Nollywood

movies is informed by the fact that the movies are a reflection of Nigerian culture and society. Also, the fact that there is a dearth of studies on ambivalent sexism in the language of Nollywood movies leaves a gap which this present study attempts to fill. Therefore, this paper seeks to answer these questions:

- i. What types of ambivalent sexism are used by the characters in the movies?
- ii. What is the dominant type of ambivalent sexism?
- iii. Which gender is the most prominently discussed?

### Literature Review

Altenburger *et al* (2017) analyze associations between the fictional series *Fifty Shades* – one popular culture mechanism that includes pervasive traditional role representations and underlying sexist beliefs by using Ambivalent Sexism Inventory, and concludes that those who interpreted *Fifty Shades* as ‘romantic’ had higher levels of Benevolent sexism.

Reisya (2018) deals with the use of sexist language in the *Twilight Saga Eclipse Movie* by using Ambivalent Sexism theory and finds out that Benevolent sexism is mostly used and also that the more prominent discussed gender is female in Benevolent sexism.

Brewington (2019) examines if sexism takes on new forms in movies by using Ambivalent sexism perspective and concludes that acts align with Benevolent sexism are more prevalent in movies than Hostile sexism on average across decades and genres, and movies falling under fantasy genres have significantly fewer counts of Benevolent sexism than family or comedy films and no genre proved to have great differences in instances of Hostile sexism.

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is Ambivalent Sexism theory formulated by Glick and Fiske’s (1996, 2001), which contends that sexism is the combination of complementary gender ideologies, held by both men and women. It posits that there is an overtly negative form of sexism (hostile sexism) as well as a covert form of sexism that reinforces gender inequality through positive stereotypes of women (benevolent sexism). According to this theory, the coexistence of power differences between genders and strong interdependence give rise to both hostile and benevolent attitudes toward men and women. The authors state that ambivalent sexism is the result of two basic facts about relations between men and women: male dominance (patriarchy) and interdependence between the sexes. Hostile sexism has three subcomponents. They are:

(a) Dominative Paternalism: This is the idea that men should control women because women are less intelligent and less competent. Women are seen as being too emotional, and incapable of making important decisions. For this reason, hostile sexists believe that it is men’s responsibility to dictate to women what they should think and how they should behave. In other words, this dominative paternalism serves to keep women submissive and subservient to men.

(b) Competitive Gender Differentiation: This reflects the separation of gender roles based on the belief that only men are capable of filling important societal roles. This reasoning offers social justification that men should rule and women seeking to fill leadership roles are trying to usurp men’s power and will not perform as well.

(c) Heterosexual Hostility: This reflects the tendency to view women merely as sexual objects as well as the fear that women may use sexual attraction to gain power over men. It projects the idea that women use their feminine tricks to gain special favors from men. Benevolent sexism has three subcomponents. They are:

(a) Protective Paternalism: This means the governing or controlling of subordinates in a way that suggests a father’s relationship with his children. It states that because of their greater authority, power, and physical strength, men should serve as protectors and providers for women. This protectiveness is particularly strong towards women on whom men feel a sense of ‘ownership’ such as wives, mothers, daughters.

(b) Complementary Gender Differentiation: Here, women in such roles as wife and mother are viewed as having favourable traits that complement stereotypically male characteristics that reflect men’s work

role. In other words, it focuses on the “equal but different” myth, where women have their own special roles in the kitchen.

(c) Intimate Heterosexuality: This romanticizes women as sexual objects, viewing a female romantic partner as necessary for a man to be ‘complete’. Here, heterosexual men seek romantic relationships, psychological closeness and heterosexual intimacy with women.

**Methodology**

This study employs the qualitative descriptive design. The datum is obtained from the conversations between the characters collected from six Nollywood movies. They are: *Let Karma*, *Jenna*, *Sophia’s Heart*, *In Every Way*, *72 Hours* and *14 Days*. The choice of these movies is based on the fact that they contain sexist expressions. The steps taken by the researcher in carrying out the research procedure are as follows:

- 1) Watching the movies received from Xender.
- 2) Selecting those that contain sexist expressions.
- 3) Identifying the type of ambivalent sexism.
- 4) Identifying the dominant type of ambivalent sexism.
- 5) Identifying the most prominent discussed gender in the movies.

**Analysis**

The datum is classified into hostile and benevolent sexism which has three subcomponents each. For hostile sexism, its subcomponents are dominative paternalism, competitive gender differentiation and heterosexual hostility while benevolent sexism has protective paternalism, complementary gender differentiation and intimate heterosexuality as seen in Table 1.

Hostile Sexism		Benevolent Sexism	
Types	Number	Types	Number
Dominative paternalism	3	Protective paternalism	3
Competitive gender differentiation	3	Complementary gender differentiation	3
Heterosexual hostility	12	Intimate heterosexuality	3
Total	18		9

**Table 1: Types of sexism and number of occurrences**

From the table above, it is evident that both hostile and benevolent sexism are used by the characters in the movies. Under hostile sexism, the datum reveals that dominative paternalism appears three times, competitive gender differentiation appears three times while heterosexual hostility appears twelve times, with the total number of eighteen. Under benevolent sexism, protective paternalism appears three times, complimentary gender differentiation appears three times, while intimate heterosexuality appears three times, with the total number of nine. Table 1 also shows that the heterosexual hostility is the most frequently used (12 times), and hostile sexism is the dominant type of ambivalent sexism used in the movies.

Types	Male	Female
Hostile	3	18
Benevolent	0	9
Total	3	27

Table 2: The number of gender discussed in the movies

From table 2 above, result shows that female is the most prominent discussed gender with the total number of twenty-seven as against males who are discussed three times. Women are mostly discussed maybe because they are perceived as people who cannot do anything on their own except when men are involved. They are viewed as the weaker sex.

## Discussion of Findings

### Hostile Sexism

This is rooted in the belief that women are inferior to men, which makes men more deserving of higher status and power. It is recognizable because the attitudes are characterized by overt antipathy (Glick and Fiske, 1996). Attitudes include the degradation of women, being sexually guarded against women, anti-feminist views and explicit threats or accusations. Below are examples of the subtypes of hostile sexism.

#### (i) Dominative Paternalism

This reflects views of women as underdeveloped adults, providing justification for men to be authoritative and monitor, protect and make decisions on women's behalf as in Exchange 1.

#### Exchange 1

**Anthony:** And how's Ene?

**Daniel:** I hadn't even stepped in, I never even settle, babe just went on her nag feast. I had to leave the place.

**Anthony:** Calm down. You need to be a man seriously. That's all I can say because **women will always be women. She will behave like a woman, but that's where you behave like a man and control your woman. That's what a man does.** (Let Karma)

The expression above depicts how domineering some men can be. Anthony, instead of blaming his friend, Daniel, for not explaining to the wife why he came back late, instigates him to control and be in charge of his wife saying that it is the duty of men to control women. The utterances by Anthony are sexist because they present women as being too emotional and incapable of making important decisions, that is, women are weak and dependent and not able to independently handle life situations.

#### (ii) Competitive Gender Differentiation

Gender differentiation refers to the social distinctions all cultures make between men and women and the importance of gender identity in social hierarchy (Harris, 1991). Competitive gender differentiation justifies women's lower status through stereotypes of their inherent inferiority and incompetence. It places importance on traditional gender roles for women (for example, mother and wife) and assumes that men depend on women to fulfill these roles. An example,

#### Exchange 2

**Dozie:** How may I help you?

**Dorathy:** You sent for me.

**Dozie:** Yes, I did. Ehmm, according to your file, I see that you are up for promotion.

**Dorathy:** Yes, Sir. I'm up for promotion. I have...

**Dozie:** (interrupted) You're not going to get it.

**Dorathy:** And why?

**Dozie:** **That position is for people who are stable to a certain level. Since you're a woman, you need to be married and settled. Until you change your status, there's nothing I can do.** (14 Days)

Dozie's last sentence in the above exchange is sexist as Dorathy is not promoted or given the position she asks for because she is not married and to Dozie, an unmarried lady is not stable to handle a good position except when she is married. That is the only thing that can guarantee her as an employee.

#### (iii) Heterosexual Hostility

This is the hostile component that links sex with power and involves the belief that women's sexuality is dangerous to men for its potential to let women regain power over men. Below is an example of this.

#### Exchange 3

**Donald:** So I blew your mind, didn't I?

**Jenna:** Don't put it that way. I was just surprised.

**Donald:** **You have an elegant look. I imagine what I can do to this body of yours.**

**Jenna:** Please stop. I knew there was something wrong about you.

**Donald:** **I thought that's what you ladies want.**

**Jenna:** Can you just leave me. Are you out of your mind? Are you crazy? (Jenna)

#### Exchange 4

**Fred:** Oh you, you startled me.

**Clara:** I wish I could do worse to a useless player like you.

**Fred:** **Really?** You are joking now, right? What's wrong with you? **You and I know that marriage was never part of the bargain. What's wrong with you?**

**Clara:** Oh really? So what was?

**Fred:** **Oh, we're having fun. You enjoyed me, I enjoyed you. We had fun. We had a good time.**

**Clara:** **The same fun you distribute to every girl in town?** (Sophia's Heart)

The above expressions by Donald and Fred in Exchanges 3 and 4 have negative connotations for women which reflect the tendency to view women merely as sexual objects that are meant to be used and discarded anytime they (men) feel like. Another example is seen in exchanges 5 and 6 below.

#### Exchange 5

**Dominic:** I would need you to make a reservation for one night at the hotel.

**Mabel:** The usual hotel, Sir?

**Dominic:** Mabel, if it isn't the usual hotel, do you not think I would specify?

**Mabel:** Sir, don't you think your house will be better? I'm sorry Sir. I promise I'll mind my business.

**Dominic:** I don't think so, but I'm going to indulge you. **No woman deserves to grace my bed, none of them. All these women you see around me, all of them want one thing, money. And I'll make sure they get all of it because I'm going to get all the pleasure that I want from them.** (In Every Way)

#### Exchange 6

**Anthony:** **Okay, I'll tell you one. I was with this one girl last week that let me do anything to her, all because she thought I was Dangote money man and when I say anything and everything, I mean anything and everything (he laughs).** (Let Karma)

The conversations in Exchanges 5 and 6 contain sexist expressions as they perceive women as those who use their feminine tricks to gain special favors from men. Dominic's statement buttress this as they believe that for a woman to agree to have sex with a man, she is in need of something, and for this reason, they would give them (women) that which they want, but they would get all the pleasure that they (men) want in return. Thus, women are presented as those who use sex to tempt and manipulate men in order to achieve power over them.

#### Benevolent Sexism

This is characterized by attitudes that regard women as inferior leading to discriminatory acts, some of which can be perceived as positive because they are helpful or protective. Glick and Fiske (2001), assert that benevolent sexism involves subjectively favourable chivalrous attitudes that give protection and affection to deserving women who embrace the stereotypical gender norm. The datum in this current study reveals three kinds of benevolent sexism; protective paternalism, complementary gender differentiation and intimate heterosexuality.

##### (i) Protective Paternalism

This behaviour reflects the patriarchal interaction between benevolent sexist men and women. A benevolent sexist might dictate women's behaviours while morally justifying his behaviour with the belief that he holds his subordinates best interest in mind. An example is seen in Exchange 7 below.

**Exchange 7**

**Nnenna:** Fine, I was at the bar last night, but I left as soon as I got your call.

I got a ride to Amaka's house and this morning, I got a cab to school. I swear, you can call her and ask her.

**Michael:** Why are you like this, eh? Why are you behaving like this? Listen, **campus was a little bit heated-up last night and I needed to be sure you were safe, that's all. So I sent out a few boys to go find you. Listen darling, you know I'll never lay a finger on you. You know that, right? I need you to understand that you're my life and I love you so much, hmm. I just want to be sure you're not stepping out on me because you're stuck in this relationship. Don't jeopardize it. Come here.**

(Let Karma)

Michael's utterances show how women are treated by men; how they believe that they (men) protect the women, but invariably mock women to be the weaker sex. Michael does not allow his girlfriend, Nnenna, to be independent instead he monitors her at all times, threatens her not to jeopardize their relationship, and at the same time professes his love for her. The expressions are sexist because they portray women as warm, caring, and maternal and for this reason, they should be protected and provided for by men.

(ii) Complementary Gender Differentiation

This holds the belief that because women are warm, morally pure and weak, and men are competent, independent, morally corruptible and strong, they have contrasting, but complementary attributes.

**Exchange 8**

**Sophie:** Oh baby, did you say something? I'm so sorry.

**Kamsi:** Yea, eh, I said I want to hire a house help.

**Sophie:** I thought we had an agreement. We said no domestic staff when we get married. So why did you change your mind?

**Kamsi:** Well, that's because I thought that when you finally come into this house, **you'll take up your responsibility as a wife; cook and clean the house,** but it looks like you don't want to change.

**Sophie:** (Kamsi trying to romance her) I'm tired please. I don't want. I just want to sleep.

**Kamsi:** You're tired from doing what? What's wrong with you? **How many times have we made love this month?**

(72 Hours)

These expressions made by Kamsi are sexist because they portray women with the responsibility of doing the house chores as well as satisfying their husbands in bed.

(iii) Intimate Heterosexuality

This is the belief that women and men are dependent on each other for both emotional closeness and reproduction. An example is seen in the following exchange:

**Exchange 9**

**Dominic:** What? What do you mean you have a girlfriend? You've known me for so many years, have I ever woken up one day and told you, 'Thom, now I'm gay' (they laugh).

**Thom:** Another girlfriend?

**Dominic:** Let's say that, eh, my therapist and I have something going, you know.

**Thom:** Bad boy, you should've told me that you wanted a 'sexiotherapist'.

**Dominic:** Ahh, you're crazy. Look, but what happened was that **Kelly was just available and convenient, and I needed the release because I've been in this house for sometime all by myself.** What would you have me do?

**Thom:** So I'm curious. How did you cope with your leg and the therapist on top?

**Dominic:** Oh, Thom, you're sick. Forgive me, but you're foolish. Look at you sounding unserious like you didn't care; now you want detail. **Well, Kelly is just wonderful in bed. The girl just knows the right thing to do and what buttons to press.**

(In Every Way)

The expression about Kelly describes women as romantic objects that satisfy men's sexual desire and without it, men cannot be complete. Kelly is not just described as an available sex mate, but also as a necessary sex mate that knows the right thing to do at the right time.

Sexism is expressed as a separation of gender roles and differential access to privileges and opportunities. Traditional gender roles stereotypes describe women as nurturers who are emotional, sensitive and warm. They also describe women as unambitious, incompetent, weak and conniving in their relational power (Adams, 2009). Even the positive qualities can hold negative implications, for example, the expression in Exchange 7 where Michael tells Nnenna, **'campus was a little bit heated-up last night and I needed to be sure you were safe, that's all.... I just want to be sure you are not stepping out on me because you are stuck in this relationship. Don't jeopardize it.'** While these traits are idealized in good romantic partners and mothers, they imply frailty or ineptitude, in a competitive environment. These views are held towards women as a group and fail to view women as individuals. These views are found in Nollywood movies as seen in the data.

### Conclusion

This study investigates ambivalent sexism in Nollywood movies. The findings show that sexist attitude is highly prevalent in Nollywood movies and is manifested either as the hostile or the benevolent form. It also shows that hostile sexism is the most dominant type used in this study and reveals that women are the most prominent gender discussed by the characters in the movies. Furthermore, while hostile sexism demonstrates direct and overt hostility toward women, benevolent sexism projects subjectively complimentary stereotypes of women (Glick and Fiske, 1996). This is to say that benevolent sexism harms women in multiple ways by justifying and reinforcing hostile sexism, fostering unrecognized discrimination that limits women's opportunities and diminishes their performance, and by sapping women's personal ambitions and resistance to inequality. Hostile and benevolent sexism may differ in the pelmet they place on the attitude of women, but they share common assumptions, which is, women are the weaker sex. Both presume traditional gender roles and both serve to justify and maintain patriarchal social structure.

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