



FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

School of Social Science: Culture Cluster

**Never Marry a woman with big feet; the Proverbial Oppression of
Women in Igbo African Culture: An investigation of the semantics
of female devaluation in Igbo African proverbs.**

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Master of Social Science in Anthropology

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DECLARATION

I, **Chikwelu Emmanuel J.** declare that

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Summary

Title: Never Marry a woman with big feet; the Proverbial Oppression of Women in Igbo African Culture: An investigation of the semantics of female devaluation in Igbo African proverbs.

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Abstract

Gender discourse has occupied an important position in African scholarship. The question is no longer whether women are being marginalized and abused, the question is how and why women are abused and relegated. Men in various cultures and societies have taken the responsibility for the construction of female identity based on some gender stereotype through cultural vehicles such as proverb. Proverbs in Igbo African culture have perpetuated the mainstream oppression and subjugation of women in Igbo society of Nigeria. Like in many other African cultures, proverbs help in defining moral consciousness, thought and belief. They are at the core of African oral literature and are believed to be a reflection of wisdom and truth preserved and passed from one generation to the other.

Nonetheless, the beauty presented by this integral aspect of African folklore has been partial and paints a derogatory image about women. This stereotypical depiction of women in Igbo African proverbs has continued to limit and deny the notable contributions of women in the enhancement of humanity in the society. This study, therefore seeks to interrogate the overt sexism in Igbo African proverbs. Through the use of in-depth interview and qualitative content analysis, this study highlights evidence of marginalization of women in Igbo African proverbs. The study equally makes use of social construct and liberal feminist theory to give a thick descriptive approach to the issue at hand. The study makes use of 5 in-depth interviews and 16

proverbs samples collected from written texts and unwritten narratives accessed from Nigerian movie industry (Nollywood) and other visual sources.

Key Words: Proverbs, femininity, sexism, language, gender, culture and patriarchy

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to all the women on earth, especially those who are making a substantive effort towards the betterment of humanity. This study equally remembers women, especially Igbo women suffering any kind of linguistic disparagement. This research seeks to fight for your course.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND LOCATION OF THE STUDY

“The inertial mass of language is like the inertial mass of society. Women inherit their place as speakers inherit their words. We drag a vast obsolescence behind us even as we have rejected much of it intellectually, and slows us down... The gun of sex-biased language may be rusty, but it is there, and greater danger is unawareness that it is a gun and is loaded” (Dwight Bolinger).

Gender has occupied an important position not just in African scholarship but that of the world. The question is no longer whether women are being marginalized and abused, the question now is how and why are women abused and relegated. Balogun (2010:22) supports that “various women liberation movements have evolved, and there has also been a considerable scholarly effort to expose the sources and dangers of the oppression of women, restoring the identity and dignity of women and empowering them for national development”. As notable as this effort might be, it is important to note that substantial success has not been recorded towards the emancipation of women and their empowerment in Africa. This is because attention has not been directed towards one of the most salient causes of gender imbalance in Africa; the proverbial resources of the community. This assertion is justified by Balogun when he states that “The oppression of women is fostered in Africa, in fact globally, through cultural vehicles such as proverbs” (2010:22).

“Proverbs constitute a powerful rhetorical device for the shaping of moral consciousness and belief” (Fasiku 2006:50). They play important role in Africa thought process. Finnegan avows that “in many African cultures, a feeling for language, for imagery, and for the expression of abstract ideas through compressed and allusive phraseology comes out particularly in proverbs” (1970:390). The significance of this assertion is evident in Igbo proverb-about-proverb which infers that “*Ilu bu mmanu e ji eri okwu*, meaning that Proverbs are the palm-oil¹ with which words are eaten”. The beauty and importance of proverbs can equally be found in all languages and cultures: “A speech without proverb is food without salt” according to Amharic, Ethiopia; “Proverbs are the horses of speech” for Yoruba, Nigeria. “Without proverbs, the language would be but skeleton without a flesh, a body without a soul” Zulu,

¹ Palm oil is an edible vegetable oil that is derived from the procession of palm fruit that adds taste and colour to food. This is a major ingredient for cooking in the Igbo land of Nigeria.

South Africa (Mmadike 2014:98). Proverbs are highly regarded not just in the communication process but thinking process as well. For Schipper (1991:3) “in oral cultures, people are impressed by those who have many proverbs at their disposal and know how to use them at the right moment”.

As a result of this much importance attached to proverbs, opinions, attitudes and beliefs are believed to be clearly communicated in Igbo African society by the use of proverbs. Among the indigenous Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria, the use and understanding of proverbs are taken to be a common knowledge. This supports the sociological perspective that common knowledge is a set of ideology and knowledge taken for granted in the society. From the much importance and value attached to proverbs, it is of utmost importance to note the overt sexism it condones and how it serves a mainstream of gender stereotype particularly against women in Igbo Eastern Nigeria. Sequel to this, it is paramount that a critical investigation has to be made into the usage and application of this important African folklore which according to the Igbo of Nigeria is a “spices that add taste and pungency to speech” (Oha 1998:85).

This research engages with the semantics representation of Igbo women in proverbial expression and seeks to problematize the semantic devaluation of women in African society. There has been a massive documentation on the importance of proverbs in Africa literature and orature but these studies only paid attention to the positive aspect of this thought process. Most studies on the use of proverbs in a male dominated Igbo African culture have significantly overlooked the fact that proverbs are used by men who position themselves at the echelon of wisdom which women are deemed incapable of attaining. This research reveals that the use of proverb among the Igbo people of Nigeria has constituted an avenue for the abuse and relegation of women by men. Proverbs, according to Oha (1998:87) “as forms of figurative communication with didactic functions in studied conversations were found to possess evidence of a male attempt at maintaining control over discourse in society”. Women, through Igbo proverbs, have negatively been portrayed as senseless, devilish, childish, weak and morally debased. This socially constructed cultural artifact has maintained that women are basically inferior to men not just in physical capabilities but in rational engagement. Balogun (2010:21) equally supports that “the most fundamental but neglected aspect in gender discourse lies in the proverbial resources of the community”.

Little or no attention has been paid on how proverbs, “as a discourse in which females are portrayed based on stereotypical gender roles and perceptions, continue to frustrate the current

efforts towards gender sensitization and the attendant of women empowerment in the continent” (Balogun 2010:35). An anthropologist according to Schipper (1991:22) believes that “studying people’s proverbs is vital in getting a better knowledge of them because as part of a people’s cultural heritage, proverbs are embedded in the context in which they function.” To this, Balogun (2005:39) rightly puts it that “proverbs have served as a major avenue for the continued perpetration of gender discrimination among the Africans”. Proverbs samples below supports the view that women are being marginalized in Igbo African proverbs.

- 1) *Àgboghò zachaa ònye mùrù ò zawa ònye nà-àlụ.* (A lady after answering whose child, will later answer whose wife)

This proverb is used as an admonition. It entreats the addressee to realise the need for self-actualization. Literally, the proverb infers that at a certain point in life, a lady is expected to get married because her identity and dignity lies on her husband. This equally infers that Woman without her man is nothing.

- 2) *Anaghi atu ikpu ukwu egwu maka na o bughi ya ga-ara ownwe ya.* (One cannot be afraid of a wide vagina because it cannot sex itself).

The vagina (woman) is portrayed as not just helpless but dependent on penis (man). This dependence also suggests her ownership by man.

- 3) *“Nwa-agboghò Ugwuta si nne ya na otu nwoke ka ya na-agara onwe ya, owee tuburu ya raa. Nne ya wee si ya gaa rakwuru. O gaa, a rachie ya ozo.* (An Ugwuta girl told her mother that as she was going on her way, a man came and threw her down and sexed (raped) her; her mother told her to go and retaliate; she went and was sexed (raped) again”) (Oha 1998:93).

This proverb depicts the sexual vulnerability of women which they fail to comprehend to their detriment because of their incapacitated rationality. The difference in the biological component of a woman is seen as inferiority by men in the patriarchal Igbo society. From all indications, in Igbo patriarchal society, sex entails women’s defeat.

This study then is an exploration of the (re)presentation of women in Igbo African proverbs. The result from the findings of this study has it that women are represented based on some stereotypes in Igbo African proverbs. It is not enough to take proverbs on the peripheral as words of wisdom and knowledge while ignoring the fact that it does not depict the reality of

women. The central message conveyed in Igbo sexist proverbs is distrust and hostility towards women who are depicted as unintelligent beings. With the use of social construct theory, attention has to be paid on how meaning surrounding Igbo proverbs has been created by men in order to relegate and subdue women. The liberal feminist theory also goes against this stereotypical depiction of women stating that patriarchal social system has given a negative understanding of women. This study, therefore, is not only an exploration of sexism in Igbo African proverbs but also an interrogation of the factors responsible for this bias depiction of women in Igbo proverbs.

1.2 LOCATION OF THE STUDY

This study is located in the eastern part of Nigeria, West Africa, mostly dominated by the Igbos. According to Mmadike (2014:98), “the Igbos live in the southeast of Nigeria, in the states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo, as well as in some parts of Delta, Benin, and Rivers states.” This term Igbo refers to both people and their language. “The entire Igbo society currently has a population of more than ten million people organized into some 200 autonomous village groups in South Eastern Nigeria between the Niger River and the Cross River” (Ottenberg 1968:9).

Like many other African languages, the Igbo language is rich in proverbs; it constitutes a powerful mainstream of folk wisdom and oratory. Proverbs serves as palm oil with which words are eaten according to the Igbos. Palm oil (also known as red oil) is an important cash crop/ edible oil that plays a vital role in the diet of Igbo people of Nigeria without which meals lack the flavor and appetizing condiment. A comparison is therefore made between proverb and palm oil among the Igbos to show the important of this folklore. Thus, proverb plays a crucial role in the Igbo oratory. Penfield & Duru (1988:25) writing on the importance of proverbs in Eastern Nigeria asserts that “In social interaction, they represent the epitome of wisdom, intelligence, and maturity”. In Igbo cultural setting, if one uses a proverb, people will pay attention and believe that the speaker is full of wisdom and intelligence. A speech that does not involve a reasonable number of proverbs in Igbo society is taken to be childish. Therefore, this study pays peculiar attention to the Igbos and their use of proverbs, particularly how proverbs in Igbo culture portrays women.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF AND NEED FOR THE STUDY

As stated in the introduction and background of the study, this paper aims to interrogate how women have been relegated to a subordinate position in the patriarchal Igbo culture of Nigeria.

It pays attention to the semantics of female subjugation in Igbo proverbs. The research proposes to investigate the cultural understanding and placement of women in the use of proverbs among the Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria. This research assumes that women are negatively portrayed in proverbs in Igbo culture and the reason for this subjugation has been as a result of women's strict adherence to culture and the much importance attached to proverbs and their meaning in Igbo cultural setting. "These cultural ideologies are perpetuated within patriarchal private spheres such as the household and family, in which women play primary roles as childminders, nurturers, and caretakers" (Mmakola 2013:6). This persistent underrepresentation of women's status in Igbo African proverbs which has led to their oppression calls for attention. This cultural ideology that is supported by Igbo patriarchal society has subjected women to the degrading circle of unintelligent and dependent being. This study, therefore, aims to investigate the overt sexism in Igbo proverbs of Igbo people in Eastern Nigeria. The study equally analyses Igbo sexist proverbs in order to determine the extent to which Igbo society has subjugated women. The study equally aims to provide a traditional Igbo frame of reference. The study examines how socio-cultural ideologies communicated through proverbs misogynistically portray women.

1.4 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study has a primary and secondary purpose. The main purpose of this research aligns with the research objective which seeks to analyze the way in which women are portrayed in Igbo African proverbs. The secondary aim of the study is to develop a qualitative data collection and analysis method that can be applied to the analysis of the representation of women within proverbs as social constructs.

1.5 Relationship of the topic to the discipline of Anthropology

Proverbs, as an integral part of folklore, are ubiquitous. Sequel to the fact that culture is the basic concept of contemporary anthropology, this research on proverbs as cultural vehicle poses a great importance for anthropological discipline. Bascom (1953:283) avows that "of the four branches of anthropology, cultural anthropology, which is also referred to as social anthropology, ethnology, or ethnography, is most closely associated with folklore." Emphatically, folklore is understood as the traditional beliefs, customs and stories of a community passed through generations by the words of mouth. Through this definition, the proverbial resource of a community is understood as an integral part of folklore. This falls within the field of cultural anthropology that is concerned with tradition, customs and the institution of the living people (Romaine 1994:106).

An anthropologist believes that in order to understand the role proverbs as part of folklore play in people's lives, specifically how its meaning contributes to the cultural construction of reality, it is then crucial that proverbs be examined. This entails that understanding of a particular group of people means paying clear attention to the proverbial resources of that community. In emphasis, Bascom states that:

“When the anthropologist goes to the South Seas or to Africa to study and record the ways of life of a particular people, he describes their techniques of farming, fishing, and hunting; their system of land tenure, inheritance, and other phases of property ownership; their kinship terms and obligations, their institutions of marriage and the family, the other units within their social structure and their functions; their legal and political system; their theology, rituals, magical practices, concepts of the soul and the afterworld, omens, techniques of divination, and other aspects of their religion and worldview; their housing, clothing, and bodily decoration; their woodcarving, pottery, metalworking, and other graphic and plastic arts; their music, their dancing, and their drama. Such studies, which we speak of as ethnographies, can give only an incomplete description if they do not also include the folktales, legends, myths, riddles, proverbs, and other forms of folklore employed by the people” (Bascom 1953:284).

To the anthropologist, folklore is an important aspect that makes up a given culture of the people. It is understood that no matter how primitive or advanced a culture is, it has its sets of folklore existing over generations. Bascom (1953:284) further supports that “although some anthropologists, for one reason or another, devote little attention to folklore, it is obvious that any ethnographic study which does not consider folklore can be only a partial and incomplete description of the culture as a whole.” And since folklore serves to sanction and validate religious, social, political, and economic institutions, and to play an important role as an educative device in their transmission from one generation to another, there can be no thorough analysis of any of these other parts of culture which does not give serious consideration to folklore (Crotty 1998:42).

Folklore is therefore studied in anthropology sequel to the fact that it is an integral part of people's culture. “It is a part of man's learned traditions and customs, a part of his social heritage. It can be analyzed in the same way as other customs and traditions, in terms of form and function, or of interrelations with other aspects of culture” (Bascom 1953:286). So in order to understand the way reality is constructed in Igbo proverbs in this study, two theories are used. The first theory, social constructionism, is used to explain that “knowledge and reality are argued to be the result of communicative interaction between human beings and their world”

(Miller 2005:27; Crotty 1998:42). The second theory is liberal feminism which interrogates the cultural provisions of the society that demeans women and relegates them to secondary citizen position. A liberal feminist believes that social construct such as proverbs was enacted by men in different societies in order to checkmate women. Anthropology equally pays attention to the cultural adaptation of people in a given society and how they relate to each other. Since sexism is a possible reality of such adaptation, anthropology pays peculiar attention to this social epidemic and how it constitutes people's reality.

1.6 TYPE OF STUDY

There are different paradigms² that guide qualitative and quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Parahoo, 2006). Skrtic (1990:126) defines a paradigm “as a worldview or the broadest unit of consensus within a given science”. Social science has four metatheoretical paradigms of modern and scientific thought. Positivism, interpretivism, critical theory, modernism, and post-modernism are the four paradigms that could be employed for a particular research. This research is built on interpretive paradigm in relation to liberal feminism and social construct theory. The choice of this paradigm for the research is prompted by the fact that the researcher seeks to understand the subjective world of women in relation to inequality incited by sexist proverbs in Igbo society of Nigeria. And since this research uses interpretive paradigm, the ontological and epistemological perspectives will be discussed³.

Interpretivists aim to gain an in-depth understanding of multiple realities and use a qualitative approach to building their research. Du Plooy-Cilliers et al (2014:30) assert that “interpretivist researchers aim to study reality subjectively and, as a result, they use methods that are sensitive to the context and that will help them to gain an in-depth understanding.” Interpretivists stress that a researcher should consider his or her own personal experience in the process of studying others. They believe that people are different from other inanimate things and as a result, people should not be studied in the same way objects are studied. For interpretivism, understands Bertram & Christiansen (2014:26) “the purpose of social research (and thus also of education research) is to understand the meaning which informs human behavior.” They share the view of social constructionist asserting that the idea of a single reality or truth about the social world

² A paradigm according to Phothongsunan (2010:1) is a “set of scientific and metaphysical beliefs that form a theoretical framework within which scientific theories can be tested, evaluated and if necessary, revised.”

³ According to Du Plooy-Cilliers et al (2014:23) Epistemology is a compound word that has its roots in the Greek words *episteme*, which means knowledge and *logia* which means the study, science or theory of. Epistemology means knowledge. While ontology is also a compound word rooted in Greek. *Ontos* means being or that which is. Ontology then can be understood as the study of being, existence or reality.

is elusive; instead, there are sets of realities which are historically formulated and cannot be generalized. There are different possible interpretations of social actions and Social science ought to study meaningful social actions. For the interpretivists, results are not out there in the society waiting to be discovered but results are created through the interpretation of data (Bertram & Christiansen 2014:26).

Unlike the positivists, interpretivists have it that an objective fact is illusive. This claim supports the view of social constructionism stating that people work closely together in order to construct an artifact through the use of language. Facts are constantly prone to change and depend on context and people's interpretation of it. With this interpretivist position, this research seeks to understand how women are portrayed in Igbo African proverbs. These proverbs are equally interpreted within the Igbo cultural frame in order to come out with what would suffice as the reality of these women at the moment. Although the researcher is not a member of the marginalized targeted group (women) of the study, but the research is significant and involves him because coming from Igbo society as a man, attainment of gender equality entails an active participation of both men and women in changing the structures that foster gender imbalance. This involves the elimination of all forms of patriarchy rooted in and supported by cultures through language media such as proverbs.

1.6.1 THE ONTOLOGICAL POSITION OF INTERPRETIVISM

An ontology with its root in Greek word '*ontos*' means being or that which is. Du Plooy-Cilliers et al (2014:23) state that ontology is the study of being, existence or reality and includes the assumptions that are made about certain phenomena. The main concern of ontology is the definition of reality and how one knows what is real. "Questions regarding what reality is, what truth is and whether such things as objective truth and reality exist are very complex philosophical questions that form the basis of ontology" (Phothongsunan 2010:2). The ontological assumptions and questions of interpretivism equally form the basis of this research since it questions what the society has accepted as the 'real' and common knowledge. This study identifies with interpretivism on this that reality is not objective, and external.

"Interpretivists do not believe in an objective, external reality that is experienced in the same way by everyone" (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al 2014:28). For them, reality is a social construction and takes the meaning people ascribe to it. "The world is therefore socially constructed through the interaction of individuals and does not exist independently of individuals" knowledge of the world" (Grix 2004:83). This research is built on this premise since proverb as a cultural artifact

is socially constructed and such construction gives a demeaning image of women. This equally entails that the social world changes as people's perception of it change constantly. Phothongsunan (2010:2) supports that "while the objects of study of the natural sciences have an independent existence, the objects of study of the social sciences are both dependent on and are the creation of human being." Using the subject of study for this research, proverbs are social creation that cannot boast of independent existence but exist solely as a creation of human persons. Sequel to this, interpretivist avows that a research in social science should seek to investigate how people perceive and make meaning of their social world. According to the interpretivists, culture, environment and circumstance contribute to diverse approach and understanding of reality by different people.

1.6.2 THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL POSITION OF INTERPRETIVISM

Epistemology is the study of knowledge (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al 2014:29). It investigates the nature of knowledge and ways of knowing. For a positivist, scientific knowledge is the only authentic knowledge and common sense should not be regarded as knowledge. The interpretivists challenge this view with the notion that common sense guides people in their daily living. In order to grasp people's behavior, positivists believe that one has to first understand what people regard as common sense (Newman 2011:22). Interpretivists are skeptical of objective knowledge and truth. "They see facts as fluid and embedded within a meaning system; what is a factual dependent heavily on the context and people's interpretation of information" (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al 2014:29). The idea that the earth was flat and at the center of the universe served as a fact for many centuries but today this is known not to be the case. Having more than one wife in a society where polygamy is allowed as part of people's culture is acceptable but this is seen as an abnormality in a given society where it not allowed or even illegal.

This entails that what we term as facts are strongly dependent on a specific cultural context it takes place and can change over time. The killing of twins in Nigeria in some years back was believed to be the acceptable thing to do but this is not the case in the contemporary society. Also many years ago, people believed that the earth was flat and at the center of the universe and these formed the reality then but this is not true now (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al 2014:29). As a result of this, interpretivists "believe that truth is dependent on people's interpretation of facts, they are not interested in generalizing their studies" (Phothongsunan (2010:3). This infers that the research methodology for this study is particular to Igbo cultural society and not meant to be generalized beyond this context.

As stated by Crotty (1998:87) a characteristic of the interpretivist paradigm is the study of meaning embedded within texts. The purpose of qualitative research, as explained by Babbie (2007:378), is also to discover meaning and patterns of relationships within certain phenomena. In the light of the above assertion, this study implores qualitative research design in order to discover the underlying meaning in sexist Igbo proverbs. For the purpose of this study, a qualitative content analysis is used to determine and interrogate sexist proverbs and its relationship to women in Igbo society. An in-depth interview is equally used to ascertain the contemporary response of women towards sexist proverbs of Igbo culture.

1.7 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The purpose of this study is to qualitatively analyze the underlying representation of women in purposefully selected samples of Igbo African proverbs. The reaction and approach of women towards these sexist proverbs is equally interrogated in this study through the use of the in-depth interview.

1.8 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The key questions framing this study are:

1. What ways are women portrayed in the proverbs of the Igbo African Culture?
2. Why are women portrayed in this way in Igbo proverbs?
3. What is the socio-cultural significance of such portrayals of women in the proverbs in Igbo culture?
4. What counts as the evidence of misogynistic and sexist proverbs in Igbo culture?
5. How do women relate to abusive proverbs?
6. What measures should be taken to ensure the contesting and addressing of sexist proverbs from Igbo traditional literature?

1.9 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study makes use of qualitative research approach to uncover the stance of women in Igbo African Proverbs. According to Newman (2011:22), “qualitative research methodology is an approach that describes and gives meaning to particular social phenomena”. The qualitative research investigates the underlying qualities of subjective experience and meanings in connection to the phenomena. This study is a mixture of empirical and non-empirical research approaches in the forms of documentary materials, semi-structured interview, and content analysis. The non-empirical aspect of this research pays attention firstly to the interpretation of sexist proverbs of Igbo culture of Nigeria and equally interrogates some existing literature on

proverbs in Africa especially as it relates to women. This study makes reference to the fact that historically these proverbs have been existing for a long time, and that the empirical angle is just to tease out how they are appreciated in contemporary times – in essence, to establish continuities or discontinuities. As Odetola Taiwo (1984: 2) states:

“The personality and the inner reality of African women have been hidden under such a heap of myths, so called ethnological theories, rapid generalizations and patent untruths that it might be interesting to study what they have to say for themselves when they decide to speak”.

The primary data for this research was obtained from an in-depth interview of Igbo women in the city of Pietermaritzburg. The choice of this location is prompted by its convenience to the researcher and availability of study population for the study. The women were contacted through Umunna Nigeria group and National Association of Nigerians in South Africa, Pietermaritzburg branch. An ethical clearance has been obtained for the purpose of this research.

1.10 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Some limitations are inevitable in the course of this research. Sequel to the fact that most Igbo women are not competent with the use of proverbs as prompted by the culture especially women living in urban areas, this might pose a problem in getting their views with regards to sexist proverbs. Nevertheless, the researcher explained the aim of the research in order to educate the participant of the study objectives and how the research concerns them. Secondly, proverbs are much used and uphold much significant in the rural Igbo settings, but the research interview forming the data collection process is conducted in the urban setting of Pietermaritzburg, this might bring about some lesser affair attitude among the participants since they might feel that abusive proverbs have no effect on them.

1.11 SUMMATION AND OVERVIEW OF THE REMAINING CHAPTERS

In order to ascertain the representation of women in Igbo African proverb as discussed in the purpose of the study, an in-depth interview and a qualitative content analysis were used for the purpose of this study. The use of interpretivist paradigm equally helped in explaining the portrayal of women in Igbo proverbs. As part of the scope of the study, a deep interrogation was made on why women are (mis)represented in sexist Igbo proverbs. The following is the overview of the rest of the chapters of study.

1.6.3 Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter discusses the background of the topic and introduces the interplay between sexism and women in proverbs in Igbo culture. The chapter highlights the importance of the study and why the researcher focused on sexist Igbo proverbs. The chapter briefly introduces the reader to the fundamental aspects of abusive proverbs as well as the breakdown of the chapters of the research project.

1.6.4 Chapter Two: Key concepts and literature review

The current discussion and debates on how women are typically relegated in sexist Igbo proverbs forms the aim of this chapter. The chapter further engages with previous research findings and current policies on gender, proverbs, and women emancipation in Africa.

1.6.5 Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, the theoretical framework will provide the researcher's point of view on how a "systematic research enterprise could be conducted given the subject matter of the study" (Balogun 2010). This section highlights the conceptual model that guides the research. Furthermore, the chapter provides background information that supports the conceptual model taken for the study's investigations.

1.6.6 Chapter Four: Research Methodology

This section vividly deals with the ways in which the research was conducted. Methodologies, methods, procedures and research design are discussed in this chapter in order to give the reader an idea of how the researcher arrives at findings of the study. Moreover, it gives the reader a description of the sample chosen as well as the justification of the sample selection and size.

1.6.7 Chapter Five: Key finding & discussion

The chapter is a reflection of the results accumulated after data collection. Findings and results are analyzed from texts materials and findings from the in-depth interview that formed the sample of the study. Moreover, a discussion of these results will follow to present the hypothesis of this study. Furthermore, existing theoretical accounts presented elsewhere in the study will be compared to these views and perceptions to facilitate a fuller discussion.

1.6.8 Chapter Six: Further Illustrations on the Key finding & discussion

This chapter is a continuation of chapter five. The chapter advances the key finding of the research and produced further evidence of women subjugation in Igbo society.

1.6.9 Chapter Seven: Conclusion and recommendation

This chapter provides a summary of the study findings, as well as a conclusion on findings and the implications of the study. The section includes recommendations for the study based on the researcher's experiences in conjunction with other theoretical positions presented to earlier chapters. The chapter aims to make recommendations that would reconstruct, if not eradicate sexist proverbs in Igbo society of Nigeria.

The following chapter is the review of the literature. It pays attention to some of the works carried out on proverbs and sexism in language. The chapter in a unique way identifies some gap in the previous literature in relation to this study in the field of abusive proverbs in Igbo society.

CHAPTER TWO: KEY CONCEPTS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Although a significant body of research has been carried out on African proverbs, this research pays particular attention to the most neglected aspect of this socio-cultural phenomenon, which is the derogative image of women it portrays. Previous studies on proverbs (in the likes of Monye 1990, Owomoyela 1981 & Ikenga-Metuh 1983) have typically presented the partial beauty it portrays while ignoring the fact that some population of the society is being marginalized by it. This chapter, therefore, reviews some studies on African proverbs and critically seeks to uncover how it portrays women.

2.2 PROVERBS

Proverbs constitute an important part of African folklore. Johnson & Ekpenyong (2013:64) understand that “the universality of proverbs cannot be overstressed as each ethnic group in Africa has its set of proverbs, maxims and popular sayings formulated and collected over generations.” These short generally known sayings are believed to contain wisdom, truth, morals and are taken to be fixed in a given society handed from one generation to the other. According to Schipper (1991:21) “Although no satisfactory all-embracing definition exists, proverbs are recognized as such by users and listeners, when quoted in a specific context”. They can be understood as words with deep and thick meaning.

Dickson & Mbosowo (2014:1) define proverbs as “short popularly known statements which contain wisdom, truth, morals, sociocultural precepts and heritage of a particular ethnic group.” To this Monye (1990) supports that “when people use proverbs there is always some relationship between two situations being compared: the proverb statement and its referent in the social context.” Proverb embodies moral practice that guides the people and Olatunji (1984: 175) supports that:

“The proverbs, more than any other poetic type, outline a rule of conduct. They state what should or should not be done and lay conditions for certain actions and attitudes. They serve as social charters condemning some practices while recommending others. These statements can be negative, positive or conditional. The negative statements usually assert what things are not or should not be done”.

It is this concatenation that gives proverbs the much importance it enjoys in Igbo African culture. The beauty of this integral aspect of language and culture can further be seen in the

work of Chinua Achebe (1958), *Things fall apart*. From the Igbo's cultural setting, “the use of proverbs gives the speaker prestige” (Schipper 1991:10). Shonas of Zimbabwe is equally of the view that one who applies proverbs gets what he or she wants (Schipper 1991:2).

This research understands that there is a massive scholarship on the cultural functions carried out by proverbs in Africa in the likes of Monye (1990) explaining that the use of proverbs aid in “making speaker’s meaning”, Owomoyela (1981) “expressing it in the most unobtrusive, innocuous and economy manner”, Nwala (1985) “acting as guidelines for successful action and living”, Ikenga-Metuh (1983) stating that proverb is the “presentation of the voice of the people”. These studies have given insight into the positive cultural role played by proverbs in Africa. Although these studies have contributed to the body of knowledge on proverbs, they paid no attention to the oppressive nature of some of these proverbs on women. These studies ignore that in Igbo patriarchal culture, proverbs are made and use by men who uphold themselves as the custodians of wisdom and knowledge which women are deemed incapable of attaining. Oha (1998:87), says that “literature on Igbo African proverbs have mainly paid attention to the positive cultural functions and how competence in the use of proverbs reflects the possession of cultural wisdom and rhetorical skill.”

According to Oha (1998:87), “the one study that has in honesty acknowledged that these Igbo proverbs show some user-unwisdom in representing women, is Udobata Onunwa’s *Femininity in African Cosmology: Paradoxes and Ambiguities*” (1992). However, this is a naïve view of approaching the criticality of the issue in question. The shortcoming of this research falls in the author’s assertion that sexist proverbs against women merely represented them negatively. A critical investigation into the semantics of female devaluation in Igbo African proverbs has it that sexist proverbs in Igbo African culture not only misrepresent women but typically oppresses and abuses them. The reason for this radical approach to this socio-cultural phenomenon is equally prompted by Balogun (2010:30), assertion which states that “the perception of women’s personality, their strengths, and weaknesses, their dignity, by the society and by themselves, is, among other things, the result of the way they are portrayed in proverbs”. This thought process which is a product of patriarchal social system generates meaning that denigrates women. Igbo sexist proverbs give the impression of women as necessary evil. This has brought about radical discrimination against women in Igbo land especially with issues that concern their happiness and well-being.

Leith (1987:34) argues that “groups who occupy a subordinate or oppressed position in society invariably suffer from linguistic disparagement in the hands of other groups that possess power.” But this is also a partial explanation of the consequences of sexist proverbs on women. The weakness of this quote lies in the author’s reliance on women suffering only linguistic disparagement. This limits and halts the derogatory and oppressive nature of such sexist proverbs to the world of linguistics, from this, one can equally argue that since the effects of these sexist proverbs are limited to language use and not practical life scenario, then it is insignificant and does not call for colossal debate or attention. But this is a typical misinterpretation of the practical subjugation of women in Igbo land as a result of these proverbs. The contribution of women in the family and the bigger society has been undermined by sexist proverbs. Where love and trust ought to be the pillar of marriage, sexist proverbs encourage suspicion and careless attitude towards women. To this Balogun (2010:31) concludes that “proverbial oppression fosters women’s dependence, which continues to frustrate the efforts of empowering women.” ‘*Nwanyi di ka nwata, aga enedo ya Anya mgbe niile* (women are just like children, they must be constantly guided.)’, proverbs such as this perpetually leave women under the directives and control of men since they are incapable of attaining wisdom and independence.

Sexist proverbs have assisted sustaining the patriarchal social system in Igbo land that has continued to abuse and relegate women to secondary citizens of the society. The few studies that have investigated the oppression of women by proverbs in African culture (in the likes of Udobata 1992; Oha 1998 and Balogun 2010) have failed to acknowledge that in Igbo culture, like in many other African cultures, women are not given the opportunity to speak in the public, especially where men are gathered, not to talk of using proverbs. Consequently, abusive proverbs are made and imposed on women while giving them no opportunity of defending themselves. The complicity of women has been the outcome of this marginalization since proverbs are taken to be gospel truth. Most women now see themselves as what they are portrayed to be in most sexist Igbo proverbs. A typical example of this scenario is when women make use of derogatory proverbs on themselves. It is of utmost importance to note that men use sexist proverbs on women to remind them of their place whenever they (women) seek to liberate themselves from the captivity imposed on them by patriarchy. If Adandé’s assertion quoted in Roscoe (1971:124) that proverbs are “indispensable for those who wish to understand the souls of African people” is true, then, a logical implication of this is that a misconceived and derogatory image of African women is being carried across the borders.

According to Balogun (2010:21), “the most fundamental but neglected aspect in gender discourse lies in the proverbial resources of the community.” This infers that little or no attention has been directed to the relationship between sexist proverbs and women’s oppression in the African continent. Specifically, no attention has been paid on how proverbs, as a discourse in which females are portrayed based on some stereotype, continue to hinder the current efforts of MDGs⁴ towards gender sensitization and women empowerment in Igbo society of Nigeria⁵. The oppression of women by Igbo African proverb has some malevolent effects on the identity, dignity, rights, freedom and empowerment of women in this 21st-century cultural milieu. This has continued to frustrate the current undertakings of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)⁶ in its effort in eradicating the oppression of women in Nigeria.

International organizations such as the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), United National Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and World Bank have continued to strive towards the eradication of abusive structures that have continued to limit the full emancipation of women in Nigeria. There is a need for these organizations to pay attention to this neglected yet most salient aspect of the society that warrants the oppression of women in Igbo culture of Nigeria which is proverb (Balogun 2010:22). If proverbs must continue to be taken as the crystallized summary of popular wisdom and fancy according to Oxford Dictionary of English (2010:60), then it must be reconstructed to display a dignified image of women.

Sequel to this, this study seeks to critically uncover the most neglected area in the current discourse which is the proverbial oppression of women in Igbo culture. The hypothesis framing this research is that there is an overt evidence of misogyny and suppression of women in Igbo African proverbs. It is an investigation of numerous proverbs among the Igbos that glorifies and encourages women’s subjugation. It differs from previous studies like (Oha 1998, Balogun 2010, Monye 1990, Owomoyela 1981 etc.) that have limited the implication of this semantic oppression to the world of language, but in this current discourse, care would be taken to critically investigate the practical implication of sexist proverb in everyday life of an Igbo woman. There is a need to further investigation on proverbs in Africa following Monye (1990:17) assertion that, “when people use proverbs there is always some relationship between

⁴ Millennium Development Goal

⁵ Some available studies that gave a partial approach to proverb are Oha 1998, Balogun 2010, Monye 1990, and Owomoyela 1981.

⁶ The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), officially known as transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a set of seventeen aspirational "Global Goals" with 169 targets between them.

two situations being compared: the proverb statement and its referent in the social context.” Therefore, except that the meaning attached to Igbo proverbs as words of wisdom and morality are taken not to be the case, or there is a radical eradication of sexist Igbo proverbs, women will continue to fall prey to the obnoxious schemes of men through the use of proverbs in the patriarchal Igbo society.

2.3 PATRIARCHY AND MALE DOMINATION IN IGBO SOCIETY

Sexist proverbs are products of patriarchal society. This falls within the stipulations of social constructionism which states that objective reality is a myth, people create reality and meaning in their subjective world. Several studies have been carried out on patriarchy in African society and how it deliberately marginalizes women but this study seeks to highlight the connection between abusive proverbs and patriarchal social system in Igbo society. Some of the studies that dealt with the issue of patriarchy include the works of Isabel Phiri (1997) exposing the malevolent effect of patriarchy on the identity and dignity of women; Michael Kimmel and Amy Aronson (2004) exposing the dominance and oppression of women through this system; Julia Cleves (1993) asserting that “patriarchy does not mean women are totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influences, and resources: but rather the balance of power is in men’s favor.”

Moyo (2008:93) in her research supports that “patriarchy is a situation where significant rights and powers are held by senior male elders.” Bibi Bakare-Yusuf in her research understands that “in the African context, patriarchy is referred to as the organization of social life and institutional structures in which men have ultimate control over most aspects of women’s lives and actions (2003:9). Dictionary of Contemporary English (1978:754) equally defines patriarchy as a “social system in which men uphold power and use it to their advantage.” By ascribing all power to men, women are seen and taken to be inferior and this has nurtured their oppression. Women in this society are made to accept their position as secondary citizens.

“The deeply-rooted patriarchal culture prevalent in most African societies attributes power to men both at home and community level and such persistent attribution of roles to either sex is referred to as gender stereotyping” (Ethiopian Society of Population Studies 2008:10). This position cripples women and limits their contribution to the society. Isabel Phiri indicates that “patriarchy is a father ruled society where all power and authority rests in the single hand of male dominated family” (1997:12). In this system, the potentialities of women are recognized but the actual power of men is noted. Patriarchy actually aims at destroying “women’s

consciousness about their potential power, which it derives from the necessity of society to reproduce itself (Eisenstein 1981:14). The implication of this understanding of Eisenstein is that patriarchy is opposed to the potential capabilities that women possess, therefore the oppression of women is a deliberate, conscious act made to prevent women from actualizing their full potential in the society.

Patriarchal ideology creates a picture of women as dependent and weaker sex and unable to carry out certain tasks that are believed to be for men. It is a form of social organization that structures the dominance of men over women (Calhoun 2002:108). This system makes women believe and accept a particular definition labeled on them and cripples their consciousness of thinking otherwise. In some cases even in Igbo society, women are ostracized from the community because they dare to challenge a particular patriarchal system governing the society.

The use of sexist proverbs has been fostered and nurtured in Igbo cultural society prompted by its patriarchal ideologies. The study of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* not only gives the reader a notable insight of the importance and uses of proverbs in Igbo culture but also discloses the overt patriarchal nature of the society. From this study, one could understand the deep relationship that exists between sexist proverbs and patriarchal social system (Oha 1998:86). Cultural vehicles such as sexist proverbs are used by men in patriarchal society to manipulate and control women. Since men have positioned themselves above women in every ramification of life, they, therefore, paint a distorted picture of women to perpetually checkmate them. "The fact that these stereotypes have been encoded in a form of communication usually respected and highly valued in Igbo culture suggests the degree rhetoric in the society has been masculinized" (Oha 1998:87). It is important to understand that patriarchy enacts stereotype in order to checkmate women. The stereotype is related to role yet distinct as Sheila Ruth quoted by Mtuze (1990:2) in emphasis articulates that "stereotype is an overgeneralization of characteristics that may or may not have been observed in fact; Often containing a kernel of truth that is partial and thus misleading". It constitutes norms about how certain groups of individuals and groups are to be treated.

The prevalence patriarchal structures⁷ narrated in the novel *Things fall apart* of 1958 is still obtainable in the contemporary Igbo society. This exposes a system where men rule over

⁷ Proverbs have been one of the basic structures that support and sustain patriarchy and male domination in Igbo society.

women in the social, economic and political institutions. This system makes women passive members of the society and powerless in all sphere of life. Patriarchy gives a picture of man-made society otherwise called the “government of the fathers” (Kalu 2008:148). Silvia Walby in her book titled *Theorizing Patriarchy* articulates that “patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices, in which men control, suppress and abuse women” (1996:7). From this insight on patriarchy, one would understand that sexist proverbs are products of the patriarchal social system and attention has to be paid on this obnoxious system if one wishes to interrogate the semantics of female devaluation. Oha (1998:87) advice that “studies in oral literature, especially in male-dominated cultures, need to pay attention to the role of male-oriented rhetoric in Igbo proverbs that signifies prejudice and hostility toward women in social discourse.” This research understands that there is strong tie existing between patriarchy and sexist proverbs and this has brought about the proliferation of the constant abuse and relegation of women in Igbo society.

2.4 GENDER, GENDER SENSITIVITY, AND IGBO CULTURE

Chambers Encyclopedic English Dictionary defines gender as the condition of being male or female in the society. Contemporary scholarship has paid much attention to gender discourse, especially in Africa. Gender is a social construct⁸ and differs from sex which is biologically constructed. According to Balogun (2010:23), “gender refers to the social relationships between men and women and way those relationships are made; it can be described as the division of the society into biological, occupational and social roles.” From this definition, it is evident that gender is constructed to maintain division and discrimination among things that are not exactly the same (Ozumba 2005:1). “Gender is the set of characteristics, roles, and behavior patterns that distinguish women from men socially and culturally and relations of power between them” (Women Information Centre, 2005:36). These are sets of idea and words about women and men in the society regarding what they should do and how they are expected to be seen in the society. These ideas are often expressed through gendered discourses. Reeves & Baden (2000: 6) further defines gender as “the roles and responsibilities of men and women that are socially and culturally constructed.” In the context of this study, the researcher wishes to understand how proverbs in the patriarchal Igbo society have aided in maintaining gender imbalance and discrimination in Igbo land through gender role.

⁸ Social construction of reality is the process by which people continuously create, through their action and interactions a shared reality that is experienced as objectively factual and subjectively meaningful (Young & Collin 2004).

Gender roles are taught by the members of the society, in other words, it is socially constructed. Gender roles also include the expected characteristics and behavior of men and women in the society (Onyejekwe 2006, Kellerman, et al 1981, Procter, et al 1985). The roles and expectation with regards to gender are fostered and modified by the differentiation of systems in political status, class, ethnicity, physical and mental ability, income levels and age. “The understanding of the concept of gender is crucial because when it is applied to social analysis it reveals the subordination of women thereby providing a way towards reducing that subordination” (UNESCO, 2003). The socio-cultural institutions that define gender role and expectation thus brought about gender inequality that typically frustrates one gender (women especially), in the hands of the other. To this, Egbue (2011:1) supports that “In most societies gender represents a significant form of social stratification.” Since gender is socially constructed embedded in a particular culture, this social construct basically differs from one culture to the other. Cultural vehicles such as proverbs in language are the means through which gender role and discrimination is perpetuated. In Igbo proverbs, women are meant to understand their vulnerable dependent status in the society and this equally has a lot to do with their engagement in the society and productivity.

Gender sensitivity presupposes the level of awareness, appreciation of the need to maintain at reasonable levels the gender differentiation between the male and female (Ozumba 2005:1). Although one would argue that what a man can do a woman can do it, but for women to insist on doing whatever men do is inexpedient. This also entails the eradication of every abusive social system prompted by patriarchy towards the oppression of women. Ozumba (2005:2) asserts that we have to keep the gender peculiarities in focus to a reasonable limit in order to remain gender sensitive. There is a need to maintain stable balance in the gender relation between man and woman according to feminist sociological approach.

Gender equality presupposes an equal representation of both men and women in all spheres of life in the society without giving preference to any. This does not suggest, as stated earlier that men and women are the same but rather, gender equality means that women share equal value and right with men and as such, should be accorded equal treatment (Egbue 2011, Xiaolan 2006, Gilbrun 1996). But the socially constructed division of labor results in different rewards, statuses, opportunities and roles (Hirut, 2004) and this brought about gender inequality. Chinua Achebe’s *Things fall apart* continues to present a picture of overt gender stereotype in Igbo cultural society. “The silent but rigorous schooling into the patriarchal and matriarchal

stereotypes was ingrained in the traditional institution of the Igbo; the men knew what was expected of them, and so did the women” (Ozumba 2005:2). From *Things fall apart*;

“Okonkwo was inwardly pleased with his son’s development and he knew it was due to Ikemefuna. He wanted Nwoye to grow into a tough young man capable of ruling his father’s household...and so he (Okonkwo) was happy when he heard him grumbling about women. That showed that in time he would be able to control his women folk. No matter how prosperous a man was if he was unable to rule his women and his children, he was not really a man” (1958:37).

The above extract from *Things fall apart* presents the picture of Igbo gender stereotype. In Igbo society, a boy is brought up knowing that he is not just superior to the girl but ought to be superior and controlling. “Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* paints a vivid picture of the Igbo traditional gender stereotypes and how through informal education fathers groom their boys to grow up as men, bold, courageous, audacious and fearless” (Ozumba 3). Women, on the other hand, groom the girls to become soft, subservient, weak and gentle. For this Okonkwo, the central character declared “I will not have a son who cannot hold up his head in the gathering of the clan” (Achebe 1958:24).

Sequel to the provisions made by certain cultural and social institutions, women suffer gender discrimination in the hands of men. Men have used some of these institutions to suppress women by employing sexist language to solidify their acts. Ethiopian Society of Population Studies (2008:10) affirms that “gender stereotyping, and thereby gender inequality, the inequality of opportunity, right, responsibility, role, and access to and control over resources, is the result of socialization; gender roles are not necessarily determined by sex status.” Egbue (2011:2) has it that “many theoretical perspectives from various disciplines have been advanced to explain men’s enduring dominance over women at the household level as well as at the macro-level income-earning sphere⁹.” This study, therefore, seeks to demonstrate the overt domination and subjugation of women in Igbo culture by the use of sexist proverbs.

Sociology of gender studies the societal impact on our understanding of masculinity and femininity. This understanding, in turn, influences our perception of identities and social practices. There are different perspective/approaches to gender issues in the society like functionalist and feminist approach. Functionalist approach asserts that “gender difference

⁹ These include Millett, 1970; Rowbotham, 1973; Firestone, 1979; Amos and Parmar, 1984; Coontz and Henderson, 1986; Mama, 1989; Walby, 1990; 1997; Paludi and Barickman, 1991; Ekejiuba, 1991; James and Busia, 1993; Roseneil, 1994; Humm, 1995; Hakim, 1995; Breugel, 1996; Abbott and Wallace, 1997; Mason, 1998; Tashjian, 2001; Omonubi-McDonnel, 2003; Okafor, 2007.

contribute to social stability and integration” (Giddens 2001:112). The functionalists are of the view that labor division in the society between men and women are linked to biological difference. Women and men are best in those tasks that suit their biological make-up. George Murdock (1949) asserts that the best structure of the society is when women are focused on domestic chores while men work outside of the home to make money.

A feminist approach to gender rebuts functionalist attributes on gender saying that “there is nothing natural or inevitable about the allocation of tasks in the society” (Giddens 2001:114). They state that women are not limited to pursuing any career in life because of their biological characteristics, but because of the socially constructed gender role. Feminism seeks to eradicate the gender inequalities that exist in the society rooted in bias gender role. Through academic publication and social work, feminism has managed to confront some of the basic constraints against women. From this insight of gender and Igbo society, it is evident that abusive proverbs are products of gender stereotype. “This will include insisting in all matters that the male and the female have different traditional or conventional stereotypes which must be adhered to” (Ozumba 2005). This study, therefore, seeks to demonstrate the overt domination and subjugation of women in Igbo culture by the use of sexist proverbs.

2.5 SEXISM, SEXIST LANGUAGE, AND CULTURE

Sexism in language entails the degrading of any member of the society through language medium. In the African context, it is like to be in favor of men against women. Sexism according to Gilbron (1996:18) is discrimination based on gender attitudes, stereotypes that are institutionalized in the society and carried out through language medium. A consideration of these examples by Xiaolan (2006) helps clarify the notion of sexist language “The man in the street” and “The woman in the street” is in the same situation, yet the former gives no interpretation to the man in the street while the latter could imply a prostitute. Sexist language favors one sex to the detriment of the other in most discriminating manner. Arguably, most of these biases are usually against women and in favor of men. Oha (1998:96) puts it that “sexism in language may be a ‘rusty’ gun, but it is loaded and therefore dangerous.” This could be more critical when it is forgotten or taken for granted that it exists in our discourse.

Lei (2006:90) supports that sexism can be reflected perfectly in proverbs; he gives an instance of an English proverb, “He who follows his wife’s advice will never see the face of god”. This proverb depicts the wicked underlines through which men exercise their prejudice to subdue women. The following Igbo proverbs equally support the view of sexism in Igbo language: “A

woman has even cheated the devil”, “Seven women in their right senses are surpassed by a madman,” “women have got long hair and short sense”, This brings about the interplay between common sense and sociological imagination. Proverbs in Igbo land appeals to the common sense of the members of the society. No critical attention has been paid to the meaning and overt sexism that it portrays. The understanding of common sense is the basic practical knowledge one possess which is often taken for granted. These are sets of ideologies that are shared by almost all the members of a particular society. Sociological imagination on the other hand according to Mills (1959:3) “seeks to question this assumed knowledge and to encourage people to not simply accept what was going on around them, but rather to question it and ask why things happen in the way they do.” Mills admonishes people not simply swallow whatever that is given to them but to think critically and relate their problem to the wider society. If people should pay critical concern to the issues in the society, sexism would have been eradicated because they would question the norms that brought about it.

The use of sexist language fosters gender inequality, marginalization and gender abuse against women. Krishnaswami et al (2005:74) infer that "In all traditions, women have always been considered inferior and incapable of any serious thinking; irrespective of religion, country, race, the period in which they live, more or less the same perception and sex-stereotyping is seen in language and literature." It is also obvious that a sexist language is deeply rooted in a sexist society. Mmadike (2014:98) also argues that “sexism refers to any discriminatory use of language which is detrimental to any member of the opposite sex.” These sexist languages flourish because language as a social phenomenon is closely related to social attitudes and norms. The process of socialization in a given culture paves way for the language acquisition because culture provides the norms of the use of language. The strong bond that ties up language and culture exist because language is acquired within a particular culture and this culture shapes the use of this particular language.

Proverbs as forms of figurative expression in Igbo African culture have been manipulated by men to ensure that women are relegated to the secondary position in the society. These sexist proverbs exist and abuse women in Igbo culture sequel to the fact that men are taken to be superior to women and as such, they (men) are the custodians of culture and tradition. An anthropologist understands that the study of language is important not just for practical purposes but in the understanding of the deeper problems of ethnology and social anthropology. Culture influences people’s way of thinking and how these thoughts are being communicated

in terms of language. Sexism in the Igbo language encompasses all aspects of language including proverbs and this will be the central focus of this study.

2.6 LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE FEMININE VERSUS THE MASCULINE

Most languages of different cultures have misogynistically given a bias definition and understanding of women as weaker sex and these still remain unchallenged in most contemporary societies (Gilbron (1996). Because language is embedded in culture, most cultures are being upheld by men who adopt derogatory language to suppress women. A strong back-up to this claim would be an example of Igbo proverb which says that '*odi njo igbasi oso ka wnoke mechie ya ka nwanyi*' meaning that 'It is pathetic to conclude a race like a woman after having it like a man. This misogyny equally brought about gender and gender role. Through the institution of culture, the society assigns different roles to men and women based on their sex. These roles are not biologically made but are produced culturally. For social constructionism equally supported by interpretivist paradigm, reality is a social construction and that it is dependent on the meanings that people ascribe to their own experience and interactions with others (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al 2014, Miller 2005). From the different roles assign to different sexes, an accompanying language is thus created to maintain this division. Women are typically marginalized because of the prejudice in gender role. In Igbo society, this prejudice is fostered by the means of proverbs.

Even in English-speaking countries, where it is believed that there is equality of gender, women still suffer from oppression in the hands of men (Oha 1998:80). Also, "there are many words, which are clearly male-orientated in that they contain the element 'man' while they can, in fact, apply to both sexes in the English language" (Xiaolan 2006:87). Examples of such words are chairman, congressman, councilman and many others. From the liberal feminist perspective, therefore, "language is determined by men to perpetuate the worldview in which women are perceived as deviant and deficient" (Romaine 1994:106). This research considers yet another mainstream of language that perpetuates sexism against women which is a proverb.

2.7 LANGUAGE, CULTURE, WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT

Marxist feminism which follows the work of Karl Marx states that sexual oppression is a result of class power. There is a link between gender, race, and class and as such Marxist feminism says that "the oppression of women originated with the introduction of private property in which women were defined as the property of men" (Beasley 1999:84). Property accumulation

further involves the suppression of women. Marxist feminist thus suggests that liberation of women is only possible in a classless society. The capitalist nature of Igbo society has men at the top positions of different aspects of the economy. Tong (2009:17) supports that “this subordination of women has greatly contributed to the nature of their work and their overall social status which critically marginalizes them from their potential roles in the society.” This suggests that women still fall under the control and directives of men and as such subscribe to men’s definition of them. Although a good number of women have broken the barriers of being subjected to second-class citizens in the society and attain some hierarchy, they too still fall within the oppressive nature of sexist language. Men in Igbo society through the use of proverbs still maintain that woman without her man is nothing. Such sexist proverb in the Igbo language rooted the patriarchal culture continues to form the worldview of both women and men. This supports the argument of Saussure on language that says that “the relationship between language and the object world is conventional; structured by the society and radically arbitrary”.

The conventional understanding attached to these sexists’ proverbs indicates that no matter the height a woman attains, she still finds herself under the mercy and directives of men (Balogun 2010:34). Some women in academics have taken the stance of feminism and have written widely for women liberation, but reality is that most of these scholarly engagement ends in the academic vicinity because, at home, she is and is still expected to dance to the tunes of her man. Consider this proverb, *di bu Mma/ugwu nwanyi* (husband, a man, is the beauty/prestige of a woman). The understanding of this proverb, which is still shared by most women of different social and economic status in Igbo culture, is that no matter the educational or financial status of a woman, without a man of her own, she is nothing. This proverb makes it a compulsory task for an Igbo woman to get married at a certain age, if not; no respect would be accorded her even from her own innermost families. Therefore, the liberation of women from the abusive system has to firstly overthrow the capitalist structure that inhibits them from attaining equal social class with men. Men have been socialized into exploitive roles, for this, there is a need for the reconstruction of social class.

2.8 SUMMATION

The literature review has served to highlight the gaps and limitation within the existing literature in Igbo African proverbs as they have typically focused on the positive aspect of this integral part of the language. The review identifies with previous studies that proverbs are important part of African folklore. The review equally identifies with Lunde & Wintle (1984:

viii) stating that “perhaps the quickest way to understand a people or a culture is to learn their proverbs.” Consequently, this literature review has suggested that most Igbo proverbs are sexist and thus derogatory on women. This view is equally shared by Ebeogu (n.d: vii) who says that “a society can be interpreted on the basis of a literature based on it, and this position remains valid even when the writer is apparently not writing about his own society of the present, but about his society of the past.” Therefore, what is lacking in the previous literature and therefore central to this study is a critical interrogation of the extent to which women are (mis)presented in Igbo Africa proverbs. The study, therefore, seeks to engage critically with these sexist proverbs as they have created a smooth avenue for the subjugation of women in Igbo society.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The chapter is an introduction to the theoretical underpinnings of the study. In order to explain and give a theoretical backing to this study, the researcher adopts the views of social construct theory and liberal feminism as the theoretical framework. Interpretivist paradigm forms the basis of these theories for the study. It is a continuation of the discussion of the socio-cultural stipulations of the paradigm. This study employs social construct theory and liberal feminist ideologies concerning the status and stance of women in the society to unpack the cultural placement and understanding of women in Igbo African proverbs.

In chapter one of this study, the researcher indicated the paradigm upon which the study is built, which is the interpretivist paradigm. This paradigm asserts that individually internalized experiences turn out to form his or her reality. Sequel to this, the reality of an individual which is subjective is a construction created through social interactions with the members of the community. It is because of this that interpretive researchers argue according (Miller 2005:58) “researchers need to analyze the position from which the individual is experiencing the situation, without judgment”.

An individual’s experience of the reality is influenced how he or she turns out to define this reality. “This definition is dependent on the meaning systems gathered from the collective social activities the individual experiences” (Neuman 1997:69). An example of this is a man that is exposed to sexist proverbs all his life (through human interaction or media representations), he will not only use these proverbs but he will see them as the norm and the reality of women. “To begin to understand the reality this individual has constructed for himself one could analyze the way in which he communicates as this is an indication as to his internal belief system and the resultant messages that he is expressing” (Berger and Luckman 1966:3).

Social construction is one of the two theories upon which this study is based. The second theory is liberal feminist theory and both of these theories pay attention to the critical concern of liberal feminist theory. Social construct theory reveals the underlying structures that give heed to the construction of sexist proverbs and liberal feminism fight these structures for the emancipation of women. “These realities are then argued to be created through language, and are dependent on the interaction of individuals during the creation process; the result being that knowledge is considered to be highly interpretive and constructed” (Littlejohn & Foss

2005:45). Social construct and liberal feminist approach share some similarities in their assertion that meanings and social structures are created through social interactions.

The following therefore is the critical presentation of these theories as they deal with sexist proverbs as a social construct created to demean women in Igbo society.

3.2 SOCIAL CONSTRUCT THEORY

Miller (2005:27) asserts that “social constructionism has been highly influential in social research since the 1960’s, and that social constructionism is based on the premise that social reality is an inter-subjective construction created through communicative interaction”. Sexist Igbo proverbs will be analyzed based on this premises paying full attention that proverbs are products of communicative interaction. The social construction of reality is equally the process by which people continuously create, through their action and interactions a shared reality that is experienced as objectively factual and subjectively meaningful (Young & Collin 2004). The above definition is restated by Crotty who infers that:

“...the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of the interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty 1998:42).

Social construct theory comprises of social constructionism and social constructivism¹⁰. Although these two tend to be used interchangeably, this study adopts constructionism theory which asserts that knowledge and truth are social creation not discovered by the mind; this differs from constructivism which states that “each individual mentally constructs the world of experience through cognitive processes” (Andrew 2012:2). The choice of social constructionism for this research is equally prompted by the fact that it uncovers ways in which individuals and people participate in the construction of their perceived social reality. To this effect, “social constructionism cautions us to be ever suspicious of our assumptions about how the world appears to be” (Burr 1995:3). With this theory, this study will investigate how proverbs as forms of language and communication have been constructed in Igbo society to portray a derogatory image of women.

¹⁰ “Constructivism is a cognitive process in which the generation of meaning takes place within the individual (taking into consideration each individual’s unique experience as a basis for his or her own generation of meaning), while constructionism is the collective generation of meaning (referring to the social generation of meaning as a group by taking into consideration that culture has an influence on an individual’s view of the world)” (Crotty 1998:58).

3.6.1 ORIGIN OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

Writers like Burr (1995) have acknowledged the major contribution of Berger and Luckmann (1966) in the development of social constructionism. Berger and Luckmann in their work titled *the social construction of reality* (1966) in turn acknowledge the influence Mead, Marx, Schutz, and Durkheim on their thinking. According to Andrews (2012:13) “more than four decades later, a sizable number of theories and research pledged to the basic tenet that people make their social and cultural worlds at the same time these worlds make them”. Social constructionism originates in an attempt in coming to terms with the nature of reality. Constructionists view knowledge as constructed as opposed to being created.

Social constructionism can be linked to the interpretivist paradigm that nurtures the “goal of understanding the world of lived experience from the perspective of those who live in it” (Andrews 2012:14). In common with an interpretivist philosophical view, constructionism pays attention to the process by which meanings are created, negotiated, sustained and modified (Schwandt 2003:12). Social constructionism maintains some distinct idea from interpretivism in its assertion that “taken-for-granted realities are cultivated from interactions between and among social agents; furthermore, reality is not some objective truth waiting to be uncovered through positivist scientific inquiry; rather, there can be multiple realities that compete for truth and legitimacy” (Berger & Luckmann 1966:8).

3.6.2 A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

For a social constructionist, we do not know what is universally true or false, what is right or wrong or what is good or bad, all we know are tells of what is good or bad and what is right or wrong. Social constructionism typically opposes the view that the human mind has the capability to mirror reality. Galbin (2014:33) supports that the “social constructionism is not interested in creating maps; it surprises the processes that map form and our maps are formed from our experience and how we perceive them”. It focuses on how meaning is created and challenges the notion of objectivity as understood by positivism. Lock & Strong (2010:7) understand social constructionism as “the view that meaning and understanding have their beginnings in social interaction, in shared agreements as to what these symbolic forms are to be taken to be”. To this Jones (2003:54) supports that all individuals are born into a system of meaning, which affects the thoughts and behaviors of that individual. A sample proverb ‘women are evil’ does not point to the reality that women are actually evil but a social construct meaning formulated by men to relegate women. Social constructionism can equally be understood “as a perspective which believes that a great deal of human life exists as it does due

to social and interpersonal influences (Gergen 1985:265). Therefore, social constructionism is concerned with the ways in which individuals through group participation collaborate in creating their social reality.

In social constructionism term, people work closely together in order to construct an artifact. Berger and Luckmann (1991:6) view “society as existing both as objective and subjective reality; the former is brought about through the interaction of people with the social world, with this social world, in turn, influencing people resulting in routinization and habitualization.” By this, a frequently repeated action becomes a pattern and subsequently gets reproduced without much effort as a norm. “In time, the meaning of the habitualization becomes embedded as routines, forming a general store of knowledge and this is institutionalized by society to the extent that future generations experience this type of knowledge as objective” (Berger & Luckmann: 1991).

This theory engages itself with meaning and understanding as a central vital aspect of human activities in coming to terms with reality. From the understanding of social constructionism, objective reality is questionable since reality is a creation of people in their social interactions. This theory gives room to question the common knowledge and understanding on women as perpetuated by Igbo African proverbs. Social constructionism pays attention to the artifacts that are generally created through social interactions of a group of people and proverbs in Igbo African culture is a replica example of an artifact. It proposes that a person’s cognitive development is radically influenced by his or her cultural affiliation in examples of language and social context. Hibberd (2005:32) supports that “a social construct or construction concerns the meaning, notion, or connotation placed on an object or event by a society, and adopted by the inhabitants of that society with respect to how they view or deal with the object or event”.

According to this theory, knowledge and many aspects of the world are not real; they exist because we give them a reality through agreement. “The ways in which we commonly understood the world, the categories and concepts we use, are historically and culturally specific” (Burr 1995:3). This entails that human beings are the creators of knowledge and it can never be objective. Andrews (2012:3) supports that “constructionists view knowledge and truth as created not discovered by the mind and supports the view that being a realist¹¹ is not

¹¹According to Schwandt (2003:8) “realism is the belief that reality lies outside of the human mind; it is the focus on things that can be observed as well as things that exist independently of what the human mind believes to be true.”

inconsistent with being a constructionist.” Burr in contrary to this assertion believes that there is a fundamental gap between social constructionism and realism since social constructionism denies that our knowledge is a direct perception of the reality. Since we have to subject ourselves to the cultural relativism of all forms, the notion about truth is questionable and problematic. All knowledge are derived from a subjective view of the world hence, there is nothing as objective fact. Andrews continues to maintain that there is no intrinsic tension between realism and social constructionism as one can believe that concepts are constructed rather than discovered yet maintain that they correspond to something real in the world (2012:3). The notion of the tree must point to a reality of tree somewhere in the world. For Schwandt (2003:19) “social constructionism challenges concepts of knowledge put forward by positivism, which postulates the externality of reality and that empirically proved truths are mind-independent.” Knowledge is a collaborative effort by the community of knowers (Marecek, Crawford & Popp). Social constructionism tends to pay attention on how meaning is created and upheld and suggests that knowledge is not only a social product but the effort of the specific society that is answerable to contest and time. In a nutshell, “the way we understand the world is a product of a historical process of interaction and negotiation between groups of people” (Galbin 2014:5).

3.6.3 PROVERBS AS SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

At the heart of knowledge is language and this has equally occupied a notable position in social constructionism. Constructionists argue that “individual’s comprehension of society is constituted through language, which means that language should be the object of study, where language is seen as a system of meanings and practices that construct the social world” (Terre’ Blanche & Durrheim 1999:149). Language is the way by which people make meaning of the world, share experiences, “objectify subjective meanings and internalize constructed meanings” (Allen 2005:38). With the use of social constructionism, the researcher seeks to understand the multiple ways realities have been created through language medium such as proverbs and have been taken for granted among the Eastern people of Nigeria that typically demean women. Social constructionism avows that language does not mirror reality but constitutes it (Hibberd 2005).

Language plays a vital role on how people come to term with reality and in turn, how people create reality. The social world is not given, natural or real but made by people. For Schwandt (2003:19) “Social constructionism understands the fundamental role of language and communication and this understanding has contributed to the linguistic turn and more recently

the turn to discourse theory.” Using constructionism theory, this research will interrogate Igbo sexist proverbs as social constructs enacted to demean women in Igbo African culture.

Proverb is a social artifact that was created by people in a particular society at a given time. Terre’ Blanche & Durrheim (1999:148) state that “social constructionist researchers analyze signs and images in order to show how representations of people are created, which later affects the underlying experience individuals have of the people being represented”. The much respect and prominence accorded proverbs in Igbo society has been a consequence of shared agreement which does not in any way mirror reality. To this effect, social constructionism insists that “we take a critical stance toward our taken for granted ways of understanding the world, including ourselves” (Burr 1995:2). For example, just because it is said that proverbs in Igbo African culture are handed from the forefathers to the present generation does not in any way makes it an objective fact. It was a collaborative effort of some group of men in a given time in history.

This follows the example of gender and sex as the world suggests of the two categories of human being, men, and women. “Social constructionism bids us to seriously question whether the categories ‘man’ and ‘women’ are simply a reflection of naturally occurring distinct types of human beings” (Burr 3). The individual and the society are indissoluble and reality is whatever they have generally believed it to be, this research, therefore, questions sexist Igbo proverb through the meaning that it communicates that typically demean women.

3.3 LIBERAL FEMINISM

The word feminism has its etymological root in a Latin word ‘femina’ which means women. According to the Blackwell dictionary of Sociology, Feminism “is a variety of interrelated framework used to observe, analyse and interpret the complex ways in which the social reality of gender and gender inequality is constructed, enforced and manifested from the largest institutional setting to the detail of people’s daily lives” (Johnson 1995:109). Weedon (1987:1) narrows this definition to “a politics that is geared towards putting an end to the existing power relations between men and women in the society”. From this assertion, feminism can be understood as a (political) movement which seeks justice for women from their cultural/societal disparagement. It could also be seen as sets of principles for understanding women’s subjugation in the society. “Feminist activist research consciously seeks to break up social silences to make spaces for fracturing the very ideologies that justify power inequalities” (Weedon 1987:1).

According to Mandell (1995:4), “all feminists believe that gender relations stems from historical and socio-cultural production, therefore, they correct myths and errors and construct theories about women and lastly they all call for a change in the status of women”. Type of feminist theories include: liberal, radical, Marxist socialist and third world feminism. This study adopts liberal feminist perspectives. The study uses liberal feminist ideologies concerning the status and stance of women in the society. The choice of this theory for the study is prompted by the fact that unlike other feminist theories (in the likes of radical, Marxist socialist and third world feminist theories), liberal feminist asks for the abolition of culturally established constraints that has hindered women’s emancipation without appealing to reverse sexism.

Liberal feminism advocates for an equal representation of men and women in the society without giving preference to any because of sex or gender. Liberal feminism, from its earliest forms to now, may be understood as focusing on the elimination of constraints facing women and gaining equal civil rights for women as a public citizen. These constraints on women may be embedded in the social structures and language in the society. A social structure such as patriarchy had laid the foundation for oppressive proverbs in Igbo culture. Men have taken the responsibility of defining women and their role in the society to the detriment of womanhood.

3.6.4 ORIGINS OF LIBERAL FEMINISM

Liberal feminism is rooted in the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), and Harriet Taylor Mill (1807-1858). This feminist movement emerged in the period of economic and political transformation of the West. The advent of industrial capitalism pushed United States of America, France, and Britain to adopt a political system of representative democracy. According to Gordon (1996:13), “Liberal feminism originated mainly among mainly Western, white middle-class women, and its focus on individualism, freedom of choice and equality of rights and opportunities for women and men”. Liberal feminism, as a product of this revolution, is structured in ideologies of political philosophy. Political philosophy seeks ideas that should inform social institutions. According to Lee (2009:2), “among the earliest political writings that can be identified as a liberal feminist is the vindication of the rights of woman (1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft.

During Wollstonecraft era, women’s rights are denied because they are regarded as non-persons and irrational. An example of such worldview on women is evident in Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1799:358) argument that says that “men and women were by nature not merely different in kind but different in natural rank, with women being weaker physically, intellectually, and emotionally.” Women for him are incapable of abstract reasoning but they require minimal education in order to be able to complement man as housewives. Wollstonecraft disagrees with the above stance of Rousseau stating that “many of the supposed differences between the sexes were either fabricated or exaggerated and therefore could not be used as the basis for differential rights and roles” (1992:34). The notion of social constructionism has equally indicated that gender and gender roles are products of social construct.

In Wollstonecraft’s advocacy of women’s right, she never suggests that women should neglect their traditional role as mothers and wives. She believes that by going about their domestic chores, women would contribute to the overall body of knowledge and virtue. For her, women share mental properties with men and have all the capabilities of abstract reasoning just like men. Although contemporary feminists are skeptical about women’s traditional role, Wollstonecraft basic argument that the equality of a man and woman is based on the shared rationality of the both sexes remains central among liberal feminist argument. Hence, the core idea of liberal feminism is that men and women share the same characteristics and should be accorded equal right and respect.

3.6.5 PATRIARCHY IN LIBERAL FEMINISM

Patriarchy as a political power seeks to control and subjugate women so that their possibilities of making choices about their sexuality, childbearing, mothering, loving and laboring are curtailed. Patriarchy as a system of oppression recognizes the potential power of women and actual power of men. Its purpose is to destroy women's consciousness about their potential power, which derives from the necessity of society to reproduce itself (Eisenstein 1989:14-15).

Liberalism with its root in political thought is a revolt against Patriarchalism (Lee 2009:3). Feminism as a political movement seeks to liberate women from the institutionalized subordination which is rooted in patriarchy. As such, Liberal feminism believes that women's subordination is as a result of inequality of opportunities in the society. Liberal feminist states that emancipation of women from patriarchal paternalism that limits their option on the grounds that it is for their interest is the primary concern of their movement. They believe that unequal representation in politics, social sphere, and economics have brought about the oppression of women. Liberal feminists are equally of the view that oppression exists because of the way in which men and women are socialized that supports patriarchy and keeps men in power positions. For Filmer (1997:15), "political authority was a consequence or derivative of the governance of the household, which was the exclusive prerogative of the father/husband." Liberal feminists, therefore, seek to liberate women from the oppressive gender roles rooted in patriarchy. They emphasize that patriarchy defines women's lives by placing them in women acceptable roles that are in line with feminine ideals. According to Mandell (1995:6), liberal feminist "blames traditional arrangements of work and family as denying women of their freedom of choices." Proverbs in patriarchal Igbo society are made and use by men thereby giving women no opportunity of defending themselves.

Liberal feminism, therefore, believes that removing gender discriminatory laws and policies will enable women to compete equally with men. Sequel to this, Elizabeth Stanton and other liberal feminists fought for equal rights for women in order that opportunities and privileges of the society be extended to women. For a liberal feminist, the definition of patriarchy is linked to women's reproductive capacities. On this Eisenstein asserts that "patriarchy as a political power seeks to control and subjugate women so that their possibilities of making choices about their welfare (e.g sexuality, childbearing, mothering, loving and laboring) are curtailed" (1981:14). "This patriarchal paternalistic and moralistic law steer women into socially preferred ways of life" (Baehr 2013:3).

3.6.6 LIBERALISM IN LIBERAL FEMINISM

Liberalism and liberal values of independence, equality of opportunities to define who they are have also laid the foundation of liberal feminist theory. Andrew Heywood puts it right when he emphasizes that “human beings are endorsed with reason and each individual should enjoy the maximum possible freedom consistent with a like of freedom for all” (2000:60). Liberal feminists understand that the state has a crucial role to play in the eradication of women’s oppression. They also believe that the state cannot do everything that women on their part should constantly fight to liberate themselves from oppressive structures by challenging them. The first step in changing any oppressive structure according to liberal feminism is by seeing that particular structure as enacted by humans and as such could be prone to bias and prejudice. Liberal feminism believes that “patriarchal paternalistic and moralistic laws steer women into socially preferred ways of life” (Baehr 2013:13). These are a restriction of women based on gender role stereotype and sex discrimination rooted in patriarchy society. They believe that women have been marginalized and devalued through different media and full social participation and public life have been denied them. The findings of this research prove that women are made to believe and accept certain marginalization by the use of misogynistic proverbs. Choices should not be made on behalf of women because of sex instead; they should have the right to choose.

Just as the name liberalism suggest, Bryson (1999:196) notes that “from a liberal feminist’s perspective, there is certainly no inherent or inevitable conflict of interest between women and men.” The implication of this, from the liberal feminist standpoint, is that all people both women and men are equal and not the enemy. Because they share the same mental capacity, both men and women are prone to the same opportunity in the society. Liberal feminists “call for change in the society, with the aim that social policies must be seen as an important force in creating access to economic and civil opportunities for all” (Elliot & Mandel 1995:6). They understand that the pursuit of equality will not only favor women but will equally favor men as well. The reason being that if men and women should share equal rights and opportunities at workplaces, the duty of providing for the family would not be left alone for the man. Liberal feminism also asserts that cultural hegemony limits women’s options in the society. An example of this is when culture, by the means of proverbs and other sources, assign identities and gender roles according to sex. Okin (1999:89) supports that “liberal feminism holds that autonomy deficits like these are due to the ‘gender system’ or the patriarchal nature of inherited

traditions and institutions and that the women's movement should work to identify and remedy them.”

3.6.7 FEMINISM AND LIBERAL FEMINISM IN AFRICA

Feminist movement acknowledges that women are subjected to some form of oppression or the other which has subsequently relegated them to second class citizens in Africa. African feminists subscribe to this view but further state that their experience and that of the western feminism differs in some ways. They believe that African women suffer more oppression than their western counterparts. They consequently seek to adopt an alternative theory that would see to their reality in Africa. For Arndt (2001:12), “there is and must be a diversity of feminisms responsive to the different needs and concerns of different women and defined by them for themselves.” Some African women like Ama Ata Aidoo, Bessie Head, Miriama Ba, Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta say that they cannot identify themselves to the western definition and characterization of feminism. An African woman is left with six oppressive loads to deal with; the first is colonialism and neo-colonialism, the second is the traditional structures, the third is her set-back, the fourth is a man, the fifth is her color and the sixth is herself (Ogundinpe 1994:28). This is an indication that western feminism (be it liberal or radical) is different and does not fully represent the reality of African women, although they may share fourth, fifth and the sixth problems.

Walker (2002) comes with the notion of womanism as opposed to feminism, as a concept that would address the oppression of women in Africa. Walker says a womanist is “committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female” (2002:38). A womanist according to her is not only committed to sexist discrimination but also skin color and economic discrimination. Ogunyemi gives a different understanding of womanism as expanding feminism. She states that “A womanist will recognize that along with her consciousness of sexual issues, she must additionally incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic and political considerations into her philosophy” (2005:86). She believes that this is in opposition to radical feminism but shares some view of Marxist feminism. She excludes white and black American women from her womanism. Womanism subsequently took the different definition from some other African women but they are geared towards the liberation of African women from their oppression. African women notion of feminism takes into consideration, the specific cultures and circumstances that they are into. In other words, the fact that the problem of African women revolves around economic development, socio-cultural problems and

technological advancement, they require different analysis that would form their own theory and reflect their own experiences.

3.6.8 CRITICAL COMMENT ON LIBERAL FEMINISM

Liberal feminism in its advocacy for women's liberation and emancipation has some internal critique from within the feminist themselves. Liberal feminism seeks to liberate women from the oppressive nature of the society but fails to consider the context and socio-cultural reality of different women in a different part of the world. This critique suggests that "liberal feminism's emphasis on autonomy and fairness in personal and associational life runs the risk of elevating one particular comprehensive conception of the good life over the many others found in multicultural societies" (Okin 1999:36). This rebuttal which is particularly raised by African feminist argues that liberal feminist theory is advocating for 'one size fits all' theory and this could not suffice for the innermost experience of all women in a different part of the world. This argument further asserts that liberal feminism has focused their attention on equality of opportunity for all without considering the social structures that have contributed to this inequality.

Another possible objection to liberal feminism has it that the difference between man and women are far more than what is acknowledged by liberal feminists. The critique states "that liberal feminists run the risk of being insufficiently liberal; measures intended to promote gender fairness and the autonomy of women could end up unreasonably hindering autonomy" (Cudd 2006:223). This critique asserts that the difference between male and female should be properly conceptualized so that both genders could be treated fairly. The proponents of this rebuttal believe that women respond to ethical issues differently as men do.

In response to the above critics against liberal feminism, I would maintain that liberal feminism is the most exhaustive account of feminism that has taken a bold step in the liberation of women. Their ideologies have brought about the activities of some international organization fighting for women's course like United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIEFM), International Labour Organization (ILO), and also the support of World Bank. This international organization serves as practical means through which the activities of liberal feminists are carried out for women's emancipation. The first critique by African feminists that liberal feminism fails to take socio-cultural context into consideration in its approach to women's emancipation ignores the fact oppression is oppression anywhere in the world. Although there might be different circumstances that could have led to the advent of oppression

in a particular society but this does not make oppression take a different definition in one society in opposition to the other. “Liberal feminists hold that the exercise of personal autonomy depends on certain enabling conditions that are insufficiently present in women's lives, or that social arrangements often fail to respect women's personal autonomy and other elements of women's flourishing” (Baehr 2003:18). They state that as the protection of individual's right and interest is the function of a state, the state should be the women's confederate in fighting and protecting their autonomy. Liberal feminists equally admonish women to stand up for their rights and break the different barriers to their attaining a befitting livelihood no matter the reality that brought about this marginalization.

Womanism, as proposed by African feminist in the writing of Walker (2002), holds no radical view from the stance of liberal feminism; it is a call for the liberation of African women in their oppression brought about by economic and social inequalities. The second argument against liberal feminism holds no water sequel to the fact that many differences between the sexes are products of sexism sometimes created by men. In as much as men and women are not the same, this does not negate the fact that they are equal and this is the central idea of liberal feminism. Man and woman in the same economic position are entitled to the same salary and benefits. As long as liberal feminism insists on the equal rationality of both sexes and need for autonomous self-fulfilment of both sexes, it is a paradigm that best eradicates the barriers towards women liberation.

Social constructionism and liberal feminist theory will help in understanding and answer the research questions framing this study. The theories are most suitable for this research because it investigates the cultural and social ground constructed for the oppression of women and seeks to eradicate it without appealing to reverse sexism. From a liberal feminist perspective, proverbs should not be abolished but care must be taken to ensure that both genders are properly represented in this thought process. Since proverb which is an integral part of the language is a social construct, there is an ardent need for the modification of this thought process especially those that typically oppress women. Liberal feminism is a call to revisit and abolish sexist Igbo proverbs for the interest of both men and women.

3.4 SUMMATION

The above discussion serves to develop a theoretical discussion for this research. Working from an interpretivist paradigm the objective is to understand how women are portrayed in proverbs in Igbo society. Using the understanding of Grix (2004:83) interpretivists seek to understand

phenomena within the social world. Gaining an adequate insight into the representation of women in a social/cultural artifact such as proverbs plays a crucial role in understanding how individuals within the society construct their reality based on such representation. Constructionist emphasizes that individuals participate actively in the creation of their reality. These realities created by an individual are the collection of experiences with external influences from friends and community members. Since this could be the case, proverbs, both sexist and positive ones as a social construct are created by individuals according to their understanding of reality (in this case, men create sexist proverbs according to perceived understanding of women).

Liberal feminist theory as the second theory of this research understands that traditional/cultural structures such as proverbs are social creation enacted by individuals according to their shared understanding of reality. And since most of these structures favor men in the society to the detriment of women, liberal feminist seeks to fight these abusive structures that hinder the full development of women in the society. A liberal feminist believes that although proverbs might be a reflection of wisdom, an interrogation has to be launched into the misogynistic ones that do not give the true picture of womanhood. Since proverbs are social construct, construct is ever changing as individuals give them new meaning and this should equally be applied to the abusive proverbs that oppose women's wellbeing. These theories not only have interrogated proverbs and abusive proverbs in particular but oppose the basic understanding conveyed by them. The subsequent chapter four now employs these theoretical landscapes to discuss the study methodology.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Using purposive sampling and working from a qualitative research framework, the research seeks to understand how/why women are portrayed in Igbo cultural proverbs based on certain gender stereotypes. These methodology couple with the research theories are relevant for this study because they demonstrated that stereotypes against women are as a result of men's domination of women in the society and therefore imposing their reality on women. The importance of this approach supports the findings of this study that there is nothing like objective fact or reality, people construct their own reality in association with others. The chapter presents the researchers choice of methodology and the reason for choosing it. The chapter stipulates the link connecting the research objectives and research questions based on the theoretical framework.

Therefore, this study makes use of qualitative research approach to uncover the stance of women in Igbo African Proverbs. According to Newman (2011:22), "qualitative research methodology is an approach that describes and gives meaning to particular social phenomena". The qualitative research investigates the underlying qualities of subjective experience and meanings in connection to the phenomena. By the use of a qualitative data collection method, "the researcher obtains a richness and depth of data gathered from complex and multi-faceted phenomena in a specific social context" (Du Plooy et al 2014:173). This approach is most suitable for this study because, according to Maree (2007:12), it is a naturalistic approach that enables the researcher to understand reality in a given context.

4.2 VALIDITY

The findings of the researcher within this paradigm are an interpretation of events of the study. Interpretivists are of the opinion that the conclusion of a study should be supported with the qualitative data to ensure coherency of the study. "To strengthen validity triangulations can be used, where researchers use two or more methods in their investigations" (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al 2014:29). This is important because if the different method can ensure the same conclusion, then the validity claims are strengthened. This research will adhere to these stipulations by making use of both in-depth interview and qualitative content analysis.

4.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The morality of human conduct is the primary concern of ethics. The study is conducted based on the ethical rules guiding social research and the University of KwaZulu-Natal. According to Edwards & Mauthner (2012:15) “ethics in social research refers to the moral considerations on the part of researchers throughout the research process.” Consent was reached before the research instrument is administered to the participant. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity before engaging in the study. With regards to informed consent, before the qualitative instrument was administered, the purpose of the study was explained to the participants and verbal consent was received from the participants. The participants enjoyed some freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without fear and this will be made clear before the interview commences. Confidentiality of the participants was emphasized and observed as their names will not be revealed in the study. Rights and integrity of respondents and discussants were protected and participation is strictly voluntary. Respondents were told to skip any question they are not comfortable answering and also to withdraw from participating entirely if they no longer feel comfortable participating in the study.

4.4 SAMPLING PROCEDURE

Sampling is the process of choosing research participants that suit one’s study. Aniekwe (2005:23) opines that “a sample size is a proportion of the population which is studied with the view of generalizing the findings to the entire population.” However, since this research involves data from in-depth interview and textual contents, a purposive non-probability sample method will be used. This infers that unlike probabilistic sampling techniques “the data or information collected was not representative of the whole population” (Denzin & Lincoln 2005:14). With purposive non-probability sampling, researcher purposefully and intentionally chooses the elements (text) that we wish to include in our sample, based on a list of characteristics. In relation to the present study, the research identifies sexist and derogatory proverbs that paint a negative picture about women. Qualitative sampling also gives an insight of the behavior of a wider population although the results might differ as far as the research is done in a different context. Data collected in this study is not a representative of all women from Igbo society of Nigeria.

4.5 SAMPLING METHOD

This study makes use of purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling methods whereby we carefully choose our sample based on certain shared characteristics. We would look at our population and our research question and determine what

characteristics from the population are important for the research (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al 2014:29). Based on these considerations, we would then choose samples that met the required characteristics leaving out the others. With regards to this study, the samples are Igbo women of Eastern Nigeria. An Igbo woman is someone born to Igbo parents or married to an Igbo man. Du Plooy-Cilliers et al (2014:29) states that “the advantages of this method of sampling is that we can ensure that each element of our sample will assist with our research because each element fits with the population parameters of the study.”

4.6.1 SAMPLE SIZE

Since the researcher cannot study the entire population of the studies, involving a precise number of samples is best suitable in qualitative studies. This is unlike quantitative research that is basically characterized by huge sample sizes for the aim of generalizing the findings. Nonetheless, quantitative sampling seeks to “describe or explain what is happening within a smaller group of people” (2007:49). Therefore, a total of five (5) in-depth interviews were conducted. Du Plooy-Cilliers et al (2014) state that choosing a precise number of sample for a research is suitable for applicable statistical tools. It is also manageable given the time and resources available to the researcher. The choice of these five (5) in-depth interviews is not to generalize findings by huge sample size but to gain an in-depth understanding of women’s approach towards sexist proverbs.

Secondly, data consisting of fifteen (15) Igbo proverbs that relate and demean women were collected from the rural and urban discourse for content analysis. The characteristics that determine the sample for this study include sexist and derogatory Igbo proverbs. The choice of these fifteen (15) misogynistic proverbs has been prompted by the overt nature of sexism that they uphold as compared with the limited number of others. These proverbs make use of sexual symbols and images derogatory to women. The choice of these obscene proverbs is also prompted by the researcher’s competence with the language.

4.6 INTERVIEW METHODS

4.6.2 IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW

The researcher got primary data from an in-depth interview of Igbo women in the city of Pietermaritzburg. The choice of this location is prompted by its convenience to the researcher and availability of study population for the study. This is prompted by the fact that the researcher is living and studying in Pietermaritzburg and it was easier to establish rapport with the respondent. These women were contacted through *Umunna* Nigeria group and

National Association of Nigerians in South Africa, Pietermaritzburg branch. Umunna Nigeria group is an association of the Igbos from Nigeria in diaspora. The group aims to promote and preserve the mutual heritage of Igbo people and values. In order to get a thick and rich response for the research, an in-depth interview is used. An in-depth interview according to Du Plooy et al (2014:188), is a “qualitative data collection method which allows you to pose questions to participants with the aim of learning more about their views, opinions, and beliefs about a specific phenomenon”. With this method, the researcher understands women’s approach towards abusive sexist Igbo proverbs. The aim of using semi-structured interviews for this research is to obtain information based on open-ended questions.

The data were collected through a one-on-one in-depth interview between the researcher and the interview participants. Individual in-depth interview was conducted with five women in order to obtain a contemporary qualitative data and “cutting edge knowledge” with regards to sexist proverbs (Punch 2005:33). Each interview session lasted for approximately 60 minutes and depended on the availability of research participants. The interview was recorded and later transcribed. Questions focused on participants understanding of proverbs in general and their response to sexist Igbo proverbs. The use of an in-depth interview equally gave the researcher the room to ask a participant for clarification on a point she is making, with this, she can equally provide a more detailed explanation of the points she is making. Mathers (1998:2), argues that open-ended questions provide opportunities for both the interviewer and interviewee to discuss some topics in a more detailed manner. A repeat interview was conducted where necessary as it helped to obtain a richer response.

The interview was conducted in the most conducive environment for both the researcher and the participants. The purpose of the interview and the study was well communicated in order to seek their permission as to whether they want to participate in the interview. Confidentiality has assured the participants and this prompted their unreserved participation in the study. Most Igbo women residing in the city of Pietermaritzburg are into academics and competent with the English language, consequently, the interview was conducted using English language medium. Should there be an exception to this, although none was known, Igbo language could have been used for the comfort of the Participant. This data collection method critically uncovers the contemporary response of women towards sexist proverbs in Igbo culture in this 21st-century cultural milieu. The data collected stipulates women’s frustration with the way they are portrayed in most Igbo proverbs. Women still find themselves at the corner of secondary citizen position in the society.

4.7 CONTENT ANALYSIS

This study equally makes use of content analysis. Content analysis is a research method that investigates the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005:1278). It is a technique for analyzing information on written and visual documents like pictures, song lyrics, and movies (Wildemuth 2009:319). This data collection method hence involves the systematic analysis of social artifacts to provide an in-depth understanding of, example, media texts, such as proverbs and their specific contexts.

Qualitative content analysis is also understood as textual analysis, and according to McKee (2001:140), is an educated guess of the most likely interpretations of a text. This method is most appropriate for this study because it involves analysis of textual content such as stories, written and spoken words as well as visualized narratives. Qualitative content analysis is implored to unpacked and uncover different themes present in a particular text. Zhang and Wildermuth (2009:319) equally support that “qualitative content analysis pays attention to unique themes that illustrate the range of the meanings of the phenomenon rather than the statistical significance of the occurrence of particular texts or concepts.”

Texts which constitute the discursive practice of a research make much meaning when they are framed within the chain of cultural intertextuality. This point to the fact that a given text in relation to the other texts portrays evidence of cultural and social realities and experiences that are typically interwoven to form a whole discursive unit. Therefore, this study makes use of data from sources such as *the compilation of Igbo proverbs and their meaning* (CIPM), *Things fall apart* (Chinua Achebe 1958), *Uto asusu Igbo* (Ilo Oha 1965), *Ilu Igbo* (Ohaneze N’Igbo), *Ukwa ruo oge ya, o da*, *Juo Obinna*, *Achoba Isi Ochu*, and *Omenala Igbo* (Ndubuisi Ekegbo 1999) *The joys of motherhood* (Buchi Emecheta 1979). The study will equally make use of data from Nigeria Nollywood movies relating to women and use of proverbs such as *The widow* (2001), *who killed my husband* (2003), *Ajadu* (2002), *Ojadike* (2004). Thus, data from the in-depth interview and content analysis will be analyzed thematically and simultaneously. Each of the proverbs in this sample is given a literal translation and semantic connotation based on the meaning of the wording. In order to complete the open coding stage, Neuman (2003:442) suggests five steps that will guide the researcher in developing the codes for analysis; these five stages include, labeling, defining, describing, flagging, and then giving an example of each of the codes. According to Quoting Başgöz (1993:130), “It is the image in these proverbs that evokes the message and builds a frame for the logic.”

4.8 DATA ANALYSIS, THEMES, AND CODING

Coding of data is the “careful scrutiny of your data and taking note of all the relevant and meaningful sections and items” (Maree 2007:77). Therefore, an exhaustive coding system has been employed in this research to ensure that all data are accommodated and represented. In order to come up with the exhaustive themes that would typically give a conceptual understanding of this research, a substantive (open) coding process has been used. This system of coding involves going through entire data in order to get an overall understanding of the message it communicates. An adequate scrutiny will be given to the data from the in-depth interview and sexist proverbs carefully selected in order to give it an overall coding. Consequently, this research is coded into a sexist ideology that is typically demeaning to women. With this system of coding, the researcher went through the data for analysis and picks the relation of the key concept to sexism and women oppression and thereby groups them into themes. Consequently, the themes for the study were carefully formulated by stipulating sexist elements in some Igbo proverbs. The concepts gathered from the understanding of these data are grouped into smaller categories of the coding unit as male domination, sex differentiation, women as sex objects and women as unreliable and unfaithful. These coding units would also aid in answering the research question through analyses and interpretation. Secondly, the themes for the study were carefully formulated

4.9 SUMMATION

This chapter has shown the link between social construct theory, feminist theory, and interpretivist paradigm. In order to give an adequate interpretation of the representation of women in the sexist Igbo proverbs, the research has adopted a qualitative in-depth interview and content analysis. The proper application and understanding of the research theories have helped with the formulation of the research methodology that would give an ultimate answer to the research questions and hypothesis. These different approaches have been properly discussed to elucidate the important and relevancy of the research method to social science and the study at hand. They have demystified the understanding of proverbs as indisputable truth and fact and have shown that proverbs are nothing but social construction and this has formed the basis of this study. In addition, the researcher has shown the importance of qualitative method in social science. One of these importance is that qualitative method helps in gaining and understanding of the subjective experiences of the participants.

CHAPTER FIVE: KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Proverbs are important to the Igbos in their daily interactions. As stated in the literature review, this social construct plays a crucial role not just in communication process but in upholding the moral consciousness of the society. It is no wonder why the respondents articulate that:

The Igbo proverbs are to the Igbos what axioms are to the scientists. They are the fundamentals upon which the Igbo society builds their beliefs or justify their actions. A true Igbo man (person) uses proverbs to introduce his speech, he uses it to support his claims just as scientists use an axiom to support their claims (Respondent No 3, October 22, 16).

In Igbo culture, any written speech or oral speech which does not contain a significant number of proverbs is assumed to be childish (Respondent No 4, October 24, 16).

But far from just being the beauty of Igbo's oratory, proverbs have constituted a smooth avenue for the cultural subjugation of women. Womanhood has negatively been represented in Igbo proverbs and according to Balogun (2010:21), "the most fundamental but neglected aspect in gender discourse lies in the proverbial resources of the community." This indicates that proverbs, which are taken to be a true reflection of wisdom, have been left out in the fight against sexism and gender imbalance in the society. Findings from the sample proverbs of this study and the data from the in-depth interview reveal that women are portrayed based on some stereotype as sex objects, irrational, unreliable, weak, wicked, foolish and inferior to men. A sample proverb, never marry a woman with big feet has not only indicated that men should be sceptical of women with big feet but equally admonishes such women to see themselves as no good. Balogun (2010:23) supports this stating that most of these (sexist) proverbs reveal that women's safety, well-being, and rights are of little or no interest to the male folk. The stereotypical depiction of women in these sample proverbs draws the attention of liberal feminist's towards women's oppression which is deeply rooted in man-made society (patriarchy). Mtuze (1990:41) presents a true picture of Igbo women saying that:

women are not only contingent on others but social norms also demand that they exercise whatever power they have behind the scenes only, regardless of their education or social status. Women are expected to be the same and any deviation from that is a suspect. Stereotyping, with its tendency to generalize, indirectly enforces the pseudo-uniformity. That is why educated women characters are not different from their uneducated.

The understanding of the participants from the in-depth interview equally aligns with the literature review which asserts that there is a strong bond existing between patriarchy and sexism in the language in Igbo cultural society. The society, under the direction of men, has invented degrading meaning on women in order to keep them at a secondary citizen position in the society. The research themes equally support the discussion on social construct theory which infers that meaning is a collective effort of individuals; referring to the social generation of meaning as a group by taking into consideration that culture has an influence on an individual's view of the world (Crotty 1998:58). The social environment of an individual equally has a strong impact on his or her belief and this has been the reason why proverbs are accorded the much enviable respect it enjoys today among the Igbos of Nigeria as words of indisputable wisdom and truth.

Therefore, this chapter exposes and discusses the overt sexism in Igbo proverbs and how it typically portrays women. The combination of qualitative in-depth interview and content analysis give this research a rich and thick approach to a conceptual analysis of this problem at hand. This indicates that the contextual and conceptual interpretation of these proverbs is critically provided in this study. "The literal level of translation of the proverb helps to frame or conceptualize the picture or image ascribed to women in the society" (Mmadike 2014:99). This also entails a proper visualization of the actual meaning of the words used in the proverbs. For the purpose of analysis, the sample proverbs would be classified into themes and key idea as (a) patriarchy and male domination, (b) ridicule on women's sex organ and gender role (d) women as unreliable and unfaithful. These themes equally draw from the literature review, social construct theory and the concern of liberal feminism. The analysis of these sexist proverbs equally involves the attitude towards sexist proverbs by the research participant. It involves the reaction of Igbo women towards sexist proverbs that typically degrade them.

5.2 PATRIARCHY AND MALE DOMINATION

Similar to the findings of other studies in sexism in a language like that of Oha (1998), Balogun (2010), the patriarchal social system has been a major avenue for creating and maintaining of

abusive language against women. It refers to men's structural control over political, legal, economic, and religious institutions (Goldberg, 1993; cited in Glick & Fiske, 1997). Sexist proverbs under this theme strongly stipulate that women are in all spheres of life inferior to men; justifying male power and traditional gender roles. Johnson (2005) refers to this patriarchal tradition of man's attitude and the right to controlling women as patriarchal terrorism. Liberal feminism in the theoretical framework believes that women's subordination is as a result of inequality of opportunities in the society as a result of patriarchy. This involves the inhuman maltreatment and silencing of women from voicing out their concerns. One of the respondents of the study understands that previous cultural settings have typically relegated women to the mercy of men and this should not continue to hold in our contemporary society:

Maybe sexist proverbs could be true in the primitive culture because of the situation women find themselves into prompted by culture but this does not apply to the present society because now women make a significant contribution in our society even in the popular slogan that whatever a man can do, women can do better. So in the present society, such sexist proverbs are so wrong and can't be applied to all women (Respondent No 4, October 24, 16).

From this point of view, one would understand that sexism has a strong tie with patriarchal social tradition since men are against women not prompted by reason but by sex differentiation and gender roles. Cameron (1977:45) supports that "sexism, which is really relevant to and is created by patriarchy, has been defined as a negative attitude or discriminatory behavior based on the presumed inferiority or difference of women as a group". This hostile sexism against women is evident in Igbo proverbs that maintain traditional prejudice against women. The following proverbs serve as cultural vehicles through which men maintain their dominance over women in Igbo society.

1) *Oburu na nwanyi asi na ya na nwoke ha, ya nyulie amiri elu.*

(If a woman claims equality with a man, let her urinate upwards) (Mmadike 2014:99).

This proverb draws attention to women that if they claim equality with men, they must be able to do as men do. Igbo society is highly patriarchal with obvious gender role differences. Here, the fact that man stands erect while urinating is used to pose a challenge for a woman who could not do so because she is biologically constrained to a particular posture while urinating. The conceptualization of an open challenge is noted here. Mmadike notes that "the Igbo

derisively refer to a woman as *nwaànyị nā-ehu ēhū ànyụ mamĩrĩ* ‘woman who stoops while urinating’ (2014:99). This biological component of womanhood has been understood as an impairment by men in Igbo society. The bodily make up of women predisposes them to some form of identity that presents them as weaker and ‘helpless’ vessels among their male folks in Igbo society.

2) *Ugwu nwanyi bu di ya.* (The beauty/prestige of a woman is her man (husband).

“The proverb is visualized as a means of admonishing any adult female who appears to be more concerned about her career than getting married” (Oha 1998:96).

A typical Igbo woman would remain in perpetual agony if no suitor asks for her hand in marriage. Thus, it is a common knowledge among the Igbos of Nigeria that it is only when a woman enters a man’s house under the union of marriage would she be accorded respect by the society. Another interpretation and understanding of this proverb are that no matter how educated, exposed and rich a woman might be, without a man she is nothing.

3) *Nwata nwanyi zachaa onye muru, a zawa onye na alu.*

(A lady after answering whose child, will later answers whose wife.)

This proverb equally follows from the previous one discussed above that keeps emphasizing the pitiable state of a lady without a man. The proverb specifically serves as an admonition. Mmadike clarifies that “the proverb shows that at a point in the life of a woman, she is expected to marry because her identity is usually derived from that of her husband” (99). It is expected that at a certain age, a girl should get married, leave her parent’s home and join her husband. According to Dlamini (1995:67) “young girls are groomed to realize that their final destination in life is marriage; both the mother and grandmothers bear that in mind when they prepare her to be a future wife”.

Without even saying it, a typical Igbo lady knows that it is compulsory for her to get married to a man. The extreme version of this proverb thus says that if a lady overstays in her father’s house, she will start attending elder’s meeting. A woman never attends elders meeting in Igbo land; it is strictly for men who gather to discuss the prospect of the community. Considering this proverb, although a woman will never join the elders meeting but for the proverb to suggest this entails that there is something abnormal with such woman. It is similar to a situation where

a woman physically beats her husband. With this awareness, a typical Igbo lady would do anything even against her wish just to be called someone's wife.

4) *Nwanyi di ya nwuru buru ukpa afia tukwasa n'isi mara ihe gburu di ya.*

(A woman that goes to the market at the death of his husband knows what killed him).

The mourning/burial process of a man is quite tedious with his wife in Igbo culture. At the demise of a man in Igbo culture, the wife becomes the primary suspect no matter how peaceful the couple might have lived. This proverb sample maintains the much traditional suspicion and distrust on womanhood. It is expected that at the death of the husband, typical Igbo women should exhibit a great deal of vulnerability and remorse as if she did kill the husband. In this sample proverb, for a woman to set out to market is seen with suspicion after the death of her husband. She is expected to observe a long mourning process and detach herself from the activities of the society. In most Igbo culture, a widow is seen as unclean and should be cleansed by some selected male kindred after the rigorous mourning process. This cleansing ritual involves being bathed naked in the river by some of the selected kinsmen of the deceased husband.

5) *Nwa agbogho nokaria na be nne ya, oghoro amosu.*

(if a lady stays too long in her parent's home without getting married, she turns to a witch)

This proverb is a reflection of the Igbo's concept of sisterhood which continues to emphasise the need for a woman to get married. According to the Igbo's of eastern Nigeria, a woman that did not get married and begin to age in her father's house is a witch and such women receive public attention and discrimination even from her fellow women because it is believed that it is her wickedness that has scared away every possible suitor from seeking her hands in marriage. In order to avert this calamity, an unmarried Igbo woman becomes agitated as she advances in age knowing fully well of the possible catastrophe that would befall her should men refuse to ask for her hands in marriage. The understanding portrayed by this proverb is thus, a woman without her man is nothing. Based on this disparity, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, an Igbo novelist and feminist infer that:

A marriage can be happy or unhappy but it is not an achievement. We condition girls to aspire to marriage and we do not condition boys to aspire to marriage, and so there is already a terrible imbalance at the start. The girls will grow up to be women obsessed with

marriage. The boys will grow up to be men who are not obsessed with marriage. The women marry those men. The relationship is automatically uneven because the institution matters more to one than the other. Is it any wonder that in so many marriages, women sacrifice more, at a loss to themselves, because they have to constantly maintain an uneven exchange? One consequence of this imbalance is the very shabby and very familiar phenomenon of two women publicly fighting over a man, while the man remains silent (Adichie 2015).

6) *So akwukwo nri ka nwanyi ga-ere, o ma nre nsi egbe*

(A woman can only sell vegetables, she cannot sell gunpowder.)

This proverb reminds women and further admonishes them of their place in Igbo society. Traditional Igbo society expects a woman to occupy herself with domestic chores that are symbolized by selling garden eggs and not in acts of bravery as symbolized by the gunpowder. A man can engage himself in any sort of trade or activity but a woman is expected to know her limit and what she is expected to do and not do in Igbo society. A participant response emphasizes on this women segregation in Igbo society starting from denying women access to inheritance to non-participation in most cultural activities of the society:

For instance in terms of inheritance, female child, in some certain Igbo culture is not allowed to inherit the father's property; it has to go to the male child, in the absence of a male child, it goes to the uncles; that places value on male child as opposed to the female child. Also in the issues of certain cultural practices like masquerade festival, why are women not given equal right to partake in this festival like their male counterparts? Some women would like to partake but because of the provisions of the culture, they will have to sit behind and watch the guys have fun (Respondent No 2, October 20, 16).

According to Oha (1998:87), "the fact that these stereotypes have been encoded in a form of communication usually respected and highly valued in Igbo culture suggests the degree rhetoric in the society has been masculinized." Liberal feminists equally point to the way cultural homogeneity unfairly limits women's options (Cudd 2006: 234).

Theme 5.2 presents proverbs that maintain women suppression in Igbo society. These sample proverbs serve as evident of gender and stratification in Igbo society. In sociological perspective, gender and stratification questions how well we can understand gender division

and roles in modern society? The answer to this question indicates that inequality of gender in the society is rooted in patriarchy. The first participant of the study noted that:

There is a connection between patriarchy and use of sexist proverbs in my culture because men have always seen themselves as being superior to women. So they tend to oppress women even in a relationship or in a family setting, there are something that a man will do as man of the house and they are pardonable but if it's a woman that does that, it is taken to be an abomination, let's take for an example, a married man can have a girlfriend or impregnate a girl, it will not be seen as a taboo but if it's a woman that does that, it's an atrocity that cannot be pardoned So this leads to oppression and inequality (Respondent No 1, October 18, 16).

This supports the assertion that in Igbo African society, also similar to many other African societies, men have the ultimate control over the activities and lives of women. In other words, it is a man-made society. Men are the dominant sex, they control their homes and according to Sakalli (2001:601) “the husband is culturally accepted as the ruler of the family and is regarded as the formal authority to whom the wife and children must ultimately respond”. A participant of the study notes that:

Sexist proverbs have the tendencies of painting an image of the female folk as always the second best to the male child. Within Igbo society, women are left at the mercy of men. In a family that is headed by a woman, for instance, where a woman is the breadwinner; she is scorned, and the man in that family is looked down upon by the rest of the community because he is seen not to be taken the roles of a man in the family, he is not being manned enough (Respondent No 2, October 20, 16).

This reality indicates how much gender stereotype has been embedded in Igbo culture. In the cases where women are breadwinners in the family, the situation becomes so intense and unbearable not because of their contribution in providing for the family but the pressure from their husbands and society that are in constant exercise of power to remind them of their place as women irrespective of their contributions. In Igbo patriarchal culture, it is believed that a reasonable and responsible man cannot depend on a woman for his livelihood. This supports the key literature review that the contribution of women in the family and the bigger society has been undermined by sexist proverbs. Where love and trust ought to be the pillar of marriage, sexist proverbs encourage suspicion and careless attitude towards women. To this Balogun

(2010:31) concludes that “proverbial oppression fosters women’s dependence, which continues to frustrate the efforts of empowering women.

This situation poses little or no wonder why the president of Nigeria in a recent interview says that his wife belongs to his kitchen and the other room (Brody 2007:11). Just like any other property that could be in a home, men believes that paying a bride price as a traditional marriage ceremony is equal to acquiring a woman who is one of his properties at his disposals. And from the perspectives of sexist proverbs, this property cannot compete with the owner. A participant of the study understands the derogatory impact of sexist Igbo proverbs as she states that:

Women being referred to as being inferior are a clear evidence of this (misogyny and sexism), in situations when the input of women are excluded from decision making as well, name calling is also an evidence of this (Respondent No 5, October 30, 16).

A formal meeting in a traditional Igbo society is organized and held by men and even when women are invited to such gathering, they are expected to be listeners and should speak only when specifically given the right. It is also of utmost importance to note that sexist Igbo proverbs use name calling to reprimand women. An Igbo woman would typically be called an *ashawo* (prostitute) and devil incarnate in order to keep her at a perplexity. It is also revealing that the participant’s response did not just halt sexist proverbs to only Igbo society. This supports the liberal feminist view that patriarchy and sexism are prevalent in almost all cultures and societies with men having absolute control over discourse in the society. She asserts that sexism is without boundary and can be referred back to the time of creation according to the Christian bible:

I think sexism not just in Igbo culture, has to do right from the beginning, right from when the world was created (in the bible), because right from the beginning male are regarded as being more superior, I think it originates from then, because men are given more priorities compare to woman. Even in the society, maybe when you want to be active in politics or something like that, women are not regarded as being competent to occupy a political position or something like that (Respondent No 1, October 18, 16).

The actual process that led to this rampant phenomenon of women abuse reaches far back antiquities and not easy to trace. Daly (1986:13) supports that “the most dangerous

consequence of patriarchal attempts to justify the domination of women according to feminists, has been the falsification of the experience of God, who has been symbolized as a patriarch in heaven, ruling through 'his' mysterious will". Patriarchy as a system of oppression recognizes the potential power of women and actual power of men. Its purpose is to destroy women's consciousness about their potential power which derives from the necessity of society to reproduce itself (Eisenstein 1989:14-15). Sexist Igbo proverbs typically depict a picture that a woman is nothing on her own, sequel to this, she is in a constant need for a man to guide and direct her for her own good. There is a need to question and interrogate the cultural settings and arrangements that have relegated women to non-rational beings.

Why would a woman be seen as incomplete without a man? Baehr (2003:13) writing on liberal feminism clarifies that "patriarchal paternalistic laws restrict women's options on the grounds that such limits are in women's interest." The mode of socialization for men and women rooted in the patriarchal system has equally given rise to the oppression of women. A respondent notes that; "The oppression of women starts in the home. In our homes today we treat girls differently, and we treat boys as if they are kings" (Respondent No 5, October 30, 16).

The gender norms and stereotypes obtainable in most societies are strongly rooted not just in capitalist market relations but the cultural domination of man over a woman (patriarchy). These sexist proverbs have brought about sex roles and sex-role stereotyping. The possible practical implications of these proverbs under this theme have equally contributed to the complicity of women. The complicity of women in oppressive society infers that women do not only accept their oppressive immediate condition as the status quo, but also compel their fellow women into accepting it as the norm. On this, one of the participants states that:

Women obviously are seen as lesser being than men, within proverbs, women are subjugated and sidelined, in the sense that we (women) always know even with those proverbs that we are not to compete or equal with men within the society and any woman that does that will firstly be scorned by other women
(Respondent No 3, October 22, 16).

Achebe's things fall apart (1958) painted a picture of women who believe and accept that they constantly need to be beaten and corrected by their husbands whom they also refer to as 'My lord', meaning the one who owns me. This is further stretched to situations when women feel unloved and uncared for because their husbands refuse to scold and beat them for corrective purposes. In Igbo society, as portrayed by these proverbs, men believe that women are

irrational. This gives rise to the situation whereby women and children are ranked the same not just in the level of physical capabilities but also with rational reasoning, with male children even occupying a higher echelon of importance more than women because they would grow one day to become a proper man.

The proverb, '*nwanyi kalia onye muru, a-juba onye ga-aruru*' (at a certain age, a woman would out-grow the question of whom the parents are and faces that question of who the husband is), pushes women never to relax in the comfort of their parent's house (or more still their own house) but to strive and get her own husband. Augustine on the topic of Eve's creation, marriage and sexuality state that "The union of male and female should be procreation. A woman's role and only purpose are to help a man in the work of procreation otherwise in all other matters a male friend is a more efficient helper than a woman" (Muthei 1999:109). Augustine believes that man alone has the image of God and a woman can only acquire this through marriage and sequel to this, women are unsettled when unmarried. To find the fullness of life, women need to marry thus have husbands and children (Clark 1983:28).

From an Igbo cultural perspective, it is only when a woman enters a man's house under the union of marriage would she be accorded respect by the society. This has also provided some situation where women go the extra mile, even against their wish to throw themselves on men, who would always oppress them. On this, liberal feminists hold that "the social arrangements of personal life should not only be freely chosen but should be characterized by fairness or justice" (Baehr 2003:13). Even without a man, a woman is and supposed to be herself and happy. The biological distinction between men and women should not lead to inequality and stereotypes but a mutual adaptation of both. This is so because if gender roles still bring about gender inequalities, it is so because the society is still on the social order where men are dominant. There is a need to combat this form of oppression on women and advocate for equal opportunities and rights for all.

5.3 RIDICULE ON WOMEN'S SEX ORGAN AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION

"A woman with big buttock does not know the amount of evil the gods have done to her until there is a stampede in the market"

Gender, from the review of literature of this research, is understood as a social construct while sex entails the biological component of a human person. It is the division of society into biological, occupational and social roles and such roles include reproduction, production, community management, politics, and participation in other domestic and civic aspects of life

(Aina 2006, 1). Through gender roles and stereotypes, the sex organ of a woman which is a biological makeup is seen as weakness by men in Igbo society and “this difference, in the masculine/patriarchal symbolic, suggests inferiority since the vagina is considered powerless” (Oha 1998:92). The sample sexist proverbs under this theme indicate the loss women suffer because they do not possess a penis. For a liberal feminist, restrictions on women are based on gender role stereotype and sex discrimination rooted in patriarchy society. The following proverbs (7-11) identify the perception of female physiognomy by Igbo men. These proverbs typically ridicule the female sex organ. At this juncture, I draw the attention of the reader to some overt reference to the genital organ.

7) *“Anaghi atu ikpu ukwu egwu maka na o bughi ya gaara onwe ya.*

(There is no need to be scared of the wide vagina because it cannot sex itself.)

Here, the vagina is portrayed as a vulnerable organ. This also infers that the vagina (woman) is not just vulnerable but also depends on penis (man). The understanding of this dependence also suggests her ownership by the man. When this proverb is used, it points to the fact that irrespective of how gorgeous or outstanding a woman is, she still needs a man for fulfillment.

8) *Otu ma uma egbu amuma, ogaghi eme ka mmiri zoo.*

(The vagina is feigning in vain as lightning, it will not bring rain) (Mmadike 2014:100).

Proverb 8 indicates a disregard on someone who issues a threat but never carries it out. Here also, a consideration is given to the image of the vagina and lightening, which naturally entails rainfall. “Thus, lightning is compared to the reddish part of the vagina which never signals rainfall” (Mmadike 2014:100). The vagina is used here as a metaphor for someone who would issue an empty threat and never carries it out.

9) *“Nwanyị buru ohu, o si raba ya, na ohu bu ohu ya, ma mgbe o puta okwu, achoba onye nwe ohu,*

(A woman would ask to be sexed, that the vagina is her own, but when it causes trouble, the (real) owner (of the vagina) would be looked for)

In proverb 9, a woman, the sexual object is disempowered. Women, according to this proverb are believed to lack the capacity to think and care for themselves, because of this, someone, a man, has to direct and save her from destroying herself. This proverb equally portrays a

stereotypical understanding of women as being irresponsible even with issues concerning their welfare. A typical Igbo man does not regard an advice from a woman with the notion that women are milky in their reasoning and cannot produce any substantive rational decision.

10) *“Nwa-agboghọ Ugwuta si nne ya na otu nwoke ka ya na-agara onwe ya, owee tuburu ya raa. Nne ya wee si ya gaa rakwuru. O gaa, a rachie ya ozo.*

(An Ugwuta girl told her mother that as she was going on her way, a man came and threw her down and sexed (raped) her. Her mother told her to go and retaliate. She went, and was sexed (raped) again) (Oha 1998:93).

This proverb depicts the sexual vulnerability of a woman which she fails to note to her own detriment because of her incapacitated rationality. “The narrative of woman’s sexual difference by the male speaker in proverb #10 indicates a callous construction of woman’s subjective position and her inferiorization” (Oha 1998:93). Within this social construct, men want to maintain their perceived mental incapacitation of women. The sample proverb portrays infantile reasoning both from mother and daughter. The difference in the biological component of a woman is seen as inferiority by men in a patriarchal Igbo society. From all indications, in Igbo patriarchal society, sex entails women’s defeat.

11) *Nwanyi choo ka o hụchaa ebe e si ara ya, isi a akpo ya n’ala.*

(When a woman strives to see the entire aperture through which she is sexed, her head will hit the ground) (Mmadike 2014:101).

This proverb admonishes women from being curious about knowing everything that goes on during sexual intercourse with men. The proverb infers that such curiosity would land them into trouble. The expectation from this proverb is that women should not seek to know much if not, a bizarre consequence would accompany such striving.

In the sexual vulnerability depiction of women in these proverb samples 1.2, this study understands that sex, which is referred to as the anatomy and physiognomy of male and female body has thus acquired sex role and stereotype. Miller (1982:9) further indicates that ‘the conception of stereotyping also involved describing how people think about others and why they do so’. Sex differentiation and sex role stereotypes date back to ancient times as seen in the work of Aristotle quoted by Miller stating that:

A woman is more compassionate than man and has a great propensity to tears. She is also, more envious, more querulous, more slanderous and more contentious. Further still, the female is more dispirited, more despondent, more impudent and more given to falsehood than the male. The man is more disposed to give assistance to danger and is more courageous than the female (Miller 1982: 189).

Throughout history, the difference between men and women has always been based on some stereotypes and shared beliefs. Some demeaning attributes on women by men is based on their biological sex difference. “The fundamental impression given by some of these proverbs is that the nature of women distinctly differs from that of men” (Balogun 2010:30). The perception of sex and sex differentiation leaves women at the mercy of men since the possession of a penis signifies a higher position in Igbo society. In Igbo patriarchal society, sex entails women’s defeat and the vagina is synonymous with irrationality and dependence.

From the proverb #10, what is the rationale behind the action of a young lady that was raped and was advised to revenge by her mother and consequently was raped again? This depicts a picture of the irrationality of women and also the vulnerability of the vagina. The advice from her mother as depicted in the proverb is not an accident; it showed shared foolishness both on the side of the mother and the daughter. This proverb was carefully constructed by men in Igbo land to back up their claim that women are irrational. The construction surrounding this stereotype on women sexual organ has equally led to gender discrimination. Ogundinpe (1994:234) writing on feminist critique to sexism avows that “feminism is not penis envy or gender envy i.e. wanting to be like a man. It is also not oppositional to men; It argues rather that a woman's body is her inherent property, not to be owned, used, and dumped by men”.

Sex has moved from a biological property to gender which is a socially constructed product. This supports social constructionism theory that taken-for-granted realities are cultivated from interactions between and among social agents (Berger & Luckmann 1966:8). Women have been suppressed to a secondary position in Igbo society and consequently, they are victims of men’s construction and use of language. One of the respondents of the study indicates that:

They (men) use these sexist proverbs to manipulate or emotionally abuse women and end up having them psychologically abused. Because our minds (women) will consistently be thinking of those words that it ends up making us feel worthless and belittled (Respondent No 1, October 18, 16).

Leith (1987:42) argues that “Groups who occupy a subordinate or oppressed position in society invariably suffer from linguistic disparagement in the hands of other groups that possess power.” Arguing from the functionalist theories of the society, the understanding of a particular aspect of the society must not be in isolation of the entire system. As a result, the oppressive nature of these sexist proverbs must be understood in the wider range of patriarchal Igbo society. As liberal feminists would have it that patriarchy defines women’s lives by placing them in ‘women acceptable roles’ that are in line with feminine ideals’ (Mandell (1995:6). Another respondent added that:

The negative impact is of these proverbs are huge but men do not really take it seriously because being a patriarchal society does favor men so they do not consider the ordeals women are passing through in sexist proverbs. But if such proverbs are used on men they will quickly fight it (Respondent No 5, October 30, 16).

The application and understanding of gender in relation to these proverbs is a crucial sequel to the fact that in the social analysis it reveals the suppression of women. This supports the review of the literature that the socio-cultural institutions that define gender role and expectation thus brought about gender inequality that typically frustrates one gender (women especially), in the hands of the other. These sexist proverbs constitute the precarious livelihood of women that liberal feminists oppose. In their advocacy of women emancipation, liberal feminists do not suggest that men and women are the same; rather, for them, gender equality presupposes an equal representation of both men and women in all spheres of life in the society without giving preference to any. Although the vagina and the penis are biologically different, this does not suggest supremacy on the side of one against the other. Equality of both genders would ensure that men would not see the women’s biological makeup as a weakness but rather as a reality of its own. One of the respondents reacted to this stating that “application of those sexist proverbs in our present age gives men the notion that women are always unintelligent and weaker species”.

Bryson says that “there is certainly no inherent or inevitable conflict of interest between men and women” (1999:196). The disparity existing between men and women is a product of socialization in the society and subsequently call for change. The process of socialization in a given culture paves way for the language acquisition because culture provides the norms of the use of language. Most cultures have taken a biased approach and understanding of women

because they were enacted by men. Women have the right to a choice and must not be forced to embrace any decision contrary to their wish because of sex.

5.4 WOMEN AS UNRELIABLE AND UNFAITHFUL

Sexist proverbs have brought about the denial of the complementary contribution of women at homes and the wider society. Since women have been labeled unfaithful and dubious, any positive contribution they render to the society is sidelined and denied. The following proverbs present women as unfaithful beings. It is paramount to understand that men subjugate women to this life of unfaithfulness in order to have a perpetual control over them and save them from themselves. The proverbs under this category admonish men never to trust a woman if not, they would be ruined.

12) Umu nwanyi na-cho so uru ha ga erite na ihe obula

(Women like to enjoy themselves but not ready to pay for the indulgence.)

This proverb paints a picture of women as cheats. For the fact that women are presented as always in search and in demand of what would only be beneficial to them without them returning similar favors showcases them as an ingrate and greedy ones. This proverb seeks to create awareness among men to be careful especially with wasting their resources on women. For a woman to pay for the indulgence as stated in this proverbs entails being loyal to man's wish after he might have spent some money on her.

13) E nyegodu onye ohi ulo-ukwu, o ma nkwusi ya izu-ohi, enyegodu nwanyi na-agba n'ezi ihe niile, o gaghi egbochi igba n'ezi.

(Give a mansion to a thief that does not deter him from stealing; give a promiscuous wife all you have in a beautiful house that does not preclude her from selling herself cheaply to a paramour) (Balogun 2010:26).

This proverb presents women as unpredictable and non-trustworthy with regards to staying faithful in marriage and sexual issues. The proverb suggests that promiscuity among women is not necessarily due to lack or hunger but it is part of their nature just to cheat. This kind of proverb has left men to be suspicious of their wives, especially exquisite ones. It equally paints a picture of women as insatiable. In Igbo cultural setting, polygamy is allowed but polyandry is treated with disdain. A woman is expected, according to Igbo culture, to stick to one man no matter what the man does to her while the man does as he will without any qualms. The issue

of unfaithfulness in marriage and relation never apply to men; reason being that men are polygamous in nature while women are expected to be faithful and loyal to their men. Balogun (2010:26) writing on this proverb supports that “the proverb is an expression of distrust and a deterministic conception of the woman.”

14) Nwanyi bu osisi obogwu na ewekoro ohere niile.

(Women are climber plants that overrun any available space) (Balogun 2010:27).

A figurative expression is invoked here. It puts the nature of a woman to that of a plant with a fixed root but has its branches in other places. This proverb equally indicates that women are not trustworthy; the implication of this is that women hook up with the best suitor in a connubial relationship. Balogun asserts that this proverb “exclusively ascribes a psychological trait to women without compelling evidence for it” (2010:27).

15) Ma nwanyi eji umuaka ma ojighi, ogbochighiya igbu di ya.

(Whether a woman has a child or not for her husband, it does not prevent her from killing him)

This proverb is used as a warning to men that they should not gain false security from the fact that their wives have borne children for them, that bond may not be as strong as the husbands might think. This proverb which is based on distrust for women encourages men to always be on the alert against the tricks of women. In this proverb, women are seen as constantly plotting evil on men’s dedication to success. This proverb implies that in the absence of a woman, absolute peace is known. Understanding of this proverb also entails that “even though women may provide advice to men, their advice is thought to lead men to hell; seeking advice from women in times of difficulty is tantamount to adding fuel to an already burning fire so as to extinguish it” (Okin 1989:89). The patriarchal Igbo society through these proverbs infers that women are always preoccupied with the intentions of killing even their loved ones. According to the proverb sample, women are synonymous with evil and for one to be called a woman portrays this reality. The Igbo society discloses this by comparing women to a witch.

16) Nwanyi gwa diya onye ojuru, ogaghi agwa ya onye okwetalu

(A woman would only tell her husband of the man she reproached and not the one she accepts.)

Women through this proverb are portrayed as schemers and cheats. Men are entreated in this proverb to always bear in mind that their women are seeing another man no matter how faithful she pretends to be. The extreme version of this proverb is that he who has a beautiful wife is in a similar situation with a farmer that grows corn by the roadside because every passerby will have a taste of it.

Proverbs in section 1.3 do not just serve to remind men of the danger that women pose but also to conscientize women that they are evil. It is crucial to understand that sexist proverb serve a dual purpose, one is to put men on the alert against the schemes and plots of women and the second is to remind women of whom they are. Through this, a woman needs not to be reminded of her devilishness should she seek to exonerate herself from any situation against her wish.

These proverbs aim to limit women and our capability to express ourselves: because of this, a woman would only want to express herself in the confine that the society has set; we are not allowed to go beyond those confines, even when trying to pursue their careers or help the family or even getting married. Every aspect of our lives is to some extent, actually, to a greater extent influenced by these sexist proverbs and the way Igbo society has viewed women's place in the society or has stipulated that women should behave in the society (Respondent No 3, October 22, 16)

These proverbs were constructed with strong language to keep women at the perpetual corner of perplexity. "The proverbs picture women as people of unpredictable character, with a natural propensity to be involved in multiple affairs at the same time" (Daramola 2007:127). The reality surrounding the use of these sexist proverbs is that women use them often on themselves since they have internalized it as the reality of who they are. With the acceptance of this reality, proverbs like; (*anyi bu umu nwanyi di njo*; meaning that; we, women are evil) are subsequently used by women in admonishing each other. This is in support of Monye's (1990:17) assertion that, "when people use proverbs there is always some relationship between two situations being compared: the proverb statement and its referent in the social context." The implications of a sexist proverb is not limited to the world of semantics, it has a correlation to the practical lives of women in the society. When a woman is aware of proverb #15 that whether or not she has a child for her husband, it does not stop her from killing him; she would never confront her husband in whatsoever situation in the family, if not it would be seen as evidence or plot to

murder her man. The second participant of the study in an undertone of suppression echoes her view to this effect stating that:

A woman is supposed to go by the words of her husband because over and over, there are so many proverbs that have told you, even if not saying it specifically that woman should be under a man but has hinted and implied that a woman is under a man and also in some instances this ties the aspiration of a woman. Most Igbo culture regards marriage as a way a man acquires a woman. when a man gets married to a woman, he has, in fact, acquired this woman, some would say she is your property; so as your property, you do with it as you wish and your property does not have any influence on you because you own it. In some ways, this is how women are regarded not only by their husbands but themselves. Women understand that as they are now married, their husband's wish is their wish. In some cases, they (women) are not allowed to diverge from the stipulations of their husbands and start their own thing. Even in the Igbo culture, because of proverbs, people see a home where a woman is sort of independent and the man does not care about this as abnormal, the society frowns at the man because there are a lot of proverbs that have implied that a man is supposed to guide and cage a woman so the lady is not supposed to be on her own. A woman in this situation would also be reprimanded that she is not acting as someone's wife (Respondent No 2, October 20, 16).

This response aligns with the theoretical framework on social constructivism stating that culture is a system of significant symbols and that those symbols are a guide to human behavior Jones (2003:53). Culture serves as the social interpersonal basis that influences a great deal of human experience. And using the example of proverbs, one would argue in line with Jones (2003:53) that culture is the source rather than the result of human interactions. The actions and interaction of men and women have to be understood in the bigger picture of cultural provisions. For a typical Igbo man also supported in the sexist proverb, it is cultural for one to constantly keep his woman in check for the sake of the woman in question. "The proverbs disclose the fact that the society holds a view that women are masterminds of wicked instigation; women cause men to rush to perform tasks without the fear of danger" (Mmadike 2014:100). This entails that men undergo physical and psychological risks in response to women's evil stipulations.

Notably, the practical implications of sexist proverbs play a crucial role in the burial/mourning process of a deceased man. The tough widowhood ritual imposed on Igbo women is a consequence of most proverbs that state that women are constantly plotting to kill their husbands. Thus, the relationship between a man and a woman is affected in Igbo society sequel to the understanding of women provided by these proverbs. Oha states that “the inferiorization of women in Igbo proverbs affects both the use of proverbs in the culture and male-female relationship in Igboland” (1998:96). Love in a family is then replaced by suspicion and agitation leaving women always in fears. This equally supports the findings of the feminist which says that women have been marginalized and devalued through different media and full social participation and public life have been denied them.

Okin (1989:89) supports this view by stating that “that autonomy deficits like these are due to the ‘gender system’ or the patriarchal nature of inherited traditions and institutions, and that the women's movement should work to identify and remedy them.” When there is a change in the mentality of how men perceive women, it would equally grant them freedom of in mind starting from the family setting. One has to understand as the 4th respondent of the study articulates that the painting of women in sexist proverbs might have been prompted by the reality of the past as she articulates that:

This is because of the provisions of the past when women were not giving any opportunity to showcase their worth in the society because they were made to hide under the provisions and protections of their husbands. Now men have taken the advantage of this and have seen women as their property that they can define as they please (Respondent No 4, October 24, 16).

Liberal feminist literary criticism is one branch of interdisciplinary inquiry which takes gender as a fundamental organizing category of experience. Green & Kahn (1985:1) hold that this inquiry holds two related premises about gender. “One is that the inequality of the sexes is neither a biological given nor a divine mandate, but a culture constructs, and therefore a proper subject of study for any humanistic discipline. The second is that the male perspective, assumed to be ‘universal’ has dominated fields of knowledge, shaping their paradigms and methods” (Green & Kahn (1985:1).

A woman is expected within the Igbo patriarchal culture to always be submissive to her husband and endure whatever treatment she receives from him. Women’s adherence to this inhuman treatment does not save them from linguistic disparagement through proverbs. A

typical Igbo woman is so concerned with maintaining her good name that she sacrifices her happiness and dignity. Gaidzanwa (1985:31) is of the opinion that:

Women who are idealized may be those who are obedient to their husbands even if the husband is wrong and unreasonable. They are women who do not complain when they are badly treated. They patiently wait for their husbands to recognize their virtue and they may actually shield their husbands from the consequences of unreasonable or cruel behavior. It is also noteworthy that it is the "ideal" wives who are most brutalized and maltreated without cause. An ideal wife is judged in terms of how she behaves towards her husband and how she looks after him. She is the one who is totally committed to serving the interests of her husband even at the risk of martyring or sacrificing her own interest.

Women have to succumb to this humiliation and neglect in order to avoid name calling and the abuse of sexist proverbs. The effect of sexist proverbs on womanhood does not end with semantics as suggested by some writers; rather it has a practical consequence of the perception and contribution of womanhood in the society. Most women in Igbo society endure this trauma of abuse because they are the ideal wives committed to their husbands. "This, in turn, implies that the society views women as demanding men's control in order for the society to enjoy a genuine, healthy and normal communal life" (Mmadike 2014:100).

5.5 SUMMATION

This chapter has given a critical analysis and interrogation of the portrayal of womanhood in sexist Igbo proverbs. Themes that formed the analysis unit for the study are based on some stereotypical depiction of womanhood in the sexist proverb that is rooted in patriarchal Igbo society. Women are portrayed as the weaker sex and these portrayals form the daily approach women receive in Igbo culture not just from men but equally from fellow women. This situation is prompted by the fact that, as one of the respondents stated that sexist proverbs have been in the system for a long time and the society has begun to internalize it as the norm. The themes for this analysis equally answer the key research questions on why and how women are portrayed in Igbo proverbs. The finding of the research follows from the liberal feminist framework which states that Proverbs in patriarchal Igbo society are made and used by men thereby giving women no opportunity of defending themselves. Women are portrayed in some negative depiction sequel to the fact that proverbs are made and used by men who see themselves at the echelon of wisdom and authority in the society while women are occupying the lesser position.

It is of utmost important to note that women made little or no contribution in Igbo culture not because they are indifferent towards this effect but because they have been denied the opportunity to do so. From the sample proverbs, men have regarded women as inferior both intellectually and/or otherwise and this devaluation of women is also supported by Aristotle as quoted by Ruthven (1984: 12) that:

Women did not grow beards or go bald any more than children did. Therefore they were physically not fully adult. Neither was their 'deliberative faculty' of reason worthy of being considered adult, it was without authority. For although there may be exceptions to the law of nature, the male is by nature fitted for command than the female, just as the elder and full grown is superior to the younger and more immature.

The above assertion of Aristotle on womanhood many years ago can still be used to determine the portrayal of women in the contemporary Igbo society. Have women's situation improved with much respect or are they still the irrational being constantly in need of men's guidance in Igbo society? The answer to this question is evident in the proverbial resources of Igbo people. From the findings of this study, women are still ranked among children in Igbo society almost in all aspects of life. It is evident that men are the consumers of proverbs in Igbo culture since they occupy an important position both in the family and social gathering.

The central message evident in all sexist proverbs is that one cannot trust women both in decision making and social responsibility since they do not share equal rationality with men. A participant notes using a sample sexist proverb"

(Nkita nwanyi zuru n'eri akwa), A dog trained by a woman eats egg. In Igbo culture, for a dog to eat eggs is something bad, sequel to this, they use this proverb to demonstrate women's inability to handle things on their own because whatever a woman does must have some malfunction in it and it is only proper for a man to constantly supervise her in order to guarantee a reasonable result (respondent No 4 October 24, 16).

A sample proverb like this has demoralized the notable contribution of women in the family and society at large. The sexist proverb proposes suspicion and careless attitude towards the undertakings of women in order to keep them belittled. It is important to note that today, most Igbo women are empowered through education, they earn money and complement their husband but these notwithstanding, these women are still under the powerful shackles of abusive proverb since a typical Igbo man is so rooted in his culture. Mmadike (2014:103) supports that "despite the fact that women, especially the educated ones, feel repulsive about

the use of sexist proverbs, they have not put forward any proposal for changing the provocative words with gender neutral ones”. The reason for this silence towards sexist proverbs from elite women is because proverbs are still seen as ‘fixed and frozen expressions’ that have outlived their users for many generations. In the understanding of Balogun (2010:31), “African proverbs, in particular, have been viewed as sacred texts that must remain unchanged.”

CHAPTER SIX: DEPICTION OF WOMEN IN IGBO PROVERBS: FURTHER ILLUSTRATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter of the research pays further attention to the depiction of women in sexist Igbo proverbs. Balogun (2010) has called into question, the very essence of the use of oppressive proverbs against women in Yoruba culture. She acknowledges that such proverbs were authored by men as a means of perpetuating their hegemony over the female. She believes that these proverbs have a massive effect on women especially with issues that concern their happiness and well-being. Although part of this has formed the basis of the previous chapter of this study, but in this chapter, a critical exposition is made with regards to sexist proverbs with a particular reference to women and their perception of abusive proverbs.

The female gender is being regarded as objects rather than the subject of existence in the negative Igbo proverbs. Since proverbs which are used to drive salient points in human interactions are taken as an expression of folk wisdom truth and interjections, this chapter further exposes the effect of the sexist proverbs on women and calls for reorientation towards changing this archetypical and stereotypical depiction of women. This corresponds with the finding of interpretivist paradigm stating that facts are constantly prone to change and depend on context and people's interpretation of it (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al 2014:29). It could have been the case that sexist proverb, (proverbs in general) were once regarded and accepted as fact especially with issues that concern women due to some complicity, but this should not continue to form their worldview in the contemporary society.

It is important to note that with regards to misogynistic proverbs, the participants of this study expressed their frustrations with some sample proverbs stating that they are portraying some twisted reality about women. Igbo proverb endorses the dichotomy between male and female and further stipulates this as the norm of the society. But although some proverbs recognize the co-existence of men and women in the society, Olasupo et al (2012:87) further avow that these proverbs underlie the fact that the relationship between male and female should be founded on equality. Sexist proverbs expose the part of human nature that nurtures the tendency to dominate especially among the men in patriarchal society. At this incident, the oppressor and the oppressed now seek to event proverbs to back up their ideology.

6.2 PROVERBS, WOMEN, AND LEADERSHIP IN IGBO SOCIETY

(O bu nwoke na achikota ezi na ulo o bughị nwanyị)

A male and not a female administers a household

(Ochichi nwanyị na-eme ka mmīrī Na agbago elu)

The leadership of a woman makes the water flow upward

All of these proverbs are phrased to reflect the society's belief that men and women assume different roles, which have a great affinity with public and domestic spheres, respectively. The pattern of discourse in these Igbo proverbs is linked to the society stereotypical beliefs that women are by nature inferior to men and consequently, should not be allowed any leadership role. These proverbs and many others deny that women possess intellectuality, rigorousness, competence and rationality, which one needs to possess in order to take part in the challenging social, political and economic affairs of the society (Hussein 2009:158). In Igbo traditional society, as in many others, there is power in gender exercised by the traditional ruling elites. This is evident in day to day interaction of man and woman in the society. "But most men and women do not know this because while the one exercised by men is temporal that of the women is spiritual and hence erroneously held the view that women had no power of their own, or if they had at all, it was inferior to those of men" (Olasupo et al 2012:87). This mindset equally embedded in the sexist proverbs has crippled the notable contributions of women in the society. Onyejekwe (2006:105) affirms thus:

An Igbo woman enjoys good respect and recognition from the men, but whatever her achievement, the man still cherishes his position as head and lord. The woman is only complete and secure when she submits to the man. Marriage is highly recommended for every female. The men, particularly those who still perceive women as objects and of no value, who continue to see them as prostitutes when they are exercising their natural function or role, should over this century old ideology and begin to see the woman as individuals in their own right

Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* has given an insight into the typical Igbo African society highlighting the power relationship between male and female. Okonkwo the central character of the play is afraid of being seen weak which he associated with womanhood. For him, a man should be harsh and dominating on his women while women are expected to be soft and under their man. From this power disparity, wife beating is very common in Umuofia town. An incident occurred when Okonkwo beat one of his wives, Ojiugo for coming late to make his meal. He was punished not for beating his wife, but for beating her during the week of

peace. From the novel, one would argue that women are the missing middle in Igbo culture and this still forms the reality in the contemporary Igbo society. The proverb, ‘one cannot run a race like a man and end it like a woman’ supports the power imbalance in Igbo society. From *Things Fall Apart*, "It was clear from the way the crowd stood or sat that the ceremony was for men. There were many women, but they looked on from the fringe like outsiders." (87). Women have no say in major events; they carry out their duties as instructed by their men as if they are slaves. This indicates that the use of proverbs, which is meant to be a public speech is strictly for men since women have no place even in the village gathering.

Women are seen as weak even to manage the household not to talk of taking up a leadership position in the society. Just consider our Nigeria Association here in Pietermaritzburg, out of the entire executive members; I am the only woman that summed up the courage to stand for a post. Initially, I was looked down upon even by my fellow women. They are scared even to speak in the gathering, whenever they come for a meeting, they hide under their men. Somehow, even educated men believe that we women do not have the capacity to take leadership roles and that a woman will always abuse powers given to her because of her weakness.
(Respondent No 3, October 22, 16)

The respondent believes that in Igbo culture, supported by proverbs, a woman's right and leadership starts and ends with domestic chores, especially in the kitchen. Such understanding of women has prompted their abuse and exploitation. "Men are meant to dominate and control influential positions within the society by restricting women to domestic spheres, where they serve mainly as wives and mothers (Oha 1998:87). The second proverb in this section which says that the leadership of a woman makes the water flow upward equally supports the view of respondent 3. The proverb puts women in the same category as children. Mwihia (2005:2) writing on proverbs in Gikuyu society supports that "a woman is placed in the same category as the immature boy; and like in many other African communities, a boy in the Gikuyu community is said to be irresponsible and immature person". Sequel to this, women are given light duties in the society.

Since women are characterized as weak and men as strong in the Igbo society, for a man to be called a woman is the height of insult that he would ever receive. From *Things Fall Apart*, "Agala was not only another name for a woman; it could also mean a man who had taken no title" (13). Title taken is strictly for men in Igbo society and this signifies a typical man worthy

of respect. Women, on the other hand, are expected to serve their men in humility. A woman is compared to a mule serving for transportation, this indicates that through domestication, men exploit women and women are not expected to aspire to anything more.

As a woman in Igbo society, there are certain things you do not need to be told because you already know the status quo. A woman cannot aspire leadership in the gathering of men. Your first rival will be your fellow women who will call you names that you want to be a man by all means. This is equally extended to the religious sphere. We have always known our pastors and priests to be men. A woman priest or pastor will be looked down upon and will not command much respect. Men are the 'Lords' women just hide under their protection. A lot of proverbs equally laid emphasis on this (Respondent No 1, October 18, 16).

This supports the view of Augustine (4 Century) on the topic of Eve's creation, marriage and sexuality, that Man and woman are unequal. Only man is made in the image of God for He only expresses in his body the power and superiority of God. On the contrary, the female body expresses passivity and inferiority (Muthei 1999:108). With regards to leadership, Augustin was against the ordination of women as priest. According to him:

Women are to be excluded from the priesthood because of their being in the state of subjection. They, therefore, cannot exercise the functions of leadership involved in the work of a priest. Even if a woman was to undergo an ordination ceremony, it would be to no avail. Her subjection to the male prevents her from receiving Holy Orders (Muthei 1999:108, Clark 1983: 65)

Women have long been marginalized in traditional leadership in Igbo society. Most rulers in Igbo traditional society are men and in certain exceptions where women are rulers, they are regents. Thus, it has become a tradition for males to dominate every traditional leadership positions. And this is backed up by proverb which states that '*Lolo agaghi arigo n'uche eze*' (the women chief will never aspire to the king's throne). "Among many Nigerian communities were the wrong notions that women were weaker sex and therefore can never be head although they are disciplined and harsh (Faseke, 1998:151). Against some stipulations on women leadership, evidence of women in leadership in the pre-colonial Igbo society is rare. It is either she is in charge of her fellow women or the wife of the ruling king.

Thomas Aquinas (13th Century) who was greatly influenced by the works of Aristotle and Augustine had this to say about women; "A woman is a misbegotten male and nothing

misbegotten or defective should have been in the first production of things; therefore, the woman should not have been made at first production of things” (Muthei 1999:108). Base on this writing, one would argue that the patriarchal/ sexist writing of Aristotle and Augustine has influenced the proverbs in Igbo African culture. A woman’s place is believed to be in the kitchen with the key responsibility of childbearing. On this Martin Luther quoted in Muthei (1999:110) further, states that "For the whole of the female body was created for the purpose of nurturing children ... in everything else, they are inferior and incompetent. They cannot perform the functions of men, teach, and rule...."

6.3 PROVERB, WOMEN, AND RATIONALITY IN IGBO SOCIETY

(Nwanyi amaghi ife mana ona amuta nwa malu ife)

‘A woman does not know anything, but she gives birth to a knowledgeable child’

(Osiri ike ihu nwanyi mala ihe maobu inyinya ibu nwere impi)

‘It is impossible to get a wise woman and a donkey with horns’

(Nwanyi adi ka inyinya, ana enedo ya mgbe niile)

A woman is like a mule, you must always control her directions

(Nwanyi nwere ike ito ogologo mana omaghi ihe)

A woman can grow tall but without wisdom

Although women are making a significant contribution to Igbo society, sexist proverbs ignore this reality and insist that women are children that would never grow up. The above proverbs, directly deny women’s intellectual capacity and wisdom. The proverbs directly assert that women lack the intelligence to the extent that they are compared with a donkey which is believed to be the most stupid of all animals in Igbo society. According to sexist Igbo proverbs, it is a common knowledge that women are unintelligent and lack critical thinking ability. A man who just got married is advised to tolerate whatever that comes from the wife since women are not capable of reason. This brings about the situation in the family where women are ranked as children and treated as such. Igbo proverb says that a woman gives birth to a knowledgeable person yet knows nothing. This proverb is taken further where women are referred to as goats, the most stupid of all animal in Igbo society. The second respondent of the research says that;

“apart from being seen as unfortunate beings, sexist proverbs portray women as feeble minded beings who can be easily deceived and are worthless without a husband” (Respondent No 2, October 20, 16).

According to Igbo proverb, (*nwanyi nwere ike ito ogologo mana omaghi ihe*) a woman can grow tall but without wisdom. Another proverb says that (*nwanyi nwere ike isi nri toro uto mana ogaghi ekwunwu okwu bara uru*) a woman cannot speak intelligently but she can prepare a good dish in the kitchen. These proverbs have equally portrayed women as cowards since they are incapable of rational decision. According to Balogun (2010:27) “within the target society, there exists a long-lived prejudiced representation of women as lacking the attributes of charisma, boldness, and bravery”. And should a woman seek to prove her boldness, she is scorned that she is manlike.

The proverb sample cited in this section indicates that women are seen by the society as lacking intelligence, wisdom, artistic qualities, and critical thinking (Olasupo et al 2012:23). The proverbial understanding here indicates that women are incapable of learning. Through such expressions, the community reflects its ideology that trying to teach women is all worthless and futile (Gaidzanwa 1985:31). This, in turn, persuades parents to teach and educate their male children and not their daughters and hence disempowering them. A woman is presented as one whom a little child can easily manipulate due to her incapacitated rationality.

Considering some of these proverbs, it is difficult for a woman to summon up the courage to make a contribution to the society, especially where men are gathered. A proverb that says that a woman thinks through her anus never provide any room for women’s contribution to the society. No one would listen to you no matter beautiful or vital your opinion sounds; you will always be looked down upon as a woman who stoops while urinating. Consequently, a woman would always keep to herself and allow men pilot the affairs of the society. Coming to families and households, the reason why most men beat up their wives is because they believe that women are like children and they need to be corrected in order to follow (Respondent No 1, October 18, 16).

The analysis of these sexist proverbs indicates that the life of a woman in Igbo society is taken for granted. As Fasold (1990:54) states, “sexist language, and, by extension sexist proverbs, encourage discrimination and can discourage women from pursuing their dreams, hence

disempowering them”.¹² This also aligns with the findings of Oha (1998) which proved that the female gender is put in the position of invisibility in the Igbo society which reflects through language. Relating to this, the fifth respondent of the study states that

The target society lacks awareness about the fact that women can think and participate in the way men can in almost all spheres of life. As such, the society still believes that women are inferior to men and reflects this through its sexist proverbs. Hence, a continuous awareness creation campaign should be launched so that the long-lived masculine-biased gender representation of the society can be undermined, which can, in turn, help introduce the notion of gender equality. This can be done by employing government media (for those who can have the access to media broadcast), on the one hand, and by deploying professional social workers for face-to-face discussion with the community (especially for people who are deprived of the access to media), on the other (Respondent No 5, October 30, 16).

6.4 SUMMATION

As has been indicated in the chapter, language is a powerful tool for establishing and perpetuating social realities. Sequel to this, sexist proverbs occupy an important position in the daily encounters of the people and serve as a powerful tool of socialization. The target proverbs of this research favor the male-biased ideology in Igbo culture. The abuse and relegation of women in Igbo culture draw little or no attention since Igbo society function in some patriarchal ideology. Within the target socio-cultural setting, linguistic violence serves as an instance of power-play enacted by men in their relationships with women. Sexist proverb is generated by the society in order to unfairly portray women and limit their power. According to Oha (1998), the society has long accumulated a significant number of proverbial utterances which pertain to the denigration, exclusion, and exploitation of women. This situation has brought about the socially established reality on how men and women ought to behave in the society.

The linguistic representation of women in all the scenarios addressed in this study is tailored in a way that women are disempowered or subjugated. As indicated above, women are portrayed as powerless and inferior. Such deprivation of power and influence is reflected by proverbs which are meant to deny women's participation in decision-making in every aspect

¹² Women disempowerment refers to the situation whereby women are forced to occupy a disadvantaged and inferior position within a society by depriving them of the power or authority to assume the opposite position (Fasold 1990:22).

of their lives (Balogun 2010:29). This, in turn, confines women to depend on the powerful members of the society, men. This complies with Weber (1946), cited in Cheryl (1999), who states that in traditional social-science approaches, power is often related to our ability to make others do what we want, regardless of their own wishes or interests. It is emphasized that power is taken as influence and control. Apart from power, women of the target society are proverbially pictured as lacking positive and socially valued attributes. This is an apparent indication of women's disempowerment via linguistic violence. Chamberlin (2011) highlights the idea that disempowerment relates to an individual or a group lacking various positive attributes.

The writer has identified such positive qualities to include: self-esteem, having decision-making power, having access to information and resources, having a range of options from which to make choices (not just yes/no, either/or), assertiveness, a feeling that the individual can make a difference (being hopeful), learning to think critically and seeing things differently (e.g., learning to redefine who we are (speaking in our own voice), learning to redefine what we can do, and learning to redefine our relationships to institutionalized power), effecting change in one's life and one's community, etc Chamberlin (2011:56). Igbo women of Eastern Nigeria are denied all these qualities and/or rights. The society has long established a reality which dictates that such attributes inherently belong to men. This is clearly manifested in its sexist proverbs, hence, subjugating women and declaring gender inequality acceptable.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In the light of qualitative research approach, this chapter highlights that proverbs among the Igbos of Eastern Nigeria are not just an embodiment of cultural and moral values, through which meaning is expressed but also an avenue for gender stereotype. Considering the much importance and value attached to proverbs, the chapter has critically interrogated the semantic devaluation of African women by the use of this mainstream African folklore. The findings of this study strongly align with the sparse literature on proverbs expressing the devaluation of women, and the need to address this social-cultural epidemic. In a patriarchal society that privileges men, the use of certain proverbs in Igboland has systematically subjugated women to a position where they are unable to negotiate their identity and assert their rights as women. In this chapter, I shall recapitulate by taking note of the findings and the observations arrived at the cause of this study.

In the context of this study, how then does the popular reflection of proverbs as words of wisdom help us understand the overt subjugation of women it condones? Or should it be the case that women are what they are labeled to be in sexist proverbs? Without mincing words, sexist Igbo proverbs are products of patriarchal Igbo culture that demeans women. The effort and awareness of Igbo women to liberate themselves from the oppressions of sexist proverbs have been pulled to the mud by men's persistent use of such proverbs to maintain and uphold their chauvinism. The views and perceptions of women in Igbo society, their strength and weakness, dignity, and prowess, have been mirrored through bias sexist proverbs.

It is equally vital to note that some negative proverbs that do not directly refer to womanhood are easily associated with women when used. For example *Akwuna ga-ebe akwa nwa na nka*. Meaning that a prostitute will later regret and want a baby at old age. This sample proverb does not point to any sex. It was constructed on a neutral ground. But it is interesting to note that the use of this proverb immediately brings womanhood into the picture. In Igbo society, the word *Akwuna* (prostitute) has been strictly been reversed for women and one needs to not to be told that a woman is being discussed when a prostitute is mentioned. This stereotype leaves one to wonder why this negative term can't be applied to both sexes. A man can be promiscuous but the notion of male prostitutes among the Igbos sounds like a contradiction. The understanding surrounding this scenario which equally aligns with the research findings is that proverbs in

Igbo culture give the expression to male gynophobia. Consequently, sexist proverbs have become a notable instrument for men to checkmate women in Igbo culture, giving them no option for them to defend themselves.

7.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES REVIEWED

The purpose of this study was to critically ascertain the representation of women in Igbo proverbs. As stated in the introduction and background of the study, the paper aims to interrogate how women have been relegated to a subordinate position in the patriarchal Igbo culture of Nigeria. It pays attention to the semantics of female subjugation in Igbo proverbs. The research investigates the cultural understanding and placement of women in the use of proverbs among the Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria. The finding of this study shows that women are relegated to the secondary citizen position in Igbo society as a result of their strict adherence to culture and the much importance attached to proverbs and their meaning in Igbo cultural setting. “These cultural ideologies are perpetuated within patriarchal private spheres such as the household and family, in which women play primary roles as childminders, nurturers, and caretakers” (Mmakola 2013:6). The combination of qualitative content analysis and the in-depth interview has given this research a thick and rich findings and analysis.

In order to complete the analysis a combination of a directed qualitative content analysis, as described by Hsieh and Shannon (2007:115-116), and Neumann’s (2007:330-332) three-stage coding process was used. The result of this method supports the view of liberal feminist that the abuse of women in the society has been normalized and seen as the status-quo. This persistent underrepresentation of women’s status in Igbo African proverbs which has led to their oppression as shown in the research finding calls for attention. The cultural ideology that is supported by Igbo patriarchal society has subjected women to the degrading circle of unintelligent and dependent being. This study, therefore, aims to investigate the overt sexism in Igbo proverbs of Igbo people in Eastern Nigeria. The study equally analyses Igbo sexist proverbs in order to determine the extent to which Igbo society has subjugated women under the umbrella of culture. The study has examined how socio-cultural ideologies communicated through proverbs misogynistically portray women.

Based on social construct theory of the study, relying on abusive proverbs is ‘*argumentum ad verecundiam*’, because it is an appeal to unwarranted authority. Sexist proverbs are fallacious and do not mirror the true reality of women. One of the key difficulties that might hinder women’s effort towards their liberation and reconstruction of sexist Igbo proverbs would be

the fact that Igbo proverbs are viewed as sacred words of wisdom or texts that must remain unchanged. To this Balogun says that “this fact has dire ramifications for the struggle against the proverbial oppression of women” (2010:32). The question that this raises for future research is if proverbs are social construction as discussed in chapter 3, and this construction is part of the cultural artifact and folklore of the people, what then hinders the reconstruction of the negative proverbs against women? Although some Igbo proverbs reflect popular wisdom but this does not outdo the fact that some proverbs equally keeps women at the corner of agony. A notable effort towards the deconstruction of sexist Igbo proverbs understands that proverbs are products of human convention; men’s convention to be precise. Being critical of this reality would foster the reconstruction of these proverbs through proper channels geared towards women’s emancipation.

7.3 LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

As has been stipulated, the finding of this study is limited to obscene and sexist proverbs against women in Igbo culture. By using non-probability sampling, the findings of this study are limited and cannot be generalized to all Igbo proverbs. There are still some proverbs that portray the positive aspect of womanhood. The study understands that there are certain proverbs that convey the positive reality of women but it is paramount to understand that the meaning in those few ones will always be questionable in comparison to these sexist ones. It is fishy to accommodate two opposing views like women as evil and women as a source of life. There is something wrong with the opposing views and this is the primary objective of this study; to gain an adequate understanding to the (mis)representation of women in sexist proverbs and not generalize it to all the proverbs. By understanding the portrayals of women in sexist Igbo proverbs, future research could use this as a basis to determine if men are equally misrepresented in proverbs. For example, one might ask if men are well portrayed in the proverbs of Igbo culture.

Furthermore, this research understands that sexist proverb can still be reconstructed to accommodate both man and woman in the society. There is not inherent fight or struggle between men and women in the society and this is the understanding of liberal feminism. Therefore, proverbs should be used in a referent context and not generalized. This recommendation does not entail the rejection or renunciation of Igbo proverbs but a proper scrutiny of proverbs so as to depict the reality of women. The data of the study emphasizes that women are unreliable and evil and any proverb stating otherwise will be suspiciously considered. The researcher shares the view of Dwight Bolinger (1987), in the introduction to

this paper which states that “sexism in language may be a rusty gun but it is loaded and therefore dangerous.” It is even more dangerous when we forget that it exist in our discourses such as proverbs.

There is equally a need for women to challenge the way they are portrayed in misogynistic language. The complicity of women in sexism entails that they often accept the patriarchal ideology imposed on them and behave accordingly to the extent of articulating the same sexist proverbs imposed on them. Oha (1998) supports that this arguably emanates, at least partially, from lack of well-organized initiatives to empower women. Consequently, concerned bodies including professional social workers ought to work hard to empower women through capacity building schemes such as training which can serve as an avenue to enlighten women so they can boldly uphold the view that all persons, irrespective of sex and gender are an equal member of the society. By this, they may even challenge male-biased gender representations articulated by men.

7.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This is a study that investigates sexism in language paying peculiar attention to Igbo sexist proverbs. The study has shown that Igbo sexist proverbs constitute an aspect of ‘Igbo orature and folk wisdom which help to define and evaluate the female from the perspective of the Igbo patriarchal society’. The proverbs make use of sexual symbols and images that degrade women. The study investigates the literal meaning of these proverbs on the basis of their wordings. It is at this level of meaning that these proverbs acquire their sexist and obscene connotations which are construed as being laden with an impertinent reference that derogate womanhood.

The proverbs were categorized into three themes on the account of their literal meaning for the purpose of analysis. An in-depth interview was also used to give a contemporary approach to the analysis. The subjugation of women in the patriarchal Igbo society forms the basis of the first theme. The proverbs in the second theme manifest how an Igbo man sees the female genital. Proverbs forming the third theme portray women as unreliable and unfaithful. These themes have showcased the constructed meaning of womanhood by men in the patriarchal Igbo society. The study has shown that “Igbo sexist proverbs constitute an aspect of Igbo orature and folk wisdom which help to define and evaluate the female from the perspective of the Igbo patriarchal society” (Mmadike 2014:103). The findings of this study allude to the fact that women in Igbo society are subjugated by sexism in proverbs which were constructed based on some gender stereotypes.

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APPENDICES

Appendix one: Research Interview Guide

The study is about the proverbial oppression of women in Igbo African proverbs.

1. What is your understanding of proverbs in general?
2. What is your understanding of proverbs of Igbo African culture?
3. What is the socio-cultural significant of proverbs in Igbo African culture?
4. Do you think that proverbs are still an important tool for communication and meaning in our 21st-century cultural milieu?
5. In what ways are women portrayed and represented in Igbo proverbs?
6. What is the socio-cultural significance of such portrayals of women in the proverbs in Igbo culture?
7. What counts as the evidence of misogynistic and sexist proverbs in Igbo culture?
8. Why are women subjugated in the sexist Igbo proverbs? Why are they demeaned?
9. What are the consequences of sexist Igbo proverbs on the man-woman relationship in Igbo society?
10. What is the role of patriarchy in the use of sexist proverbs in Igbo African culture?
11. In your opinion, do you think sexist proverbs portray reality about women? Are women what they are labeled to be in the misogynistic Igbo proverbs?
12. As a woman, what is your response to sexist Igbo proverbs? How do you relate to abusive proverbs?
13. What measures do you deem necessary that should be taken in order to check-mate sexist Igbo proverbs against women?
14. Would you opt for reverse sexism in proverb against men, the abolition of proverbs or reconstruction of proverbs in respect to both genders?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!