

Why Men Hit:  
Deconstructing Men's Narratives of Conjugal Violence and the  
Cultural Construction of Masculinity in Nigeria

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Why Men Hit: Deconstructing Men's Narratives of Conjugal Violence and the Cultural Construction of Masculinity in Nigeria**

**Lesley Lambo**

This thesis explores the increasing incidence of conjugal violence in Nigeria, and how the construction of masculinity is one of the challenging dynamics concerning this issue. The cultural construction of masculinity in Nigeria is a result of the complicated intermingling of historical, local, traditional and global processes that are mediated by several factors, including age, ethnicity and status. Gender relations and constructs are complex, which means male dominance and privilege cannot be assumed. Thus, domestic violence serves as a medium through which masculinity is studied.

The results of this research suggests a relationship between the prevailing predominant culture and its social values, the perspectives held of masculinity, and the actions of a certain 'type' of man – the "wife batterer". The data derives from two group interviews with male participants who engage in conjugal violence, and were held in Lagos and Abuja in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The men's narratives expose their world view regarding women, marriage and family, the cultural context through which the men justify their behaviour toward their wives, as well as the cultural norms and values that these men use to construct their notions of masculinity.

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## INTRODUCTION

My research explores the relationship that exists between the prevailing predominant culture and its social values, the perspectives held of masculinity and the actions of a certain type of man – the “wife batterer” and the accounts given by these men for why they commit these acts. The field research was carried out in the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Nigeria presents a paradox with respect to gender relations. Men are the head of the household and dominate the decision-making process, while women organize the domestic unit but are expected, and do, contribute to the family’s finances. At first glance, it appears that men do inhabit a privileged space in Nigerian society, however, Olajubu claims that in Yoruba society gender research should ask “not which sex enjoys dominance, but rather, over which areas do the sexes enjoy prominence” (2003:10). This alludes to the complexity of gender in Nigeria. Because Nigeria is a patriarchal society and culture, male dominance cannot be presumed or taken for granted. Nigerian masculinity is a result of a complicated process of historical, local, traditional and global factors. There is no homogenous category of masculine identity but competing discourses that men refer to and from which they derive their notions of masculinity.

My hypothesis suggests a relationship between the cultural construction of masculinity and conjugal violence. I propose that men who batter their wives have their *own* cultural construction of masculinity that supports and justifies the

use of violence within their intimate relationships. I am not challenging the “wife-batterers” worldview; I am trying to discover his worldview. Is there an existing relationship between the cultural construction of masculinity and conjugal violence? How do men seek to explain their acts of violence? How does culture shape notions of masculinity?

Wife battering, as an act, is predicated upon perceptions held by the wife batterer, perceptions of masculinity that are culturally negotiated. Men’s narratives will expose *their* world view regarding women, marriage and family; the cultural context through which men explain and justify their violent behavior toward their wives as well as the cultural norms and values that these men use to construct their notions of masculinity. How men construct their masculine identity through violence within their intimate relationships is central to the issue of male violence against women. Synnott argues that in our society

“most men define themselves, their manhood and their masculinity, primarily by their relationships with their loved ones, male or female, and their families. Furthermore, many centre their masculinity on violence and the effort needed to control anger and violence in the male psyche” (2001:212).

Thus, conjugal violence can serve as a medium through which masculinities can be studied.

Not all men use violence in their intimate relationships; in fact, the majority of men use non-violent methods of resolving conflicts. So, what compels some men to use violence and not others? What distinguishes a wife batterer from a non-wife batterer, both of whom have been brought up in the

same community and social environment; in short, both of whom have learnt the same values and sense of what it means to 'be a man'? The relationship between cultural values (as understood by men and explained in their accounts) and the act of wife battering is modulated by other factors. How do notions of masculinity guide men's behavior in daily interactions with their wives? What stress factors exist in his relationship with his wife, financial constraints, for example? There are many such questions that will need to be explored before I can hope to offer an explanation of the relationship that exists between the cultural construction of masculinity and conjugal violence.

In the literature regarding conjugal violence, I became increasingly aware of the absence of the male voice. Indeed there are few anthropological studies of conjugal violence<sup>1</sup> or studies that include men's experiences of why they engage with violence instead of other methods of conflict resolution. My rationale for the research derives from asking myself, what were the men thinking when they committed these acts of violence against their wives? What drives a man to physically assault or verbally abuse his wife? Wicks calls conjugal violence the "issue of the day" (1996:5) and indicates that by studying what drives men to violence against their wives, we could find why men turn to violence instead of other methods of conflict resolution in their relationship with women thus reducing conjugal violence significantly (1996:5). Men's explanations regarding their acts of violence against their wives provides an insight into their

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<sup>1</sup> Harvey and Gow: 1994, Green: 1999, Counts, Brown & Campbell: 1999, Levinson: 1989.



expectations as men, their gender role and the reasons why they commit these acts of violence. The literature on conjugal violence offers insufficient attention to the accounts of those involved, particularly men (Dobash, Dobash, Cavanaugh and Lewis: 2001, Chant and Gutmann: 2000). Men are represented as the problem with respect to patriarchal values, gender inequality and relations and as such their views are disregarded.

I hope to provide a context for the men's narratives. The accounts are subjective and are not impartial or without bias. Hearn cautions researchers on taking men's accounts at face value that "experience and interpretation, and their interrelation have to be constantly understood and contextualized. Pure truth is not to be found here" (1998:40). However, the men's narratives illustrate the manner in which gender impacts the male batterer's experience of conjugal violence. Thurston and Beynon posit that,

"the stories men tell about being violent, and the language and manner and context in which such stories are told, can provide insights into the gendered nature of some men's violence" (1995: 187).

Thus, conjugal violence is a gendered act of violence and provides a medium through which masculinity can be understood.

This study does investigate the issue of conjugal violence in the everyday lives of the men who perpetrate the violence. Hatty claims that "narratives about violence, and the discourse that underpin these narratives, are central to the patterning of violence in society" (2000:58). Thus, studying men's perspectives,

the socio-cultural construction of masculinity through the medium of conjugal violence can contribute to the understanding of the dynamics involved in this complex issue. This study will contribute to anthropological studies of violence not only in the context of Africa but globally.

The voices of those who have participated in this study, *their* reflections and *their* points of view provide polyvalence in the ethnography. Narratives and the subsequent discourse analysis afford an ethnographic context that will shed light on the language, social and cultural forces that might otherwise be lost. Rosaldo refers to the use of narratives in an ethnography as resulting in a “stereoscopic double vision” and that they can be as gripping as a good mystery (1989:127-143). The men’s narratives reveal *their* perceptions, *their* notions of what it means to ‘be a man’ and *their* rationale for their acts of violence.

Chapter one provides a summary of Nigeria’s history and demographics. I outline the characteristics of the three major ethnic groups; Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo people. In addition I offer my own personal experiences from having lived in and visited Nigeria over the past twenty-seven years. Chapter two examines the theoretical framework and literature review that forms the basis for the analysis of the data and research. I use Butler’s paradigm of performativity of gender and theories of masculinity. In chapter three, I review the fieldwork methods used to collect the data, the field site and those who helped me in this endeavor. How successful was my decision to hold a group interview instead of individual interviews? I review the humor as well as the difficulties I

experienced during the interviewing process with the Nigerian men. In chapter four I examine the topic of masculinity. There are few generalizations derived from studying the “traditional” Nigerian man in contemporary society. What is the impact of colonialism on gender, in particular the construction of masculinity? How do men negotiate their masculinity within the bounds of the dominant culture in contemporary Nigeria? In chapter five I introduce the issue of conjugal violence. I discuss the difference between wife beating that is considered acceptable in some cultures, wife battering and the subsequent consequences or sanctions placed on those who engage with conjugal violence. I explain conjugal violence as a cultural construct and how Nigerian society is presently focusing on this issue. Is conjugal violence considered a crime punishable by law and how does this impact the reporting of it? Chapter six introduces the men who participated in this study and their narratives. I provide an analysis of the men’s narratives using the theoretical framework of Butler and theories of masculinity as well as academic literature in order to support my claims. In chapter seven I offer my conclusions as well as avenues for future research and methods for applying this research in the field of gender and violence. Chapter eight concludes the ethnography by exploring the reflexive process of carrying out the field research.

## CHAPTER 1

### **Nigeria**

Nigeria is on the West Coast of Africa and is situated between Togo and Cameroon. It occupies an area of some 923,772 square kilometers, approximately four times the size of the United Kingdom (Okehie-Offoha & Sadiku, 1996:4). With a population of about 138 million people, Nigeria has the largest population in Africa. One in every five Africans comes from Nigeria (Falola: 2001). Abuja is the capital of Nigeria, with Lagos, the largest city and commercial center. Lagos has an estimated population of 12,000,000 people that translates to an average density of 20,000 persons per square kilometer (<http://www.lagosstate.gov.ng/about/about2.htm>). Nigeria has over 250 ethnic groups of which the largest are; Hausa (29%), Yoruba (22%) and Igbo (18%). The official language of Nigeria is English.

Nigeria gained its independence in 1960 following sixty years of British colonial rule and became a republic in 1963. Since then there have been a series of military coups and democratic elections resulting in a succession of both military and civilian governments. Currently the democratically elected President is General Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba man who was formerly a military leader in the late 1970's.

Nigeria's economy has become dependant on oil production and exportation, with the country being the twelfth largest producer of oil in the

world<sup>2</sup> ([www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/topworldtables1\\_2.html](http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/topworldtables1_2.html)). According to Falola, “the first half of the twentieth century reliance was on agriculture. This changed in the 1970’s as increasing revenues came from oil” (2001:12). The massive revenues from oil companies gave rise to corruption on an unprecedented scale and a new generation of wealthy Nigerians. The dissonance between the wealthy and the poor has widened considerably. However, since the oil crisis of the early 1980’s almost destroyed the Nigerian economy, the majority of the population now lives well below the poverty line (Hodgson and McCurdy, 2001:78/79). Statistics estimate that 90.8% of the population has access to less than two dollars a day to live on ([www.undp/hdr2002/indicator/cty](http://www.undp/hdr2002/indicator/cty)).

Not much of the oil wealth has been used to improve the infrastructure or communications leading to insufficient basics such as water and electricity as well as the breakdown in public transport systems. There is severe congestion in the cities and problems of drainage and sewage disposal (Falola: 2001). Falola claims that “current economic indicators reveal a society in trouble”, but despite this, “Nigeria’s economy is the second largest in Africa, following that of South Africa” (2001:13). The informal sector is thriving and reflects the innovative culture of the Nigerian people. With few jobs available, many Nigerians are self-employed, offering a range of services to the general population (Falola: 2001). Statistics estimated unemployment to be around 28% in 1992 (<http://www.worldpress.org/profiles/nigeria/cfm>).

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<sup>2</sup> Nigeria is the eighth largest exporter of oil, with nearly all of the oil produced exported to other countries.

The oil refineries in Nigeria are all under repair. Therefore, crude oil is sent to other countries to be refined and sold back to Nigeria, resulting in higher oil prices. While conducting my field research in Nigeria, and as a result of a series of price increases of fuel, there were a number of general strikes organized. This imposed several hardships on the general population since most ordinary Nigerians use public transport and travel by bus. Fares have increased and are disproportionate to the average wage. The average Nigerian woman uses a paraffin stove to cook, and according to persons I spoke to, the price of paraffin oil has nearly doubled. Bridget, an assistant from Project Alert for Violence against Women, told me that conjugal violence is on the rise and “when the women have to ask their husbands for more money all the time so they can buy food and paraffin oil, the husband does not understand and it is causing trouble between them. We are seeing it and hearing it from the women who come to our shelter”.

Religion plays a significant role in the daily life of most Nigerians. While 50% of the population are Muslim, 40% practice Christianity<sup>3</sup> and 10% follow indigenous beliefs (<http://worldfacts.us/Nigeria.htm>). However, Islam is the primary religion of the Hausa people, while the Igbo are predominantly Christian. Traditionally, the Yoruba people were Christian but in recent years the number of Yoruba people practicing Islam has risen to almost 50% of the population (Falola, 2001). The recent literature suggests that many Nigerians

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<sup>3</sup> For the purpose of this research Christianity encompasses Protestant, Anglican and Catholic religions. However, the men I interviewed are from a Protestant and indigenous background.

engage in religious practices from both traditional and mainstream religions (Falola: 2001, Okeke-Ihejirika: 2004, Okechie-Offoha: 1996). Falola posits that the result is “indigenous religions have interacted with both Islam and Christianity in many creative ways” (2001:38). For example, present-day traditional religions now recognize only one God, Christianity acknowledges a man’s right to have more than one wife and Muslim priests bring together traditional divination with Islamic beliefs (Falola: 2001). Despite Okechie-Offoha & Sadiku’s claim that in Nigeria, “religions cohabit without major religious conflict and tolerate each other’s belief” (1996:127), there have been a number of violent clashes reported between Muslims and Christians in recent years. Furthermore, in my experience, many Nigerians irrespective of their religious background maintain a belief in witchcraft and magic (juju).<sup>4</sup>

Falola argues that “where Nigerian traditional beliefs, Islam and Christianity intersect is that of interpersonal relations and individual behavior” (2001: 32). The men I interviewed quoted the bible on many occasions with quotations and references related to the treatment of women, married couples and how they believe women should behave toward their husbands.

Furthermore, when attending ceremonies in Nigeria, I have observed that many wealthy Nigerians have become high-ranking officials in their church. The business associated with church activities takes up the greater part of their

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<sup>4</sup> In the past, friends in Nigeria have warned me to be careful and not to look people in the eye as it might invite ‘trouble’. For example, a friend, who is a medical doctor and a devout Christian, told me the story of how many of her family have fallen ill, some fatally, as a result of her father’s junior brother wanting to take over the family and ‘putting juju’ on her fathers family.

leisure time and money, generating huge investments. Religion in Nigeria offers relief from the difficult daily life experienced by most and hopes for the future that they do not receive from their government institutions.

I have lived in and visited Nigeria over the past twenty-seven years and I know it to be a vibrant and eclectic place. Lagos is a lively and congested city with compounds that accommodate large and beautiful houses cohabiting next to shantytowns that house thousands of people living in poverty. Bustling marketplaces are dotted all over the landscape next to large, new shopping centers that have very little inside as a result of importing restrictions. The people are resilient and have a sense of humor unlike that of any other place I have visited. Nigerians are loud, aggressive people and extremely generous with their hospitality and time, irrespective of their social class. The climate is taxing and there are two seasons; the dry season where it is hot, dry and dusty and the rainy season when the weather is hot, humid and raining. Malaria is a constant concern and health facilities are poor. Thus, Nigerians and expatriates alike require patience, flexibility and robustness in order to live and survive in Nigeria's extraordinary environment.

While all three ethnic groups, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo, have their own regions, they interconnect in the larger urban areas, such as Lagos and Abuja, in search of work and a chance for a healthier economic future for their families. Common to all three groups, for both men and women, marriage and having children, especially sons, is a fundamental part of becoming a social being as well



as the understanding that the extended family is crucial to their survival. Falola states that,

“the Nigerian family serves as a welfare and insurance agency to the needy, the jobless, the elderly and the sick...The family is equally a social organization.... Responsible for creating the opportunities for leisure, ceremonies and education. As a social organization, the family defines roles on the basis of gender, age and generation” (2001: 117/118).

The family is more than a nuclear unit comprising of a husband, wife and children; it is a web of relations essential for the wellbeing and continued existence of its members.

There is a saying in Nigeria related to the three major ethnic groups and I have heard it many times from various people, “you find the Hausa in politics, the Igbo in business and the Yoruba in school learning”.

### **Hausa**

The Hausa people are mainly from the north of Nigeria and make up 29% of the total population. They speak the Hausa language. Despite the Fulani people also being a major ethnic group in the north of Nigeria, Okehie-Offoha & Sadiku claim that “contemporary politics lumps Hausa and Fulani into one camp” (1996:58). The Hausa people are traditionally commercial, although since independence, they have played a central role in Nigerian politics. No less than three of Nigeria’s presidents in the 1980’s were from the Hausa ethnic group (Okehie-Offoha & Sadiku, 1996:59).

The Hausa people are predominantly Muslim and observe traditional Muslim practices such as seclusion of the women and polygamy (Okehie-Offoha

& Sadiku 1996). Shari'a law is practiced in the North of Nigeria<sup>5</sup>. Callaway and Creevey posit that Hausa women are strictly secluded but that change is occurring and "Hausa women are only gradually emerging from seclusion and are only beginning to assert some level of equality and independence. They are only now, and only at the upper status levels, entering the wage labor sector" (1994:109). In my experience in Nigeria and visiting the North, Hausa women are very visible in society and are found in many professions in the public sector.

The Hausa are patrilineal, both descent and ethnicity derive from the father (Okehie-Offoha & Sadiku, 1996:49). A good husband is one who is considered to be successful and generous. On the other hand, according to Callaway and Creevey, a good wife is "modest, obedient, proficient in conjugal schools and fecund" (1994: 36). Hausa women are regarded as transitory in their husband's homes as divorce rates are extremely high (75%) and it is proposed that each woman will marry an average of three times during their lives (Callaway and Creevey, 1994: 107). The significantly high divorce rates leads to women maintaining a close bond with their kin (Smith, 1981:18). The children from each marriage will remain with the husband except on occasion where an agreement is reached, for example, if the child is still breast-feeding.

The two Hausa men who participated in this study are the sole providers for their families, neither of their wives work or contribute and they do not expect them to. Smith (1981) argues that prestige plays a part in the Hausa

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<sup>5</sup> I expand on the practice of Shari'a law later in the paper.

women's seclusion. The men from more wealthy or well-known families do not permit their wives as much freedom as those from the lower echelons. I would surmise from this that a man with a higher status is more public and his reputation subject to more scrutiny concerning his wife's conduct and her capacity to shame him.

### **Yoruba**

The Yoruba make up 21% of the Nigerian population and are from the South and Southwest. The Yoruba have more cities in their region than any other group and, according to Falola, are known for being "the most urbanized group in Africa" (2001: 9). The Yoruba people speak both Yoruba and English. Okehie-Offoha & Sadiku argue that "the real core of the Yoruba life is their religion. The social structure is embedded in their belief system. Therefore, any serious analysis of the Yoruba must begin with their religious life" (1996:127). The Yoruba practice Christianity and Islam but infuse both with indigenous religion.

The Yoruba have an extended family system that is both patrilineal and patrilocal. Marriage is a key step for the Yoruba male and is understood to be not only the joining of two families but the first step into adult masculinity (Lindsay, 2003:36, Falola, 2001). Okehie-Offoha & Sadiku claim that "the wife is also viewed as married not just to her husband but to all his kinsmen, and her happiness in the household largely depends on how well she conducts herself, which is adjudicated by his relatives" (1996:133). This is a crucial point with respect to the men's narratives and the justifications used by them. Gender

hierarchy is problematic since Yoruba women have a history of financial independence from their husbands, ordinarily by way of trading, and they are expected to pay for their children's education, food and incidentals while men pay for housing and the needs of the extended family (Lindsay, 2003). Thus, Barnes claims that "Yoruba ideology supports both the subordination of woman and the contradictory position that men and women are equally capable of performing society's valued and essential tasks" (1990: 253).

While monogamy is the more common practice today, men can have more than one wife (Falola: 2001). Indeed all of the Yoruba men I interviewed were monogamous, but the majority said that they maintain at least one relationship outside of marriage without their wives being aware of it<sup>6</sup>. Nine of the seventeen men who participated in this study were from the Yoruba ethnic group.

### **Igbo**

The Igbo people are traditionally renowned in Nigeria for being business oriented people. Okehie-Offoha & Sadiku posit that "the general stereotype of the Igbo as ambitious, shrewd, industrious, adventurous, avaricious, innovative and clannish conforms to the stereotype of the Jews" (1993:63). There are various dialects that indicate different regions of Igbo land, however, Igbo is the traditional language spoken by the majority of the people. The Igbo people are predominantly patrilineal but there are groups that have matrilineal kinship systems (Okehie-Offoha & Sadiku, 1993). According to Olaniyam, the Cross

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<sup>6</sup> In Nigeria, many of the women I have spoken to expect their husbands to have affairs while they are married.

River Igbo peoples of Ohafia have a matrilineal descent system and the Cross River Igbo peoples of Afikpo practice double descent (1985: 23).

The extended family system is common practice with the nuclear family playing the central role. The key role of authority rests with the eldest male member of the family. While traditional marriage is most common, levirate marriage is a fundamental part of the Igbo culture (Okehie-Offoha & Sadiku, 1993:65) and women remain the property of the husband's family irrespective of whether or not her husband is alive. The Igbo male is the head of the household and like the Yoruba women, Igbo women are expected to contribute to the household. It is an Igbo woman's responsibility to maintain conjugal chores such as cleaning, cooking and childcare in order to assist their husbands and demonstrate their love for them (Okehie-Offoha & Sadiku, 1993:67).

Furthermore, childlessness is normally regarded as the woman's fault since "a man proved impotent is not regarded as a 'real man'" (Okehie-Offoha & Sadiku, 1993:67). Moreover, in Igbo culture the male child is fundamental to the continuation of the lineage and the inability of a wife to produce a son can result in marital conflict (Okehie-Offoha & Sadiku, 1993:69). The husbands family can convince him to find another wife who will produce a son and either divorce the first wife or maintain a polygamous lifestyle.

## CHAPTER 2

### **Theoretical Framework**

For the purpose of this study I draw on two theories, Butler's paradigm of the performance of masculinity and theories of masculinity. Each of these is in accordance with my own observations and provides concrete explanations for this study of Nigerian men, masculinity and conjugal violence.

Conceiving men as actors in their socio-cultural environment leads to an understanding of their self-conceptions and the manner in which *they* interpret masculinity. Masculinity is constructed experientially and is constantly being negotiated with reference to the dominant culture, in this case, Nigerian, heterosexual, married and financially secure male. According to Kaufman and Brod, in their cross-cultural study of masculinity, men require ritual as proof of their masculinity:

"it is of great interest in understanding gender that girls are frequently thought to be born with all the necessary internal functions to become biologically full-grown women naturally. No intervention is necessary. Boys on the other hand, require intervention to develop; it is such an idea on which the daily ingesting of semen in New Guinea is based. Among the Sambia, semen builds men; without it, boys remain feminized. In other places, war builds men. So does sexual conquest or the acquiring of riches. But something must be done to make a boy a man; some proof of masculinity, some achievement, is necessary" (1994: 68).

In Nigeria, a man reaches full manhood once he has married and produced children. In this patrilineal society, a son will perpetuate his father's name and will inherit his property. However, sustaining a male identity is a continuous process through which men must demonstrate that they are competent and

maintain a public performance of it. Gender, in this instance masculinity, is experiential and is constantly being renegotiated and modified by both the individual and their socio-cultural environment.

Butler claims that gender and sexuality are culturally constructed within existing power relations and subjectivities (1999:40), therefore, “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender: that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results” (1999:33). By interviewing men regarding their experience of “being a man” and conjugal violence, then analyzing the narratives through the model of performative gender, I show how men construct or reconfigure their masculine identity through engaging with conjugal violence.

The paradigm of a performative system of gender endorses the ideal of change and variation between and among cultures. In colonial Nigeria men negotiated their masculinity and male identity on many levels and among competing discourses on masculine identity. Oyewunmi describes colonization in Nigeria as “the taking away of the manhood of the colonized” (1997: 1221). For example, a man was ‘boy’ to his colonial master but considered the ‘breadwinner’ and head of the household by his family. Anderson and Umberson argue that the performance of masculinity is shaped by the cultural options available to men (2001: 375). Thus masculinity identity is vulnerable and can be contested on many levels; economic, ability to control one’s wife, extended family, religious affiliations, by other men and many other factors that

can bring into question an individual's capacity to 'be a man' in his sociocultural environment.

The ideal of performance is fundamental to understanding gender roles and relations. In essence, the cultural construction of gender is created by the very people who perform it and those with whom they interact on a daily basis. Butler maintains that "gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed" (1999: 33). Thus, masculinity and male identity derives from a conflation of behaviors, acts and responses to competing discourse. Chopra, Osella and Osella endorse the performance aspect of gender and argue that "Masculinity is a configuration of embodied and enacted practices, not a frozen identity acquired and achieved once and for all" (2000:30). Thus masculinity is in constant flux and being renegotiated by men in their daily lives.

In Nigeria, where gender identity is fluid and based on a man's performance there is the risk that the ideal construction of manhood is unattainable to those who are marginalized in society. Irrespective of their ability to achieve or perform their masculine identity, the men I interviewed had very clear notions of what they perceived to be the characteristics of what it takes to 'be a man' in their sociocultural environment. Masculinity is not assumed or taken for granted. Therefore, it is important for men to be publicly performing their masculine identity in a proficient manner for the benefit of other persons.



Butler identifies gender as being a subjective experience that is generated by the dominant discourse and creates something outside of the individual (1999:13).

Limon (1997) provides an analysis of working class Mexicans in south Texas. He examines men's behavior and banter around each other at a barbeque and describes it as a form of *play*. Limon (1997) communicates Butler's performative aspect of masculinity, men using certain rhetoric in order to maintain a stance with respect to other men. Masculinity is not just one way of 'being a man' but is performed and reified by men through a multiplicity of everyday behavior, interactions and language. Ways of 'being a man' are not static and men's violence within their intimate relationships can represent, as Limon argues, "multivocal symbols possessing several different meanings and not reductable to a single one...." (1997:71). Thus, stereotypes of African men and their subjugation of women do not reflect the men's subjective realities and the manner in which they negotiate their male identity.

Theories of masculinity establish an explanation of violence and men's behavior through social and cultural 'archetype' constructs of masculinity. Gutmann argues that anthropology has "always involved men talking to men about men" (1997: 385) but has failed to examine men *as* men. Furthermore, in his ethnography relating to Mexican men, Gutmann states that "my definition of male identities focuses on what men say and do *to be men*, and not simply what men say and do" (1996:17). This study focuses on men *as* men; their subjectivities as actors and participants in their social and cultural environment.

Thus, masculinity is not simply a relational category or studied in terms of dominance and subordination. According to Gutmann,

“identity does not stand still or fall outside what it itself represents, this indeterminate understanding of identity allows for the nuanced appreciation of the allusiveness of gender identities that are constantly shifting in terms of history and place” (1996: 17).

Theories of masculinity account for the fluid nature of Nigerian constructs of gender, the premise that masculinity is a continuous process and the impact of colonialism on contemporary notions of masculinity.

The plurality of the construction of masculinities should be acknowledged in order to avoid reductionist or essentialist explanations of masculinity (Connell, 2000, Gutmann: 1996). Masculinity is considered as being both problematic and dynamic (Connell, 2000; Collier, 1998) and hinges on man’s ability to exercise some measure of power and control. However, Brod and Kaufman consider the manner in which the world of power has been constructed results in feelings of pain, isolation and alienation (1994:142). This model of male identity which points to a ‘crisis of masculinity’ is reaffirmed in many ethnographies and academic literature (Connell: 2000, Lindsay and Meischer: 2003, Gutmann: 1996, 2003, Ramirez: 1999, Chopra, Osella, Osella: 2000, Lindisfarne and Cornwall: 1994). Cornwall argues that in Nigeria, “being a man was not enough to maintain authority; much came to depend on a more performative identity as a man.” (2003: 244). Men are challenged in their everyday lives to navigate their masculine role in order to be considered as men

in their society. As the men's narratives will illustrate, the challenges and competing discourses are complex and requires "more than a day's work" (Cornwall, 2003: 244). Thus conjugal violence can be perceived as a response to a threatened masculine identity and an individual sense of inadequacy on the part of the male.

Men's failure to achieve the necessary attributes demanded by society in the construction of a successful masculinity results in what is referred to by Ramirez (1999) as a "crisis of masculinity". Ramirez states that "men who are less able to show control and power tend to exaggerate their masculinity. Resorting to a range of expressions of violence seems to be part of that exaggeration (1999:77). Butler's notion of "performance of gender" is along the lines of Ramirez's explanation of male violence against women. Men, by resorting to violence, are performing a certain aspect of their masculinity or order to demonstrate the feeling of power and control that they ostensibly lack.

Gutmann (1997) asserts that, in Mexico, following the economic crisis of the 1980's, there was a shift in gender relations. Necessity dictated that both the husband and wife work in order to support the family. Men found themselves helping with domestic work that would previously have been relegated to their wives. Moreover, women were visible in the public space and subsequently gained access to an income, creating *fuzziness* with respect to the boundaries of the private and public spheres as well as a change in the traditional gender role expectations. Gutmann claims that this change in gender relations in the broader

Mexican society “greatly affected men’s relations with women, and therefore men’s own identities” (1997:224). Germane to masculine identity is the role of provider; a change in men’s ability to perform this role along with women’s increased visibility in the labor market is also creating a ‘crisis’ for Nigerian men. Gutmann (2003) describes the conjugal space as the most contested space, where a man is at most risk of being feminized and struggles to maintain his masculine identity.

Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as “the mode of masculinity that is at any one point culturally exalted” (2000:84). Hegemonic masculinity is the model of the ‘ideal man’ that is projected and perpetuated by society and culture (Connell: 2000). This model is static and monolithic and not in accordance with the paradigm of performance of masculinity or plural masculinities. The notion of hegemonic masculinity as defined by Connell (2000) is for the most part, incongruent in the context of Nigeria (Lindsay: 2003). Connell suggests that each society projects an ideal model of masculinity produced by the dominant discourse. However Nigerian society has many competing discourses relevant to a successful male identity which men draw upon depending upon the situation.

Masculine identity is strategically negotiated, contested and performed by men on various levels; it is both multifaceted and problematic. Lindsay describes Connell’s model as only “partially useful” (2003: 13) when used in the context of Africa, particularly with respect to colonial Africa. Lindsay argues that,

“the limited reach of the colonial ideologies, combined with social flux created by new constraints and opportunities, meant that a multiplicity of competing identities interacted with more complexity than in Connell’s original formulation” (2003:13).

Therefore, masculinity constructed as oppositional or relational to women is not conducive to the Nigerian construction of male identity. A successful construction of masculinity is partially dependant on the control of one’s wife or wives and as such women are part of the process, not simply to be employed in binary or dualistic terms of reference. Furthermore, Gutmann cautions against “the tendency to regard generalizations about social categories of any kind as permanent cultural features” (1996:244). The narratives demonstrate that Nigerian men’s interpretation of the actual performance of their male identity is situational and is dependent upon where they are and whom they are with. What is open to contest and challenge is his ability to meet the societal and cultural expectations of having ‘performed’ like a man.

In the context of Nigeria, women have always been active in the public space and contributed to the household economy as well as maintaining the domestic unit. At the same time, men are considered the primary breadwinners and culture dictates that, as boys approach manhood they distance themselves from household chores (Das, 2000:111). More recently, Nigerian women are occupying jobs previously held by men, creating tension in the workplace, particularly when men find themselves with a female boss. Cleaver argues that “violence has been linked to economic stress, low self-esteem and traditional

ideas about gender roles” (2003:12). The traditional male ideal in modernity has continued to be that of provider and breadwinner of the family, resulting in a dissonance for those who fail to achieve the norm. Theories of masculinity and Butler’s paradigm of performance of gender bring me further in explaining the social and cultural construction of masculinities and if there exists a relationship to acts of conjugal violence.

### **Literature Review**

There is a dearth of literature relating to contemporary Nigeria and other non-Western cultures on the topic of gender, the cultural construction of masculinity and conjugal violence (Silberschmidt: 1999, Lindsay: 2003, Cleaver: 2002, Kalu: 1993, Lindsay and Meischer: 2003, Oyewunmi: 1997, Odame: 2002, Lindisfarne and Cornwall: 1994). In addition, many of the ethnographies relate to fieldwork carried out during the pre-colonial or colonial period and are now dated (Eades, 1980). For example, Mary Smith’s ethnography, *Baba of Karo* (1981), based on the life of a Muslim Hausa woman in Northern Nigeria was written in the 1950’s. Fadipe’s *Sociology of the Yoruba*, although published in 1970, was based on his 1939 thesis (Eades: 1980). This study will reflect the current changes in gender relations and constructs and respond to De Neve’s critique that,

“Western constructs of masculinity are often blindly projected onto non-Western cultural contexts...and numerous are the colonial as well as current development discourses that stigmatize the African and Asian man as lazy, unreliable, effeminate or troublesome” (2000:62).

Recent studies conducted in Nigeria by the likes of Lindsay (2003) are from an historical perspective. However, Lindsay's comprehensive ethnography does relate to Nigerian constructs of masculinity and gender relations during the colonial period. Lindsay (2003) argues that Yoruba men strategically manipulated and negotiated a multiple of masculinities while mediating their daily lives. Yoruba men's employment by the railway from the 1930's onwards served as a basis for change in gender roles and relations in Nigeria. Salaried employment provided young men with "new expressions of adult masculinity" (2003:12), offering greater opportunities with respect to marriage, status and the possibility to be recognised as men in society much earlier than they previously would have been. Moreover, the ideology of sole breadwinner, previously unknown to Nigerian culture and social life, originated during the colonial period. I suggest that despite the notion of breadwinner being a remnant from the colonial period, it still contributes to contemporary notions of Nigerian men's masculine identity.

In addition, colonialism was a major factor in determining male identity in Kenya and Silberschmidt claims that, "beneath the rhetoric of social control, these were attempts to create an African masculinity that mirrored a flattering vision of the officials' own maleness" (1999: 54). Thus, colonialism so shaped Nigerian society and culture that its impact is relevant to studies of gender in the context of Nigeria (Mama: 1995, Oyewunmi: 1997). Harris critiques the anthropologist for completely disregarding the topic of conjugal violence and

claims that, with respect to colonialism “it is relatively easier for anthropologists to explain violence in terms of pressures from outside than to investigate its parameters in everyday life” (1994: 42). I maintain that colonialism represented more than an external pressure with respect to explaining conjugal violence. The colonialists introduced practices that resulted in rapid social change, particularly for men, and imbibed itself in the everyday life of those they colonized.

Lindsay suggests that, for Nigerians, gender relations were strained during the colonial period because change was reflected in one part of a workers life but not in other parts (2003: 7). Smedley furthers this argument and claims that the introduction of money created tension and complicated the relationship between husbands and wives (2004: 179). Women worked further from home and outside “her husband’s immediate jurisdiction and control. Not only that, but away from her husband she may encounter temptations that may have, at worst, a potentially explosive effect on her values and her regard for the woman’s position in Birom society” (2004: 179). Hence, the rapid shift in gender relations during the colonial period not only presented new ways for men to demonstrate their masculine identity but also complicated women’s lives and gave rise to an increase in conjugal violence.

As I have already discussed, western gender constructs are problematic when applied to Africa (Oyewunmi, 1997:16). Oyewunmi argues that, “all concepts come with their own cultural and philosophical baggage, much of which becomes alien distortion when applied to cultures other than those from



which they derive" (1997: x/xi). In the context of Nigeria, gender is complex as a result of a combination of history, colonialism, custom as well as the diverse population. Furthermore, Oyewunmi claims that Western constructs have dominated gender ideology and theories leading to,

"a preconceived assumption of gender asymmetry actually distorts many analyses, since it precludes the exploration of gender as a fundamental component of social relations, inequality processes of production and reproduction and ideology" (1997: 16).

This 'preconceived assumption of gender asymmetry' and hierarchy is particularly significant with respect to Nigeria where gender constructs are fluid and situational. Furthermore, Lindisfarne and Cornwall posit that masculinity is

"so compelling that it rests on an apparent certainty: that a 'man is a man' everywhere, and everywhere this means the same thing... However, essentialist explanations cannot explain variations and the fact that cultural forms are never replicated exactly" (1994:3).

Recurring gender stereotypes of the male patriarch and submissive women is fast becoming redundant (Silberschmidt: 1999, Cleaver: 2002, Lindsay: 2003, Wicks: 1996, Butler: 1999). Patriarchy does not fully represent male identity; it forms part of the discourse regarding men. Patriarchy is not the sole basis for men's control over women; it is an institutional support that plays a role in determining their rights as men in society. Moreover, patriarchy does not guarantee the men I interviewed a dominant gender role unless they also have wealth, status and seniority. Silberschmidt argues that the stereotype of the male patriarch is "static and can be deceptive when used in the analysis of societies undergoing massive change (1999:8). Gender identity is undergoing change in

Nigeria as men experience difficulties in exercising their role as heads of the household and factors such as an increase in conjugal violence reflect this shift.

The likes of Lindsay and Meischer (2003) argue that Western constructs, such as Connell's (2000) notion of hegemonic and subordinate masculinities, is only partially useful in the context of Africa. Lindsay states that,

"the limited reach of colonial ideologies, combined with the social flux created by new constraints and opportunities, meant that a 'multiplicity of competing identities' interacted with more complexity than in Connell's original formulation" (2003:13).

Connell's hierarchy of masculinities fails to reflect the fluid nature of gender and the manner in which Nigerian men negotiate their masculine identity; drawing from a multiple of ideals. According to Connell (2000), few men attain the ideal model of hegemonic masculinity but the majority of men benefit from their position in the "patriarchal dividend" (1995). However, in the context of Nigeria, the majority of men do not have access to the resources that would provide them with authority and power. In fact Smedley questions whether any ordinary men in third world communities are capable of "imposing their will on social systems long dictated by military, economic and political elites" (2004: 3). Certainly the men I interviewed fall into Smedley's category of ordinary men.

Smedley's ethnography discusses women's role in the patrilineal system as well as their part in perpetuating the system. According to Smedley, women have more "room to manoeuvre within the patrilineal system than do men" (2004: 234) and can subsequently manipulate social change through the system

itself. This is in keeping with Chant and Gutmann's (2000) notion that men are bounded or to some extent limited by their masculine ideals and the resulting 'crisis of masculinity' where they are unable to meet the cultural expectations regarding the construction of masculinity.<sup>7</sup>

Masculinity is often seen as having a binary and or relational structure (Connell: 2000). However, there is a complementary nature to gender relations in Nigeria and according to Smedley,

"women do not see themselves as in any way engaged in active competition with men, nor do they sustain perpetual antagonism toward men on account of their superior positions. If anything, the majority attitude toward men is supportive and conciliatory" (2004:188).

Smedley's model further points to the dissonance between western and Nigerian models of gender relations. Moreover, Lindsay maintains that Nigerian men "negotiated their daily lives according to different constructs of gender ideals" (2003:3) and women supported them in their endeavor in order to maximize the financial benefits.

Hodgson and McCurdy's (2001) collection of ethnographies also relate to women in the context of Africa. However, the general theme revolves around deviant women or women who contest the boundaries of their gender role or relations. Hodgson and McCurdy argue that "Wicked Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa analyzes how ideas and actions of such 'wicked' women are pivotal in transforming gender relations and other domains

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<sup>7</sup> "What is called the masculinity crisis involves the collapse of a common code for male role behaviour and the intensification of gender role strain" (Levant quoted in Hatty, 2000: 179).

of social life" (2001: 1). In particular, Cornwall's (2001) ethnography explores the shift in gender relations of Yoruba men and women in Southwestern Nigeria and supports the data I collected as well as reflecting my own experiences in Nigeria. Hodgson and McCurdy suggest that "unlike wives of yesteryear, today's women are represented as wayward: rude, troublesome, and disobedient, and liable to run after other men and their money" (2001: 67). Furthermore, this label "provides a powerful normative injunction to women of all ages" (2001: 80). While men adhere to traditional values regarding gender role and relations, women contest those boundaries and thus endure the consequences. I suggest that men are turning to conjugal violence as a result of this challenge to their masculine identity.

The men I interviewed often used the term '*wicked*' and '*bad*' when referring to their wives. Hodgson and McCurdy claim that "wickedness is a discourse primarily of masculine power that seeks to control or oppress women by stigmatizing certain actions, whether normative or unconventional" (2001:5). Thus, Hodgson and McCurdy's collection of ethnographies provided me with a basis for analyzing the men's narratives and gender relations in the context of Nigeria.

Silberschmidt's (1999) ethnography relates to gender relations in the Kisii district of Kenya. Silberschmidt documents men's frustrations and changing position regarding gender role and relations in contemporary Kisii culture. I have drawn parallels between Kenya and Nigeria regarding the impact of

colonialism and how economic hardships influence men's role in society.

Furthermore, Silberschmidt (1999) concurs with Smedley's (2004) notion that men are more vulnerable than women with respect to shifting traditional and modern roles. In addition, Silberschmidt refers to the more recent development of crisis of masculinity that portrays "the problem-laden man who cannot help beating his wife" (1999:123) but warns that this should not be the only model for interpreting conjugal violence. However, men's inability to respond to new ways of 'being' in society and culture where outdated traditions are adhered to in order to maintain authority and control does provide a basis for explaining men's frustrations and why they turn to acts of conjugal violence.

Gutmann's ethnography, as well as being one of the few anthropological studies of the construction of masculinity, provides a template for analysing the men's narratives and regarding men as social actors in their cultural environment. Gutmann conducts research into masculinity as it applies to Mexican men and the ideal of 'macho'. 'Macho' alludes to men's expression of strength, sexual prowess, control, power and authority, not only over women but also over other men. The macho ideal shares similar characteristics to Connell's hegemonic masculinity with regards to being the desired concept and stereotype that is unobtainable to most men. Although the macho stereotype is not particularly representative of the desired masculine ideal when applied to Nigeria, there are parallels. Like Nigerian constructs of masculinity, the model of the 'macho man' is complex and Gutmann maintains that Mexican men

perform their masculinity creatively within the constraints of their sociocultural environment (1996: 245). Nigerian men model themselves on the stereotype of the male patriarch, head of the extended family household and as I have already discussed, men perform their masculinity as the situation requires (White: 2003).

Gutmann (1996) describes the justifications and explanations for conjugal violence as being related to the participants' failure to achieve a healthy masculine identity, although not necessarily the macho ideal. Gutmann outlines the 'crisis of masculinity' as a rationalisation for conjugal violence, but like Silberschmidt (1999), he suggests that, "I'm a macho man, cannot be accepted at face value, but must serve as a starting point for discovering deeper causes and consequences of violence than so-called cultural attributes" (1996: 199).

Explanations such as men's crisis of masculinity cannot release those men who engage with violence from blame or responsibility for their actions but it can represent a point of departure for analysis.

The study conducted by Atinmo (1997) on the implications of conjugal violence among the Yoruba in Nigeria expose the difficulties in researching such a sensitive topic. Atinmo (1997) observed and interviewed five couples in their homes as well as talking to the institutions that deal with conjugal violence, such as social workers, welfare officers and the police. Atinmo's study cites numerous reasons for the increase of conjugal violence, among others they include poor communications skills, financial stress, temperament and differences in value systems. Findings suggest that structural institutions are incapable of dealing

with this particular problem because they draw on traditional cultural ideals relating to gender role and constructs. For example, women who have a higher titular position than their husbands, such as doctor or professor, are counselled to be humble about it so their husbands can maintain their respect and public standing. Atinmo (1997) states that welfare officers “remind women that Yoruba culture allows men to beat women” and social workers “work on the premise that a wife is her husband’s property, and he can use his property as he likes” (1997: 111). Atinmo’s study is fundamental to the understanding of the construction and implications of conjugal violence in the context of Nigeria.

Women’s choices are limited and subsequently impact their ability to escape their violent husbands since they are obliged to work within the accepted boundaries of their tradition. Atinmo (1997) encountered numerous problems regarding the interview process. Men were unreliable and would either not turn up, cancel appointments or would drop out completely. In addition, women were unable to speak openly in the presence of their husbands; leading me to believe that this mode of study is perhaps more problematic and that group interviews elicit more data. Interestingly, Atinmo seems puzzled that “in spite of the beatings, the wives as well as the husbands in this study preferred to remain married to each other” (1997: 122). However in her conclusion, Atinmo (1997) does acknowledge the significance of the institution of marriage to Nigerian society. Irrespective of difficulties experienced by the couple, elements such as

the level of poverty in Nigeria, shame and the focus on marriage as a means of reaching personhood all serve to ensure the continuation of a marriage.

There is a plethora of academic literature regarding masculinity written by the likes of Kimmel and Messner (1998), Kaufmann (1998), Kuypers (1992, 1999), Brod and Kaufman (1994). They provide a model of masculinity that embodies men's power, domination, privilege and its binary relationship to women.

Kimmel refers to a model he calls "marketplace man" and argues that,

"the constant fear of not living up to the demands imposed by the cult of masculinity produces a paradox in which men have virtually all the power and yet feel powerless as individuals. Much frustration and anger stems from the feelings of men raised to believe themselves entitled to feel power, but do not" (In Kuyper, 1999: 191).

Though contributing to theories of masculinity, these models essentialize masculinity. They imply that all men are powerful and men emerge as a homogenous group. Theories such as these do not account for why not all men are violent. Kuypers (1992) ethnography espouses the shortcomings of American men and their need to inflict violence on women and other men, and the language used is challenging and confrontational. For example, Kuypers argues that,

"if the male is given or claims a position of superiority, then he will use whatever means available to him to keep his position. Since no other unique means are left to him except his greater ability to control with force, this is what he uses. And he justifies his acts as being in the service as a natural order - his position of power, authority, duty and domination" (1992: 39).

Universal explanations of men's violence against women are not compatible with my approach; they are without context, essentialize gender constructs and they



do not account for deviations in masculine behaviour<sup>8</sup>. Literature concerning African masculinity enumerate that most ordinary men fail to have any real or imagined power and that gender is more complex than these dualistic and binary models (Smedley: 2004, Lindsay: 2003). Nigerian constructions of masculinity are not achieved as a result of a single ritual but are dynamic, situational and reproduced by men on a continuous basis.

Gow asserts that “anthropology has made little attempt to analyse the gap which exists between dominant cultural category and the actualities of day to day relations” (1994: 145). Other scholars (Gutmann: 1996) have proffered a similar critique of the discipline. However, studies such as those conducted by Gilmore (1990) and Herdt (1982) offer a comprehensive knowledge of men’s lives. Gilmore’s (1990) study, albeit a cross-cultural study of men in Spain and Truk Island, engage with notions of masculine behaviour that draw parallels with the men I studied in Nigeria. Gilmore (1990) cites that the strict gender division of labour and gender role is a facet of masculinity that applies to Andalusian men. Sons are fundamental to men’s identity, as is the ideal of the ‘breadwinner’ and obligations toward the extended family. Men who help out in the kitchen are ridiculed and people scoff and ask, “is he a man?” (1990: 54). According to Gilmore, those men who fail to meet the cultural expectations of masculinity are considered to be “despised, less-than-a-man, a wastrel” (1990:43). Furthermore, Gilmore (1990) explains that a man is measured by the

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<sup>8</sup> I offer an analysis of narratives concerning deviant masculinities in Chapter five.

performance of his masculine role, “adequate performance within set patterns (the male script); it also means publicity, being on view and having the courage to expose oneself to risk” (1990: 36). This paradigm is in keeping with Butler’s framework of performance that gender is ‘doing’ and it is not enough just ‘being’ a man.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Field Research**

#### **Methodology**

My fieldwork was carried out in Lagos and Abuja in Nigeria. As I have previously stated, I have lived in and visited Nigeria over the past twenty-seven years. I met my Nigerian husband while working in Nigeria in the late 1970's and over the years I have immersed myself in Nigerian culture and am fortunate to have been accepted by other Nigerians as a result of my efforts. In Nigeria, most people speak English or use Pidgin English in addition to speaking their own dialect. The interviews were conducted in English. Given my years in Nigeria, I understand Pidgin and I often phrased the questions in Pidgin in order that the men could understand exactly what I was asking them. In the data analysis, I respected the men's own definitions and used their language in the narratives. I have translated the colloquial words but the narratives remain in the words of the men who participated in the study. I am reminded of Messerschmidt's warning that "contaminants" (2000: 20), such as the participants dishonesty or faulty memory, occur in any social science methodology. However, according to Messerschmidt, the men's narratives and life histories should be treated as a "situational truth" (2000: 20) and as such, will permit me to discover the men's subjective reality.

My aim was to interview a sample of twenty men who had in point of fact been known to be violent within their intimate relationships. Despite the sample

being relatively small, it does provide significant information on patterns related to conjugal violence and the distinctive character of a specific population of male batterers. Not all men who experience similar circumstances batter their wives. Therefore, it is fundamental to the issue of conjugal violence to identify why these particular men do and, in doing so, point toward new avenues for future research.

### **How did I go about it?**

Prior to going to Nigeria, I contacted two Non-Governmental Organizations. The first was called Project Alert for Violence against Women and is based in Lagos and WRAPA (Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative) which is based in the Nigerian capital, Abuja. Each of these organizations runs a shelter for battered women as well as providing legal aid for those women who want to either press charges against their husbands or leave them. The notion of providing a safe haven in the form of a shelter for battered women is very new concept to Nigeria and this is the first time a project of this sort has been undertaken. Initially I explained my research project to the director of Project Alert, Josephine Effah-Chukwuma. Josephine embraced the idea of working with men and saw it as a positive move forward in violence against women. Josephine offered to help me in my endeavor and suggested we meet upon my arrival in Lagos in order to discuss the logistics of getting the men to agree to be interviewed.

Following my arrival in Lagos, I visited Project Alert and interviewed Josephine on her experience with the women who attended the shelter. I was subsequently invited to a workshop being held by them that would serve to inform the media and government organizations about a conjugal violence bill that had been drawn up by Project Alert in conjunction with other NGO's. I was also invited to give a talk about my project. It was an interesting two days and my project drew much interest from those who attended the workshop. Despite some people making comments such as: talking to the men takes the attention away from the women who were the *actual* victims, many others agreed that little else had worked in preventing or reducing conjugal violence.

Josephine asked me to write the letters of invitation to the husbands of the women who had previously stayed at the shelter and she would send them by courier on my behalf. Josephine offered me the use of the premises for the interviews and, as a safety precaution, she suggested that two staff members remain with me on the premises for the duration of the interview. I scheduled the interviews for a Saturday morning since many of the men worked and would have experienced hardship in taking a day off to attend. I sent eleven letters inviting the men to participate; asking them to share their experiences and views regarding conjugal violence. I offered to reimburse the men for travel and to provide lunch and drinks on the day. Josephine warned me not to expect many of the men to come, she felt that Nigerian men would not want to openly discuss this topic. Many of the people I spoke to share this view and had warned me

that I would not find anyone to talk to about conjugal violence. I felt very despondent at times. I am normally very confident in terms of my ability to connect with people but I did not feel that I was in control of the situation and I was dependent upon the help offered by the NGO's.

I had already decided that I would hold group interviews in order to see if the men would be more open with respect to their experiences. I had, in the past, held one-on-one interviews with men who attended a support group at the McGill Conjugal Violence Clinic. The interviews were successful and I collected a rich source of data but I felt that the atmosphere was clinical and not conducive to having an open discussion. Furthermore, I felt that, on occasion, the men manipulated and controlled the interview process. In a group, the men might be more spontaneous in their reactions and responses to my questions and in turn would provoke further discussion about the topic. Indeed, Ogbomo confirms that group interviews,

*“unravels contending versions of narrative traditions, probably exposes more than it hides, and alerts the researcher to the details of reasoning which might not – surely would not – be revealed in the privacy of a home” (1997: 180).*

Furthermore, Lamphear (1976) posits the thought that

*“the group interview was often useful when working in a given area for the first time with unknown informants; there was more likelihood of getting at least some useful information from the group as a whole than only one poor informant on his own.” (pps. 58, 59).*

The group interview was successful in terms of the men's spontaneity in responding to the questions I asked them but moreover their reaction to each

other was revealing. Periodically the men's responses bounced back and forth off each other leading to new topics of discussion that I had not asked about. Working with a group gave me the time to observe the men's body language while they were talking with each other.

In my experience, individual interviews are fraught with potential problems; the participant manipulating the direction of the interview, him trying to gain my approval or seek my advice and reticence in responding to questions. Mama (1995) suggests that the successful interviewer should maintain a balance between being warm, creating rapport and remaining detached. I feel that a group interview provided me with the opportunity to prove my skill as an interviewer. I managed to maintain the balance referred to by Mama (1995), i.e. between warmth and rapport on the one hand and detachment on the other hand. I define detachment as being non-judgmental and not reacting in response to some of, what I considered to be, violent behavior, expressed in the narratives that the men shared with the group.

### **Lagos**

Upon my arrival at the office of Project Alert on the day of the interviews, I was informed that only two of the men had responded. However, communication in Lagos is difficult at best and few of the men have telephones, making it impossible for us to confirm their participation. Ever hopeful that some of the men would be curious enough to attend, I had arrived early in order to set up my tapes, consent forms and lunch and await the men's arrival.

Much to my, and everyone else's surprise, eight men attended the group interview I held in Lagos. I managed to collect the history of six of them. One of the men declined to fill in the form stating his personal details and I was unable to read another of the men's writing. In retrospect, I should have taken down the life histories myself in order that I could decipher them but the men came in all at once. Initially they appeared ill at ease and did not know what to do with themselves. They sat in their chairs and avoided looking at each other. I felt that by having the men write out their personal history and details, it would keep them occupied and enable them to settle in to their surroundings. More importantly, this gave me the opportunity to greet the men as they arrived. In Nigeria, greetings are an important ritual and cannot be rushed. Fadipe states that "the demonstration of good fellowship in words is as important among the Yoruba as demonstration of deeds. A man who is inclined to be too sparing of the appropriate words to suit particular occasions is an anti-social man in the eyes of the Yoruba" (1970:104). My husband is from Nigeria and is a Yoruba man. Hence I would be expected to be familiar with the customary greetings and failing to do so would have been construed as rude and ignorant. Furthermore, Falola claims that "among many groups, failure to greet or to answer when greeted is a sign of contention" (2001:139). Worse still, had I failed to greet each of the participants inappropriately it would have been explained away as my



being an “Oyinbo”<sup>9</sup>, and this would have set the tone for the remainder of the interview.

I introduced myself, outlined the reason for the meeting and after explaining the consent form, I asked the men to sign them. All of the men signed the forms without hesitation and ticked the box that would permit me to publish my work using their names. Despite all of the men agreeing to me using their names in my thesis and any published work, given the sensitive and personal nature of some of the information, I have changed the names so that their narratives cannot identify them.

I began the meeting by asking the men individually, why they had come to the interview. Two of the men admitted that they did not know what it was about and wanted to come and see for themselves. The general consensus was that they wanted to share their stories and this was the first time anyone had asked them to talk about their views on the issue of conjugal violence. The men appeared willing to answer personal questions and there seemed to be few boundaries. Interestingly, on many occasions the men used the third person in order to describe their experiences, using “they” or “he” in their narrative. Falola argues that Nigerians do use the “third person” when addressing an older person (2001:138). However, I feel that using the “third person” facilitated the process and permitted the men to distance themselves from their narratives enabling them to communicate their feelings.

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<sup>9</sup> “Oyinbo” can be translated as white person, stranger or foreign person.

I asked open-ended questions relating to their relationship with their wives, their childhood, their ideals of what it takes to “be a man” and other factors referred to by researchers of conjugal violence, such as stress, shame and finances. The questions were framed so as not to offend the men and to enable me to understand how they themselves defined their experience. For example, I did not refer to them hitting or slapping their wives as conjugal violence or indeed use the word violence throughout the interview. I feel that the group interviews resulted in a rich source of data, not only derived from the men’s responses to my questions but also their reactions and responses to other men’s experiences. Furthermore, in my endeavor to remain non-judgmental and encourage an atmosphere of openness, I asked questions that would not be conceived as confrontational. More importantly, I often paraphrased the men’s responses in order to stimulate further debate on certain key issues.

The interview lasted four and half-hours and upon leaving, the men thanked *me* for *my* time. I felt very humbled, since one of the men had attended the interview instead of attending a family wedding and another had delayed attending the Eid-el-Fitr celebration that marks the end of Ramadan, both important functions in the context of Nigeria. However, at the same time I was elated. I had proven the pessimists wrong *and* I would have an important source of data for writing my thesis. The assistant to the director, Bridget, commented that she did not anticipate the men talking about their experiences so openly. Furthermore, she felt that in future, the organization might be able to help the

women who attended the shelter and their families, by providing male support groups like those I had already worked with at the McGill Conjugal Violence Clinic.

### **Abuja**

From Lagos, I discussed my project by telephone with the director of WRAPA (Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative) in Abuja, Saudatu Mahdi. In order to conduct the interviews, I would have to travel to Abuja by plane and stay in a hotel for two or three days. This was a costly undertaking as both flights and hotels in Nigeria's capital are very expensive. I therefore decided that I would only go to Abuja once the groundwork had been laid. Saudatu would send out the invitations on my behalf, as we had done in Lagos, and I would arrive the day before in order to talk with her and her staff.

Regrettably, a general strike was proposed for the week I was to travel and I could not risk either the violence that sometimes erupts during public demonstrations or getting stuck in Abuja. I was to leave Nigeria for Montreal the following week and Saudatu herself was traveling to Senegal for a meeting. Following a lengthy discussion, Saudatu suggested that they invite the men to participate in the interviews and I could use two research assistants to conduct the interviews on my behalf. I would provide a questionnaire and guidelines for them, based on my interviews in Lagos.

I was very hesitant upon embarking on this course of action. I would have preferred to have control of the interviewing process, be able to observe the

men's body language, see how the men interacted with each other and clarify their answers when necessary. I mulled this over for a couple of days, unsure whether it would work or whether the data would be valid. However, Ogbomo suggests that a good researcher has the ability to respond quickly to changing circumstances and claims that, "essentially the quality of the information gathered by the researcher is very much the outcome of how well he or she responds to surprises" (1997: 174). I had earlier been very worried that none of the men invited would agree to participate in the Lagos interviews and I would fail in my undertaking to interview Nigerian men accused of battering their wives. Therefore, I decided to take a chance and I agreed to Saudatu's proposal.

I sent explicit instructions regarding the translation of the data, in that it had to be consistent with the language that the men actually used to describe their experiences and views. With respect to the men who spoke in their native language, I asked the assistants to use the literal translation. Furthermore, I explained the basis of my thesis in order that the assistants would understand the objectives of the research. I provided the money to pay the research assistants, and to reimburse ten participants for their travel expenses and lunch. Once again I was warned to be prepared for failure and that the men probably would not agree to participate in my research project. As mentioned earlier, it is commonly thought that Nigerian men do not talk openly about their relationships.

Ten participants agreed to be interviewed in Abuja. Since I could not attend the interviews in person, I am unable to describe the men's manner of speaking or what they looked like. More importantly, I could not ask them to elaborate on some of their answers; something I feel might have improved the quality of the data. I was concerned that the men's responses might be manufactured for my benefit. In order to gauge the validity of the answers, I compared them with the data I had gathered in Lagos. The responses were consistent with my interviews in Lagos. Despite missing out on the experience of being part of the interview process and not being able to meet the participants, the narratives provided an insight into why these men resorted to violence and the similarities between the men's individual experiences.

## CHAPTER 4

### **Masculinity and Masculinities**

Men grow up with distinct ideas regarding expectations related to their gender role. Many ethnographies maintain that gender is an organizing principle in society and can shape political and socio-cultural processes (Collier and Rosaldo: 1981, Brod and Kaufman: 1994). Factors relating to the cultural construction of masculinity are diverse and problematic. Indeed Lindisfarne and Cornwall claim that masculinity is

“so compelling that it rests on an apparent certainty: that a ‘man is a man’ everywhere, and everywhere this means the same thing...However, essentialist explanations cannot explain variation and the fact that cultural forms are never replicated exactly” (1994:3).

Western models of masculinity are limited when applied to developing and postcolonial African cultures. Louie argues that the failure to provide models of non-Western masculinities perpetuates the “myth of a supra-sexual mankind, placing all other kinds in the margins” (2002:3). Moreover, there are no universals regarding the cultural and social construction of masculinity.

For the purpose of this study I use the definition of masculinity developed by Lindsay and Meischer as,

“a cluster of norms, values and behavioral patterns expressing explicit and implicit expectations of how men should act and represent themselves to others. Ideologies of masculinity.... Are culturally and historically constructed, their meanings continually contested and always in the process of being renegotiated in the context of existing power relations” (2003:4).

This definition effectively illustrates the fluid, changing, relational and performative aspects that contribute to men's notions of masculinity. Nigerian masculinity is not simply a cultural construction, but is subject to many other factors such as age, class and ethnicity. Lindsay and Meischer quote Hodgson and McCurdy, who argue that gender is produced by "the ideas and actions of men in interaction with local and translocal structures and processes" (2003: 7). I discuss masculinity in terms of a complex construction interacting with many diverse processes.

### **Colonial Masculinities**

The construction of masculinity in Africa must be explored in the context of both culture and historical processes, particularly colonialism. In Nigeria, the cultural construction of masculinity is, in part, a product of the historical processes of colonialism. Miles argues that

"To colonize is to alter identity. Among its other transformative consequences, colonialism entails the superimposition of the colonizer's sovereignty and, to varying degrees, it's very self upon the colonized. As a result, the colonized society can no longer define itself independently of the hegemon" (1994:42).

By omitting the experience of colonialism concerning men and masculinity, we run the risk of "overlooking the consequences for those among the colonized whose bodies were at the receiving end of violence" (Hayes, 1997:52).

Colonization provided a common experience for Nigerian men and shapes their present ideals with respect to 'being a man'.

Nigeria gained its independence from British colonial rule in 1960. The British ruled Nigeria through indirect rule using traditional rulers to impose their regulations and culture on the Nigerians. Colonialism has had an impact on how Nigerian men construct their notions of masculinity, kinship and family (Lindsay: 2003, Miles: 1994, Falola: 2001). The source of power was very much in the hands of the colonial masters resulting in Nigerian men negotiating their masculinity on multiple levels. At home, in the private domain, men were the head of their household but in the public space were subordinate to the colonial rulers. Furthermore, within the men's own subculture there are hierarchies with respect to indigenous rulers, the man's place within his lineage and his capacity to earn money.

Lindsay discusses factors such as Nigerian men working as house servants and cooks for the colonialists, engaging in conjugal work normally carried out by women. In this context, Nigerian men were considered a 'man' in his village and became 'boy' to their colonial masters (2003:12). Although the colonialist did not see their house servant as being a 'real man', paradoxically they considered him sexually threatening. Hunt argues that,

*"gender was an important axis along which colonial power was constructed but also that European projections of Africans and other colonized peoples as demonized, sexualized, feminine 'other' worked to feminize and tame, and thus to diminish and control, colonized men and women 1997:9).*

During this period masculinity became part of a racialised discourse. Said argues with respect to the Orientalism, that men are somewhat feminized and



“penetrated, silenced and possessed” (1978:207) by the West. Meischer and Lindsay contrast the “effeminate” colonial subject and the “manly” Englishman in colonial Nigeria (2003:2). This paradigm provided a dual system under which the colonial manhood was revered and Nigerian men were marginalized with respect to their male identity.

Kimmel, claims that “all masculinities are not created equal; or rather, we are all created equal, but any hypothetical equality evaporates quickly because all definitions of masculinity are not equally valued in society” (1994:124). In Nigeria, the colonial regimes sought to model Nigerian masculinity on their own norms and values, such as those pertaining to men as the ‘breadwinner’ and the structure of the nuclear family. Moreover, Chopra, Osella and Osella posit the thought that masculinities should be both situated and contextualized because “it is within social spaces that gender as an identity is transacted and negotiated” (2000:30). Colonialism, as an historical process, is thus fundamental to any study regarding Nigerian constructions of masculinity and male identity.

Prior to colonialism in Nigeria, women played a central role in decision-making and contributed to the finances of a family. A husband was, and still is, expected to provide his wife with the money to establish a business in order to generate an income. Women usually begin by way of trading or selling cooked food. A couple’s finances are normally kept separate and men often complain that they do not know anything of their wives’ income (Smedley: 2004). The men I interviewed bear out this claim. Lindsay suggests that, in pre-colonial Nigeria,

“normative ideals linking money and masculinity did not include the notion that men should be the sole financial providers within their households or that wives should not earn money as well” (2003:46). Nigerian constructions of family included the extended family of both the husband and the wife. Subsequent to this, during the colonial period, Nigerian men were encouraged to conform to Western ideals of family and manhood; with the mother a homemaker looking after her children and all being supported by the male “breadwinner”. In Nigeria following colonialism, the notion of the African extended family and working mother were no longer fundamental to the dominant discourse.

Lindsay (2003) argues that there was a dissonance between dominant discourse and local practice. Nigerian men and women strategically manipulated Western ideals of gender in order to manage their daily lives and maximize their economic gains. In theory, Yoruba women endorsed the discourse of the man being the sole ‘breadwinner’ in order to gain the salary benefits available to them by the colonial regime. However, in practice, women continued to work outside the home and to contribute to the household finances.

De Neve claims that,

“while multiple masculinities are usually cultivated and embodied by different men, it has also been suggested that at the same time, there exists a culturally recognized ‘core’ of masculinity - particularly espoused by women - that centers around the responsibilities of men as providers for the family” (2000:93).

In this context, both men and women are complicit and actively perpetuate notions of masculinity and manhood, negotiating creatively within the constraints of their socio-cultural environment.

The impact of colonialism was not only felt by men, women suffered as a consequence. A Nigerian friend of my Mother-in-law who is in her nineties explained to me that "*Yoruba women did not know about this kind of problem (conjugal violence) between a husband and wife before the British arrived and began making wahala (trouble), not like you are seeing it now*". Smedley acknowledges this assertion and argues that "some people claim that the incident of physical abuse has increased since the Europeans came" (2004:170). The colonial government imposed patriarchal regulations that gave men more authority within the context of the family. As I have already mentioned, men became the sole 'breadwinners' whereas prior to this, women were considered economic partners. Okeke-Ihejirika maintains that,

"colonization and capitalist development, as major definable markers of Africa's historical transition, undoubtedly afforded men the foundation to build and legitimize new power bases and privileges. These power bases and privileges have introduced new patriarchal patterns that in some cases are not even justifiable on indigenous grounds. The hybridized social order, with its fusion of Western and African features, also embodies contradictions that blur the boundaries of the old and the new" (2004:5).

Okeke-Ihejirika (2004) accedes to the diminished status of women since the colonial period. However, her argument gives rise to factors related to the 'crisis of masculinity' referred to by many theorists (Connell: 2000, Hatty: 2000); the frustration men experience in living up to their duties and responsibilities as

men. In addition, similar to the Nigerian context, Silberschmidt argues that Kenyan men “do not live up to either traditional or ‘modern’ roles” (1999:126). However, during colonialism there was a transformation in the discourse and the ideology of the man as ‘breadwinner emerged and, according to Silberschmidt,

“male financial contributions became particularly important. The substantial change in the need for contributions to the family support challenged the ideology of separate spheres and a majority of men were neither able nor prepared to deal with their new responsibilities and obligations” (1999:126).

Men’s access to resources has diminished as well as their control over women thus calling into question “the whole ideology on which male prestige, male dominance as well as male notions about themselves is founded” (Silberschmidt, 1999: 126). The men I interviewed are, according to the dominant discourse regarding masculinity, the beneficiaries of power and privilege but, in practice, do not experience it in their daily lives.

### **Contemporary Masculinities**

Presently, Nigerian men cope with both traditional and contemporary ideals of masculinity. Traditional notions of masculinity expect a man to be a husband and father and have overall control of the family as head of the household. Inherent to the laundry list of attributes is control of his wife or his wife’s behavior. White argues that “there’s a sanctioned untidiness to masculinity in Africa, an encouraged (or at least not discouraged at all) freedom for men to fashion themselves into the man with the masculinity a situation requires” (2003: 251). Contemporary constructions of manhood in the context of Nigeria are less

tangible. Money has always been important in Nigeria and is fundamental to a man's ability to gain prestige and status in society. Lindsay and Miescher argue that in recent times, Nigerian constructions of masculinity have undergone change resulting in dissatisfaction, thus

*"discourses on masculinity that offer models that many of today's young men struggle to emulate. Caught between discursive domains that create variant images of masculinity, from responsible provider to insatiable lover, youths find that becoming a man is fraught with complications. Accused by wives of being 'useless' and passed over by would-be girlfriends for lacking the economic potency to satisfy them, young men find themselves in a position of diminished control" (2003: 20).*

Indeed, this is in line with Chant and Gutmann's claim that the young and poor men are the most vulnerable and marginalized with respect to their masculine identity (2000: 1). The purported privilege that manhood enjoy brings with it a sense of frustration and anger directed at their wives.

The research conducted in Kenya by Silberschmidt (1999) indicates that men find themselves in a vulnerable position as a result of "lack of fit between the traditional moral universe, norms and values and the actual/changed social reality" (1999: 128). The conflict between traditional and modern values creates a tension and, as a result, these men redefine their notions of what it means to 'be a man'. Those men who cannot adjust resort to conjugal violence in order to maintain and demonstrate their authority and control. Cornwall argues that in present day Nigeria, the dissonance between traditional and contemporary notions of masculinity leaves a man, whose ideal was being in control and the

breadwinner of his family, “without any cultural referent with which to rescue his self-esteem” (2003: 239).

Not all of the men who participated in this study were from a working-class background or living very close to the breadline; several were from the middle class. According to the literature, conjugal violence cuts across all social classes (Hatty: 2000, Dobash and Dobash: 1998, Counts, Brown, Campbell: 1999). Wealthier couples have more options available to them, women can leave their husbands without worrying about their financial situation, their children or the stigma attached to divorce. In Nigeria, wealthier men can also afford to form second and third households (Effah-Chukwuma and Osarenren: 2001, Silberschmidt: 1999), options that are unavailable to some of the poor or unemployed men I interviewed.

In the context of Nigeria, masculinity must be viewed from a “multiplicity of subject positions within any discourse” (Moore, 1994:143), where there are many competing discourses relating to the cultural construction of the male identity; colonial, traditional and contemporary. Moore argues that it is at this point that multiple masculinities can be recognized as existing within the same context (1994:146). The cultural construction of masculinity is a result of complex historical, traditional, local and global processes mediated by, among other factors, the individual’s age, ethnicity and status.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Conjugal Violence**

For the purpose of this thesis I use the term conjugal violence as an alternative to domestic violence or family violence. This study explores the violence that occurs between a husband and his wife not child abuse or other forms of abuse that take place within the context of the family. Moreover, I use the term husband and wife and not partner because all of my participants were married. Their subjectivities and cultural environment shape the perception and understanding of the perpetrators of conjugal violence. Irrespective of the apparent universal nature of conjugal violence, the experience of those involved cannot be essentialized or generalized.

### **Statistics**

Statistics regarding conjugal violence are extremely difficult to find.

Underreporting of this form of violence against women is common and few third world societies acknowledge having reliable or indeed any statistics at all related to conjugal violence. Those women who do take action form a small percentile of a far greater population of abused women (Okun: 1986). Mihalle and Elliot argue that,

“underreporting is one of the major problems in all studies of domestic violence. Victims of marital violence may fail to report their victimization in because of shame, fear of reprisal, faulty memory, they may not understand the questions, or they may consider the violence a private matter or too minor to mention” (1997:296/7).

Thus statistics related to conjugal violence can only be used as a broad estimate and cannot be relied upon as representative of the actual numbers of women who experience conjugal violence, particularly in the context of Nigeria.

Project Alert for Violence Against Women opened the first shelter for battered women in Nigeria three years ago. The shelter is based in Lagos and they are finding increasing numbers of women using it on a repeat basis. Josephine told me that the address of the premises has remained confidential, consequently they have not had to move location as yet. The staff encourages women to report their abuse but no pressure is exerted on them and their decision is respected. Josephine, the director of Project Alert, told me that although more women are reporting their abuse, not enough are doing so because of the fear and shame associated with this particular form of violence. Measures are taken by the staff members in order to ensure that no reprisals by family members or husbands against the women upon their return home; these include personal contact for days and possibly weeks following the incident.

Project Alert has collected the first statistics for conjugal violence and gender-based violence in Nigeria. The staff scans all of the newspapers daily in order to assess the reported instances of violence against women. Researchers administered a questionnaire to three thousand women in twelve of the thirty-six states in Nigeria and held focus groups and individual discussions. The sample targeted for the questionnaire were market women, women in the work place, young women in schools, social welfare officers, policewomen and medical



doctors. Of the three thousand questionnaires, two thousand three hundred and twenty were found to be correctly filled in. A staggering thirty two percent of women from all twelve states reported having experienced some form of conjugal violence. According to the literature this number should in fact be much higher because studies claim that conjugal violence is persistently underreported; (Mihalle and Elliot: 1997, Okun: 1986, Effah-Chukwuma and Osarenren; 2001, Gelles and Loseke: 1993). Findings show that market women (Effah-Chukwuma and Osarenren, 2001:69), experience the highest instances of conjugal violence and they admitted reporting the violence only to their parents and families. Furthermore, the numbers of women experiencing conjugal violence are consistently higher in the Southeast and the North of Nigeria where Effah-Chukwuma and Osarenren state that,

“this picture shown in the different zones simply confirms the cultural orientation of many men in such zones. Culturally, in the Southeast: North-Central and Northeast, wife battering is not seriously frowned upon except in few cases where the woman sustains grievous bodily harm” (2001:30).

The ethnic group from the Southeast is mainly Igbo and in the North you have the Hausa people.

I asked Josephine if she herself noticed men from any particular ethnic group committing conjugal violence. Apparently, twelve of every twenty women who attend the shelter are from the Igbo ethnic group. I asked Josephine why she thought this was the case. Josephine said that, in her experience, it is very important for both men and women in Igbo society to be married. Educated women marry men with little or no education in order that they

conform to socio-cultural pressures and can be considered full social beings.

However, Hodgson and McCurdy claim that in Igbo culture, every woman must marry but also that there has been a shift and some women are pushing the boundaries and waiting for the right person, sometimes preferring to be the second wife of a wealthier man (2001:242/243). This ideal, however, is pertinent for those women from a higher social class; women and men from lower economic groups have fewer opportunities open to them. Nigerian men are bounded by their need for children, particularly sons, "as proof of their manhood" (Hodgson and McCurdy, 2001:240). Alternately, women need to produce a son in order to keep her husband and avoid the wrath of her in-laws who will often counsel their son to find another wife in order to fill the void.

The statistics collected by Project Alert are conducive to Warrior's estimate that "in most countries, between twenty five and fifty percent of all women have been physically assaulted at least once by their intimate partner" (1999:17).<sup>10</sup>

### **Conjugal Violence as a Cultural Construct**

There is a multitude of definitions related to conjugal violence. Article 2a of the UN Draft Declaration of Elimination of Violence Against Women encompasses a

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<sup>10</sup> In the United States, studies carried out in the nineties showed that one in three women experience violence from an intimate partner and that woman aged 19-29 report more conjugal violence than any other age group and only one in seven of all conjugal assaults are reported. Furthermore, two-thirds of all men who commit conjugal violence are aged between twenty-four and forty (<http://abanet.org/domviol/stats.html>). These figures are in keeping with my findings and the age of the men I interviewed in Nigeria and the McGill Conjugal Violence Clinic.

cultural element that is not present in many other definitions. Conjugal violence is defined as;

“physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation” (Effah-Chukwuma and Osarenren, 2001:66).

This study explores the abuse inflicted on a wife by her husband; this can include physical, sexual, financial or psychological abuse. Psychological abuse can consist of emotional cruelty, name calling, threats of violence and threats of taking the children. All of the men I interviewed had engaged in physical abuse as well as emotional abuse and in certain cases, marital rape. Although female genital mutilation, acid attacks and widowhood rites are commonplace in Nigeria and are included in the UN definition of conjugal violence, this study does not include them. Until recently, conjugal violence was regarded as an accepted form of discipline used by men to control their wives.

Effah-Chukwuma and Osarenren posit that it was only in the late nineties, following the change from military to civilian rule, that there was an effort to recognize conjugal violence as a problem experienced by Nigerian women (2001:4). Prior to this, conjugal violence was referred to as a ‘husband and wife problem’. Silberschmidt argues that ‘violence is a highly contested term and we need to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate use of physical violence’ (1999:122). Men do not consider conjugal violence an act of violence; it is more a

legitimate method of control, much like a parent disciplining a child (Green: 1999).

Kalu states that “in Nigeria, wife battering is widely accepted as a corrective measure, particularly in cases of consistent insubordination of the wife to the husband’s authority” (1993:369). The interpretation of a ‘good wife’ is one who obeys her husband, tends to his needs as well as to those of the extended family. Furthermore, Smedley claims that “a good wife does not complain, nor does she carry out actions or effects a demeanor that is antagonistic to her husband....works hard and is faithful” (2004: 163/164). Any deviation from this model of a ‘good wife’ exacts disciplinary measures.

Even now, in certain cultures some forms of conjugal violence are not considered abuse; such as physiological, financial and emotional abuse. Green argues that this particular type of abuse is insidious and, although emotional abuse does not leave a visible injury, results in the “sophisticated and systematic wearing down of women’s autonomy and self-esteem. It relies on a range of mechanisms that may be subtle or obvious, it enforces gender roles and is ultimately geared at reinscribing the relations of power” (1999:2).<sup>11</sup>

The definition of conjugal violence as a cultural construct is constantly being contested and negotiated by those who engage with it (Hearn, 1998; Hatty,

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<sup>11</sup> Tom Caplan, the director of the McGill Conjugal Violence Clinic, explained that the support group and counseling can extinguish the physical violence. However, psychological and emotional or financial abuse is resilient and will often continue to be used by men as a mode of control over their partners (personal communication, 2001).

2000). Many theorists and cultures distinguish between wife beating and wife battering and argue that wife beating is universal (Counts, 1999:18, Levinson 1987). Counts argues that "in many non-industrial societies, husbands beat their wives as a physical reprimand...it is viewed as unremarkable... where men who beat their wives are not 'abnormal' or 'deviant' but merely behaving in a culturally expected manner" (1999:4). On the other hand, wife battering is considered to be "something extraordinary, possibly resulting in severe injury, incapacitation, or even death" (1999:4). Much of the violence inflicted by the men I interviewed would be considered wife beating and not wife battering because, despite their wives needing medical treatment from time to time, a hospital stay was not required and their injury did not result in death.

Conjugal violence is sanctioned in many cultures by law, religion or societal and family pressure (Effah-Chukwuma and Osarenren: 2001, Counts: 1999). Silberschmidt refers to the cultural construction of conjugal violence and claims that "the meanings and applications of the term violence are culturally specific and physical hurt done to others counts as violence only in certain social contexts" (1999:122). Conjugal violence is one such term; it is distinct in that the violence is inflicted by an intimate and is of a private nature. Effah-Chukwuma and Osarenren concur that "the definition of conjugal violence varies and is closely connected to the cultural context in which it occurs" (2001:66). Unlike Canada where there is a zero tolerance policy with respect to conjugal violence, in Nigeria, violence between a husband and a wife is seen as a legitimate use of

force. Silberschmidt posits that “violence is a highly contested term and we need to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate uses of physical forces” (1999: 122). This begs the question “how much conjugal violence can be considered too much?”

Nigeria is just beginning to address and label the problem of conjugal violence through NGO’s and pressure groups such as those I worked with during my time there. While in Lagos, I attended a meeting on the process of bereavement. I spoke to a Nigerian doctor who attended the meeting and explained my research project and he told me that “*this problem (conjugal violence) does not happen here, you have arguments and maybe some reason to discipline between couples but you cannot call it violence*”. At the same meeting another male doctor explained that, “*yes, it sometimes happens but it is a matter to be dealt with between a husband and wife, or maybe even the parents*”. Each of them assured me that I would not find any man who would talk to me of “such things”. According to the statistics, conjugal violence does happen frequently in Nigeria. However, this particular act of violence has yet to be labelled as such.

Nigeria has a plethora of laws that condone the use of violence within the context of the family. Northern Nigeria’s Penal Code, section 55(1), states that

“nothing is an offence which does not amount to the infliction of grievous hurt upon any person and which is done:

- a) by a parent or guardian for the purpose of correcting his child or ward, such child or ward being under eighteen years of age or.....
- b) by a husband for the purpose of correcting his wife, such husband and wife being subject to any native law or custom in which such correction is recognized as lawful” (Effah-Chukwuma and Osarenren, 2001:68/69)

Section 58 of the same penal code adds:

- c) “nothing is an offence by reason that causes or that it is intended to cause or that is likely to cause any injury if that injury is so slight that no person of ordinary sense and temper would complain of such injury” (Effah-Chukwuma and Osarenren, 2001:69)

The Criminal Code in operation in the South of Nigeria shares many similarities to the Northern states, permitting or justifying the use of violence within the family. However, in the Northern Muslim regions of Nigeria the Shari’a Penal Code system has been in effect since 1999 and is now used in twelve states (Eze-Anaba, 2004). In effect, these states have two parallel criminal law systems in operation, the Nigerian common law, which is based on the English system, and Shari’a law. In cases where a capital sentence has been handed down by the Shari’a courts in the North, the Federal courts have overruled the sentence. Although no death sentences have been carried out, it is important to keep in mind that many other sentences have, such as public whippings (Eze-Anaba, 2004).

According to Eze-Anaba (2004), in essence Shari’a law and Islam treat men and women equally. However, it is open to interpretation by judges and the men who use the system and this leads to its abuse. Indeed, the men I interviewed spoke to me about Shari’a law. Shari’a law is perceived by them as supporting men while condemning women to stoning and punishment for breaches of the feminine code of behavior, for example, not looking after her husband in the traditional manner or adultery.

Currently, conjugal violence can only be tried under a charge of criminal assault. Consequently, many women do not report incidences for fear of having their husbands arrested and shamed by a public prosecution. According to the non-Governmental Organizations, Project Alert and LEDAP (Legal Defense and Assistance Project), the proposed conjugal violence bill is culturally sensitive and it will encourage more women to come forward and report their abuse without the fear of shame or reprisals. It is based on laws established in other countries but adjusted to be made more relevant to Nigerian culture. For example, the bill includes traditional marriages and customs as a basis for reporting the violence and the extended family can report or represent the victim.

Effah-Chukwuma and Osarenren (2001) suggests that many women do not report conjugal violence to the police for fear of ridicule, humiliation and reprisals. Moreover, women are advised by officials to return to their husbands and be a 'good wife'. Women who have called the police report being asked questions such as, "what did you do to provoke him?" or "did you serve him his food on time?" (2001:70). None of the men I interviewed have been arrested for criminal assault and none of their wives, apart from taking refuge in the shelter, had reported the abuse to the police. Green argues that,

"worldwide, class and ethnicity play overwhelming roles in determining who is arrested, prosecuted and convicted. Generally speaking, legal action is likely to be taken only when the conjugal abuse exceeds certain limits or when this 'private' behavior becomes a public nuisance, forcing the police to act as mediators" (1999: 112).



In Nigeria, arrest irrespective of class and ethnicity is unlikely. However, according to Josephine, once a family member considers the violence to be excessive, an elder will mediate and speak to the husband (personal conversation: 2004).

Recently, the British Broadcasting Commission (BBC) reported that “the government in Nigeria had made the first tentative steps to acknowledging the problem of violence against women” and the conjugal violence bill was about to be given its first public reading.<sup>12</sup> NGO’s have worked hard in presenting the conjugal violence bill to the media and government officials in the six main geopolitical states in Nigeria.<sup>13</sup>

### **Implications of Conjugal Violence**

The contrast between conjugal violence and other patterns of violence is essential to this research. Statistics from the United States suggest that women are 2.5 times more likely to sustain serious injury from their husband or partner than by a stranger (<http://abanet.org/domviol/stats.html>). Conjugal violence is distinct because the perpetrator of the violence is an intimate partner. Hatty cites Fagan, and argues that In the case of conjugal violence,

“the emotional ties between the assailant and the victims, the private and recurring nature of the violence, the prevalence of domestic violence compared with other crimes,

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<sup>12</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4596645.stm> 31/05/05

<sup>13</sup> While I was in Nigeria conducting my fieldwork I had attended a workshop held in Lagos for the purpose of presenting the conjugal violence bill. I asked Ito Eze-Anaba, the director of LEDAP, if she had gained much support from government officials. Ito explained that, “*surprisingly, most of the resistance had come from the female senators. I was very surprised, as I had not expected this response from the women. Now they (the female senators) have gained a higher position, they do not want to be seen as ‘rocking the boat’ or feminists. They fear what the men might say if they are pushing the conjugal violence bill ahead. They are not yet comfortable with themselves*” (personal conversation, October 2004).

and often the irrational rage-driven outbursts associated with domestic violence make the logic of deterrence largely irrelevant. For these reasons, the effective legal control of domestic violence is difficult” (Hatty, 2000:48).

Why are men who beat their wives only violent within their intimate relationships and not generally violent? Indeed the men I have interviewed in the past at the McGill Conjugal Violence Clinic and the men I interviewed in Nigeria have no predilection for general violence, it is directed at one person, their wives. Conjugal violence is the most common and frequent form of violence against women in Nigeria (Effah-Chukwuma, 2001) and its ‘private’ nature is an obstacle that prevents it being dealt with in the same manner as other ‘public’ forms of violence.

### **Criminal Assault Charges vs. Conjugal Violence Bill**

What is the difference between pressing criminal charges and having legislation to deal with conjugal violence? How does this impact the reporting of it by the victim? I have written about the current laws in Nigeria regarding the reporting of conjugal violence. Effah-Chukwuma and Osarenren maintain that “there are certain provisions in our (Nigerian) statute books such as the penal Code of Northern Nigeria, which encourages chastisement of wives by husbands” (2001: xii). Eze-Ananba claims that presently the Nigerian legal system is somewhat antagonistic and does not seek to resolve issues such as conjugal violence (2004:16). The Nigerian police are not trained to handle conjugal violence and tend to “taunt, humiliate or trivialize” (Eze-Anaba, 2004:16) the victims of conjugal violence until such time as they drop the charges. Therefore, cultural

factors regarding husband's rights i.e. women as property of their husband and public investigation into private matters impact how the police and judicial system handle cases of conjugal violence.

Criminal charges, if proven, result in the husband standing trial with the wife and victim as the only witness against him. Eze-Anaba contends that the proposed Conjugal Violence Bill makes possible such processes as a Protection Order and "under the civil justice process will involve less complicated and quicker legal proceedings resulting in the enforced discipline or separation of the perpetrator of violence from the family home for a certain period of time as well as rehabilitation of the victim" (2004:18). Protection from reprisals is important for the victim of conjugal violence.

In the context of Nigeria, the family experience tremendous economic hardship as well as the shame brought on them by having their husband, father or son imprisoned. This contributes to women's reluctance to press charges against their husbands. The conjugal violence law will permit the victim to press charges, have interim protection for her and her children in addition to support for her husband without initially charging him with criminal assault. Furthermore, unlike criminal assault charges, the conjugal violence bill allows for cases to be heard in confidence thus protecting the family from public attention.

I asked Josephine if the women who attended the shelter actually wanted to return to their husbands when they left the shelter. Josephine told me that "*in most cases they do want to return to their homes. It is important to the women to remain*

*married, have financial security and a home for their children. If a woman does leave her husband and returns to live with her parents, she is normally told to go back to her husband and work it out. Unless a woman can earn a lot of money, she cannot survive in this environment alone".* The staff of Project Alert acts as mediators for couples and attempt to end their disputes. Despite a Nigerian woman's financial independence, she does seek the support from her husband or extended family. Nigeria does not have a social welfare system or national pension scheme irrespective of class. The Conjugal Violence Bill might give these women more options than they have at the present time.

## CHAPTER 6

### **Men's Narratives**

In this chapter I provide the life history of each of the participants in this study and the relevant data in order to contextualize the narratives; permitting the reader to engage with me and the men who gave their time and shared their experiences with me. I offer the men's narratives and subsequent analysis in terms of explanations and justifications for conjugal violence, the men's subjective notions of masculinity as well as other factors related to the issue of masculinity and conjugal violence.

I have chosen to refer to the men as Nigerians and not by their respective ethnic groups, i.e. Igbo, Yoruba or Hausa except in the instances where the men have elected to do so themselves. I do not seek to generalize or suggest that these men represent a homogenous group. Gutmann posits the thought that "models of homogeneity among men falsely and inexorably lead to "the notion that there is a unitary man's point of view" (1996: 20) and cautions against universals and generalizations. However, the responses of the men to my questions and indeed the discussions held between themselves overwhelmingly reflect a shared sense of Nigerianess. For example, when I asked the question, how important is it to have children and is it important to have a son? The response from all of the men was '*very important*'. A son guarantees the continuation of the patriline and children show that the man is virile and capable of "*bringing issue*". I will provide many other examples that identify the collective nature of these men's values and

belief systems regarding the cultural construction of masculinity and male identity.<sup>14</sup> I analyze the narratives that relate to the issues of socialization, masculinity, the notion of breadwinner, sexual behavior, son preference, honor and shame, adultery and where on the body the men hit their wives. Moreover, the men's narratives illustrate the dissonance between the dominant discourse regarding masculinity and these men's perceptions of what it takes to 'be a man'.

Connell views gender identities as having derived from culturally and historically constructed versions of traits, beliefs and values. Hence, "masculinities are configurations of practice within gender relations, a structure that includes large-scale institutions and economic relations as well as face to face relationships and sexuality" (2000:29). This paradigm of masculinities permits for a more shared experience of masculinity and of these men's experience as 'Nigerians', not Yoruba, Igbo or Hausa men.

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<sup>14</sup> Silberschmidt supports her argument for generalizing with respect to the background of the men and women, who participated in her research and states that,

"with this reservation..., neither men nor women were homogenous groups and social differences were very apparent in the interview sample. Yet having said this, women had much in common, and so did men. Most strikingly, in spite of the fact that both men and women came from different social strata there was often a surprising unanimity in their responses to the questions asked (1999:28).

The participants of this study were from all three of the main ethnic groups in Nigeria and from a similar social class. I have already discussed the cultural differences that characterize each of them. Irrespective of their ethnicity, there existed commonalities with regards to the participant's response. At the same time Gutmann argues that "despite the diversity of male identities, at the same time certain important similarities exist among men who share a particular socio-cultural and historical experience" (1999:223).

## **The Participants**

### **Lagos**

Ifeanyi Okechukwu was thirty three years old, had been married for one year and had one child. He had a university degree and worked as a peace builder. He is from the Igbo ethnic group and a Christian. Ifeanyi was a very quiet and well-spoken young man who suffered abuse from both his parents as a child, although, of the two parents, his mother was more severe with him. His father also engaged in conjugal violence as well as having a drinking problem.

Odusanya Olajide was thirty-four years old and had been married for three years. He had one child. Odusanya had a graduate degree but was not currently working. He was a Muslim and from the Yoruba ethnic group. Odusanya presented himself as a very cheerful character and said that he came from a loving family where he had not experienced any violence.

Udom Chijioke was a thirty nine year old pastor who was unmarried and came to the interview on behalf of a number of men who wanted to share their views but did not want to come themselves. He was from the Igbo ethnic group and was a Christian. Udom was very outspoken regarding the difficulties men experience in Nigeria. He read out comments from other men and also shared his experience as a pastor dealing with couples who were violent in their relationship.

Kingsley Nwabueze was forty two years old, had been married for eight years and had four children. He had a high school certificate and was self-

employed. Kingsley was from the Igbo ethnic group and was a Christian. Kingsley was very quiet to begin with but as time went on and the other men began to speak, so did he. He was quick to judge others and was asked not to criticize the men during the interview. Kingsley, according to Bridget, the assistant from the NGO, was not very honest with respect to his admitting that he hit his wife. Apparently, he was one of the more violent men who attended the interviews.

Okeagba Adebayo was thirty-seven years old, had been married for six years and had one child. Okeagba was from the Yoruba ethnic group and was Christian. He said that he had a Bachelor of Science and was a minister of the church. Okeagba was very quiet and sat looking at his hands. Many times, when asked if he wanted to say anything he declined. However, after some time had passed, Okeagba asked if he could talk and he spoke for a good twenty minutes. Okeagba's story had the greatest impact on the group. After he had spoken he sat taller in his seat and contributed often to the discussion.

Napolean Shaibu was thirty-three years old, had three children and was a Christian. He had a high school diploma and worked as a civil servant. He was from the Igala ethnic group.

Victor Emano was from the Igbo ethnic group, in his late thirties. Victor was well built in spite of not being very tall. He was jovial and engaged easily with the other men in the group. Victor was the most vocal of the group. He did not hesitate to talk about his experiences using very colorful explanations and



gestures. Victor spoke openly about conjugal violence, what it meant to him 'be a man' and his relationship with his wife. I had the impression that he was happy to share his experiences with others who might be sympathetic to his difficulties. Furthermore, Victor provided the basis for much of the data that I collected. He made comments to the other men thus stimulating exchanges between them. Victor looked directly at you while he is talking. He modulated his voice, beginning a story with a soft tone while progressively getting louder as he got to what he perceived as the most important part. He would gesticulate with his hands, sometimes banging the table or clapping his hands loudly in order to enhance his narrative. Having said this, he had a great sense of humor and did elicit many laughs from all who attended the session.

Ambrose worked as a cook for my mother-in-law and was 65 plus years old. Ambrose was from the Igbo ethnic group and he had a son. His wife lived in the village and visits him on occasion. We held numerous informal talks and covered a number of topics. It was not as open as the group interviews and there were many silences while he tried to find answers to the questions.

### **Abuja**

Ade was 42, had a school diploma and was self-employed. He had been married for fourteen years and had two wives and eight children. He was from the Edo ethnic group and was a Christian. Ade said that marriage kept him from "carrying unnecessary ladies about" and he beat his wives because they provoked him.

Moshood was forty-five years old and was a teacher. He was married in a civil ceremony fifteen years ago and had two children. He was from the Hausa ethnic group and was a Muslim. Moshood began beating his wife after three years of being married and had had an affair with another woman for the past twelve years.

Hassan was thirty-nine years old, held a bachelor's degree and was a businessman. He had been married for ten years and had two children. He was from the Ebbira ethnic group and was a Muslim. Hassan had continued a relationship with another woman for twelve years.

Deji was thirty-nine years old, had a high school diploma and was a police officer. He had been married for nineteen years and had five children. Deji was from the Yoruba ethnic group and was a Muslim. Deji was the only man who admitted to beating his children and often he and his wife ended up fighting as a result of her trying to stop him beating them. Deji said that he would be happy if his wife left him and that no one would blame him. Deji said that he would keep the five children.

Danjuma was thirty-five years old, had an advanced diploma and was an accountant. He had been married for eight years and had one child. He was from the Hausa ethnic group and was a Muslim. Danjuma had beaten his wife since the second year of their marriage. Danjuma believed that a woman with more education than her husband would not need to listen to him.

Funmi was twenty-eight years old, had a high school diploma and was a builder. He had been married for one year and had one child. He was from the Edo ethnic group and was a Christian. Funmi had beaten his wife since the beginning of their marriage and he believed that “money makes you a man”.

Gbega was forty years old, had attended technical school and was a builder. He had been married for seven years but did not have any children. He was from the Yoruba ethnic group and was a Christian. Gbega’s wife was from the Igbo ethnic group. In my experience, it was not common to find men marrying women from a different ethnic group. Gbega had three children from a previous marriage.

Hezekiah was thirty-two years old, had a high school diploma and was a police officer. He had been married for eight years and had two children. He was from the Idoma ethnic group and was a Christian. Hezekiah started beating his wife four years into the marriage. They did not live together; his wife lived in Lagos and visited him on occasions when he permitted it. Hezekiah had had an ongoing relationship with another woman for four years.

Imo was thirty-eight years old, had a high school diploma and was a businessman. He had been married for eight years and had two children. He was from the Igbo ethnic group and was a Christian. Imo believed that 99% of married Nigerian men had affairs outside of the marriage. Imo had been beating his wife since the beginning of the marriage.

Joke was thirty-two years old, had a high school certificate and worked as a security man. He had been married for nine years and had one child, a girl. He was from the Benue ethnic group and was a Christian. Joke had beaten his wife severely and had had numerous affairs. He spoke of his intention to take another wife who would give him a son.

### **The Men's Narratives**

#### **Part one: Socialization**

Not all Nigerian men physically abuse their wives, yet most grew up in homes where parents were strict disciplinarians, they watched their parents fighting, and were taught the same values. So how does socialization factor in? A good deal of the literature on conjugal violence illustrates that social learning is a contributing factor regarding men's propensity for conjugal violence (Dobash and Dobash: 1983, Hatty: 2000, Collier: 1998, Kaufman: 1998). In Nigeria, the extended family plays a major role in the upbringing of children. Okehie- Offoha and Sadiku suggest that "the child is socialized within the family, but not by the parents alone.....They provide physical and emotional care, teach young members the parents' culture, and influence how cultural and social realities around them are interpreted" (1996: 67). In addition, parents who have used violence as a means of conflict resolution or discipline in the home serves as a template upon which children can model themselves. In the context of Nigeria, I feel that the notion of socialization manifests itself more as a process of acculturation since it is not only the parents who are the primary caregivers; the

extended family become involved in teaching children their cultural expectations and behavior.

Nigerian culture permits and encourages men to use force in order to discipline both his wife and children. In my experience, most Nigerian families use corporal punishment as a means of disciplining their children and it is not unusual to find teachers using the same form of punishment in schools.

Acculturation into the values and beliefs of the dominant ideology regarding gender relations and roles is fundamental to child rearing in Nigeria. Lovett posits that, in Tanzania “boys and girls were socialized differently because of the varying degrees of autonomy and influence they one day would or would not wield within the larger society as a whole” (2001: 53). Women are taught that, as wives, sisters and daughters, they should defer to the men in their lives and boys grow up to be men modeled on their fathers.

Effah-Chukwuma and Osarenren claim that a Nigerian extended family “can be considered to be society’s contractor, whose contract it is to prepare the younger and newer members of society for future assumptions of adult roles and responsibilities” (2001:66). Cultural expectations form part of that contract and male as well as female members of the family provide boys with their first introduction to their masculine identity. Remember Ifeanyi’s mother still advises him on how to ‘be a man’ in society. In Nigeria, the extended family is the primary place where children first learn the basic ideals of gender roles and relations.

The element of cultural learning is imbibed in every aspect of gender distinction and in Nigeria this distinction begins from birth. I have already mentioned the preference for sons. Girls traditionally help their mothers with work that will prepare them as wives. Cultural learning is not only central to childhood development but impacts later life. As boys mature they perform their gender role within the constraints of their socio-cultural environment and the extended family unit in which they learn their values. Ramirez claims that the construction of masculinity for boys in Puerto Rico is rigorous and,

*“the socialisation and training to which the child is subjected from an early age require the suppression of any feeling that may imply weakness, frailty, fear, sensitivity, affective spontaneity; and on the contrary require learning self-destructive or high-risk answers” (1999:59).*

There are parallels between Puerto Rico and Nigeria that illustrate the demanding acculturation process for inculcating the demands of a masculine identity.

The link between these men’s experience with social learning and conjugal violence is ambiguous and cannot support or disprove assumptions regarding socialization and men committing acts of conjugal violence. As I have stated most Nigerian men grow up in a similar family environment with regards to discipline and cultural expectations. However, not every Nigerian man uses conjugal violence as a means of controlling and disciplining his wife.

## **Part Two: Masculinity**

### **Deviant Masculinities**

I consider two narratives particularly significant because they clearly illustrated the focus of my research: i.e. how men construct their notions of masculinity and its relationship to conjugal violence. Okeagba and Ifeanyi's experiences were distinctive because Okeagba was the abused partner and Ifeanyi, contrary to ascribed gender roles in Nigeria, made an effort to help his wife with the household chores. Kleinman, Copp and Henderson call narratives that move away from the norm, "deviant" (1997:487) but point out that they are also "crucial for analysis because they provide the exception that tests the rule" (1997:487). Thus, Okeagba and Ifeanyi narratives and the groups' response to them illustrated their frustrations with respect to shifting gender relations, social order and economic hardships in contemporary Nigeria. I also explain the impact that these elements have on their subjective notions of masculinity, sense of self as well as the manifestation of these frustrations within their intimate relationships.

### **Okeagba**

After introductions had been made and a certain amount of time during which the men talked generally about themselves, I asked them if they would like to tell me about what happened when they quarreled with their wives. All but one of the men, Okeagba, shared their experiences with the group. I asked Okeagba if he would like to add anything and he said no. Then after about 30-40 minutes,

Okeagba said that he would like to say something. He said that he did not have the same experience as the other men and that it was his wife who was abusing him. Okeagba explained that *"I met my wife while traveling around the country as a pastor and I immediately fell under her spell"*. He said that he did not know what happened but he married her, abandoning his girlfriend of nine years. He said *"the very month after we were married was when our problems started. I told her this was what the bible said we should do. I prayed, she refused, no explanation. She called me and told me that she had to control the man and the house. There was never peace in the house; she was a demon possessed woman"*. He said that he was not happy about it but was too ashamed of himself and therefore continued to put up with what he called *"my wife's' wickedness"*.

While Okeagba was talking the other men shook their heads and one or two commented that, *'this was not how a man should be in his own house"*. Okeagba explained that he awoke one night (he was sleeping on the floor while his baby son and his wife slept on the bed) to his wife talking and *"crossing me nakedly"*. By this he meant that she was jumping back and forth over his body while naked. He pretended to be asleep and this continued over a week or so until he confronted his wife about it and she slapped him. After some weeks passed, he told her that this would have to stop. She took her clothes off and lay with her legs across the door. Okeagba said *"the trick is she wanted me to cross her so she can do anything she like"*. He pulled her away and she stood up and knocked him to



the ground. Okeagba said *"it was from that day we got physical, we fought. I will be tortured from this day. She has a demon spirit"*.

I asked him how he felt not being in control of his own house. Okeagba said *"it is difficult for me, after this, two months and one week, work stopped and I was dismissed. Right from that time everything changed. If I tell you, now I ride Okada (taxi bikes), so it is no good at all"*. Okeagba said that his wife was wicked and had put 'juju' (magic spell) on him.

I thanked Okeagba for sharing his story with us. The other men were shaking their heads and telling him that this woman was bad. Victor told Okeagba *"it is rare for a woman to touch a man, it is very rare. Woman beating a man does not happen. My brother (Okeagba), the wife slap him, if a woman slap a man, he is not a man. He is the husband, not the woman"*.

Once the meeting was over the men quickly got up and took Okeagba aside, telling him *"brother, we need to talk to you"*. Once I'd gathered my things together, I asked if any of them would like a lift home or to transport. They declined, telling me, *"we will stay with our brother and go with him"*. I could not help but ponder over the advice that these men, who all engage with conjugal violence, would give Okeagba and what impact the advice might have on his next relationship.

#### **What did the other men say?**

Some of the men admitted that their wives do fight back in retaliation.

Victor said *"of course! Of course she will come back at me but I am the head of the house, there is only one way out for her and I can beat her very well."*

Napoleon said *"if I let her she will try to kill me with whatever she can find"*

Hezekiah said *"Often nearly to finish me off, tearing my clothes and fighting me"*

Imo said *"the first time she really fought back but the last time she did nothing but just wept"*.

Joke admitted that *"yes, that is why I beat her like that (flog her severely all over her body)"*.

Ade said *"yes she retaliates but she is not violent"*

Danjuma said that *"She hit me with a kettle and cracked my head open"*

Gbega said *"yes she hit me with a boiling ring"*

### **Ifeanyi**

Ifeanyi spoke to the group about his experience of abuse at the hands of his parents, particularly his mother. Although the other men also referred to the mode of discipline their parents used on them during their childhood, none were as harrowing as the abuse suffered by Ifeanyi. Ifeanyi's mother used to tie him up, cut him and rub pepper into the cuts. Fadipe explains this method of punishment is commonly used in Nigeria on 'wayward young boys' (1970:109). His father also abused him when he was drunk.

Ifeanyi said that he tries to keep things cool in his marriage but his wife talks too much, asking him how he feels all the time and advising him to talk to his family. Unlike his family, who all adhere to traditional values and do not

communicate well, his wife comes from a family that communicates with each other in an open manner. He says that she can't understand how his family interacts with each other. Ifeanyi said *"I am an introvert and I keep things to myself. I just want to forget what happened to me and I find it irritating that she is too concerned about the things that happened to me. She comes to you and asks you what you are thinking. You want to do things your way and you don't seek opinions. You get married and you find that your wife wants to use your slippers, trousers, you get annoyed. She thinks that nobody should be worried about anything. Sometimes you react by exchanging words and so on. We resort to a level of physical violence. We talk about it. Just let it be. I find it embarrassing"*. He said, *"she cannot let me be"*.

Unlike many Nigerian men, Ifeanyi helps his wife around the house and in the kitchen. However, at times he has difficulty in reconciling society's ideals of masculinity with his own behavior. Ifeanyi's mother is very critical of his relationship with his wife and when she sees him helping his wife in the kitchen, she accuses him of not *'being a man'*. His mother tells him that the kitchen is no place for a man. His mother abuses his wife for not being a *'good wife'*. He says that *"now when my mother comes to visit, I stay out of the kitchen and I pretend to be a man while she is in my house"*. I asked him, *"how do you feel the rest of the time?"* He said *"I am not a man in the eyes of my family. My mother and brothers tell me that I should take another wife. I am not happy about it. I get mad with her (his wife) for bringing this on me"*.

### **What did the other men say?**

Udom commented that in Nigeria men will say, *“a man has no business in the kitchen that is a woman’s place, “man go work, woman go cook”*. Many of the other men nodded in agreement.

Victor said *“These women, they are very tough. I have to beg for her to cook. I see my son, I don’t want him to see me cook. I tell him, you are a man, you have no business in the kitchen”*.

Kingsley added, *“you no go cook now if you have a wife, what are you teaching your son”*

Odusanya said that *“my son gets up in the morning and he takes the broom like the mother. What stops my wife from doing this? A son should take the same lifestyle as the father”*.

Ambrose said *“I am a cook but in my house it is my wife who will prepare and cook the food for me, otherwise they will see you as a woman and I will not be happy.*

Napoleon added that *“a woman must cook food for her husband, it is our culture”*.

### **Analysis**

Ifeanyi and Okeagba’s narratives are significant because they explicitly illustrate, to some degree, what it means, “to be a man” in Nigeria. For Ifeanyi, his relationship with his wife does not conform to the socio-cultural construction and ideal of masculine behavior. In Nigeria, a man should not help his wife in the kitchen nor discuss his feelings with her. Gutmann explains that, in Mexico city, while gendered activities such as housework and shopping are now being

carried out by men as a result of their wives working, like Nigeria, “cooking is still commonly seen as the consummately female task” (1996: 152). Pesquera argues that cooking is impervious to defeminization and continues to be a woman’s role (1997: 209). According to the men’s narratives, gender role and gender ideologies concerning cooking are particularly resistant to change. Cooking remains women’s work.

The other men’s narratives confirm the view that cooking is a gender-based activity and that it is also a mark of respect a wife shows for her husband’s place as head of the household. Effah-Chukwuma and Osarenren claim that, in Nigeria, “it is expected that a wife will not only provide a good meal for her husband, but would also be punctual, and present it in the proper manner” (2001:82). Traditionally, proper manner involves giving the husband his food while in a kneeling position and holding a bowl while the husband washes his hands. Of primary importance is a wife showing respect for her husband’s family. Any perceived breach of behavior can have severe consequences and be grounds for divorce (Effah-Chukwuma and Osarenren, 2001: 82). Ifeanyi’s narrative demonstrates not only the gender-based division of labor but also the impact of a mother-in-law’s displeasure. The literature suggests that in many instances, family violence is supported and perpetuated by other women in the family, such as mothers-in-law, mothers and grandmothers, who themselves have experienced conjugal violence and see it as a way of maintaining their

current power in the family structure (Cleaver: 2002, Counts, Brown, Campbell: 1999, Smedley: 2004, Women in Nigeria: 1985).

Lindsay (2003) posits that gender has an impact on the kind of work that people do and that the gender-based division of labor is entrenched in Nigerian society. The men's narratives confirm this assumption; the concept of men cooking or even entering the kitchen, challenges the boundaries of masculinity. Smedley claims that traditionally, in Nigeria, "a man may not cook for himself and he must not ordinarily handle the utensils of women for fear of the ridicule and displeasure of dead ancestors (2004:143). Men perform those elements of masculine behavior prescribed in order to be 'a man' but it is also fundamental to male identity that he does not perform those duties that are proscribed or deemed 'woman's work'. In the context of Nigeria, the rigid gender-based division of labor is inherent to the construction of masculinity.

Silberschmidt refers to Butler's notion of performance of masculinity in order to further her analysis of Kenyan construction of masculinity and argues that, "maleness and male identity are also bound up with the way in which a man performs his social functions, it is not a question of being but performed" (1999:177). By helping his wife in the kitchen, Ifeanyi broached the cultural boundaries of manhood and openly demonstrated his inability and incompetence at 'being a man'. Ifeanyi said that he did not like beating his wife but that "*she makes me hot*". His brothers advised him to "*beat your wife O'; she will learn respect*". Ifeanyi admitted that his mother never spoke to his father the

way his wife speaks to him and that “*my father beat my mother regularly*”. Ifeanyi referred to his wife not respecting his things and said that this made him feel angry. Ifeanyi’s wife gives *him* advice, reversing the traditional gender role expectation, and making him feel less in control and open to criticism by his family. Therefore, despite Ifeanyi being the only man to speak fondly of his wife, he restores his sense of masculine identity and manhood by beating her. Gilmore posits the thought that,

“to be dependant upon another man is bad enough, but to acknowledge dependence on a woman is worse. The reason, of course, is that this inverts the normal order of family ties, which in turn destroys the formal basis of manhood...There is no greater fear among men than the loss of this personal autonomy to a dominant women” (1990:50).

Ifeanyi’s narrative reveals his fear of exposure as being less than a man through not only his wife’s intrusive behavior but also his own deviance. For Okeagba, his wife maintaining control over the household challenged him both physically and emotionally. His failure to ‘be the man’ in his relationship and his household not only led to him losing his livelihood, but also shamed him and his family. Hodgson and McCurdy argue that, in Tanzania, the proper gender relations within marriage were “relations in which women were subordinate, deferential, and obedient, and the man was unchallenged head of household” (2001:53). The men’s narratives point to a shift in women’s conduct. The men are frustrated with their wives questioning and disobeying them. Victor commented that his wife keeps, “*talking, talking unnecessarily*” and in doing so women threaten the men’s notions of themselves and their perceived authority

as heads of household. Gutmann reflects on this shift in gender relations and explains “whether or not women are physically present with men at work and at leisure, the initiating role of women in challenging received gender wisdoms and customs is profound” (1996: 24). Gutmann suggests that gender constructs are not hierarchical but,

“seen dialectically and not as a dualism, women’s initiative – often in the form of arguing, cajoling, and issuing ultimatums – should be understood as part of the process by which women and men creatively transform themselves and their gendered worlds in consequential new ways” (1996: 24).

Both Okeagba and Ifeanyi’s wives become part of the process through which they construct their manhood. Okeagba’s wife broke many boundaries associated with her traditional gender role as a wife and mother, resulting in him being marginalized as man. She not only challenged his authority but also completely dismissed it once they were married. Ifeanyi’s bid to help his wife in the kitchen contests his ‘public’ masculine identity. The other men told Ifeanyi that it was not his place to be helping in the kitchen and his mother blamed his wife for what she considers to be a transgression of his male role. Anderson and Umberson simplify this aspect of masculinity and state that,

“one is one’s gender to the extent that one is not the other gender. He (a man) is unable to perform masculinity to the satisfaction of his friends when mirrored by a partner who is perceived as dominant” (2001: 365).

In order to be perceived a man by other persons, Ifeanyi performed his masculine role publicly and for their benefit. When Ifeanyi’s parents or family



visited, he would not enter the kitchen and in his own words “*I pretend to be a man*”.

In addition, Okeagba’s belief that his wife was possessed is in keeping with the concept that women who do not conform to their structured gender role are either deemed ‘wicked’ or a ‘witch’. Hodgson and McCurdy refer to this rhetoric as being “a discourse of primarily masculine power that seeks to control or oppress women by stigmatizing certain actions, whether normative or unconventional” (2001:5). Indeed the men used the term ‘wicked’ or ‘bad’ to describe those women whose conduct they found most challenging to them, such as their wives answering back in a disrespectful manner or friends who they felt had a negative impact on their wives. Hodgson and McCurdy argue that “wicked women’ are regarded as a transgression and state that “when women (or men) overstep boundaries, whether intentionally or unintentionally, they not only challenge dominant norms of gendered behavior, but threaten the moral foundation of society” (2001:6). Okeagba’s wife did not conform to the cultural ideal of a good wife and proceeded to take charge of the house, abusing him and challenging the boundaries of his masculinity in the process.

Okeagba’s worked as a pastor for one of the many religious groups that has appeared in Nigeria over the years. It is a blend of both traditional and Christian beliefs that provide him with explicit knowledge of spiritual beings and the concept of evil. Falola explains that traditional doctrine is on the decline as more Nigerians become educated, exchange ideas and travel. However,

“many Nigerians still believe that death can be caused by the “evil eye”, witches and all sorts of enemies; that luck and destiny count for success; and that God bestows power wealth and all forms of blessings” (2001: 31). Okeagba could only rationalize his inability to affirm his authority as head of his household as being the result of witchcraft or sorcery. Following this dualistic religious paradigm, there remains the possibility that, in the future, Okeagba can recover his masculine identity and respectability since the fault lies with an external source and not as a result of his own shortcomings.

In contemporary Nigeria there is a dissonance between traditional practice and the new changing ways of ‘being a man’. Cornwall suggests that “men’s agency and identities within everyday life are imbricated with the contrasts evoked by these changes” (2003:232). Women are perceived to be challenging male authority and as a result threatening the men’s notions of masculinity. Marriage and children provide the context through which men derive their manhood and women “can no longer be relied upon to shore up a man’s sense of his own potency” (Cornwall, 2003:232) leading to confusion among men who expect to reproduce a level of authority in their household based on their knowledge and interpretation of traditional Nigerian practices and culture regarding masculinity.

The failing Nigerian economy makes it difficult for the men to provide for their families<sup>15</sup> and is not only rendering a threat to men's masculine identity but also as a consequence, contributes to the increase in conjugal violence. Indeed, over the past twenty years there has been a noted increase in the instance and level of conjugal violence (Chukwuma & Osarenren, 2001). According to Cornwall, masculinity "requires more than active maintenance, which in the face of economic change has become something that takes more than a day's work to be able to sustain" (2003: 244). The paradigm of "more than a day's work" takes the stance that masculinity not only evolves over time but is vulnerable and can be lost or gained at will. Napoleon shook his head and said, "*ah! To be a man in Nigeria is not easy. As soon as you have children that makes you a man. If you go out of the house and you have nothing you are not a man. How my wife and family behave is important for me. Friends and people will come to the house and see the way you live with your wife*". Napoleon's frustration is conveyed by the way he shakes his head and speaks quietly to the group. The other men in the group nod their heads in agreement with him. The men often commented throughout the interview that "*it is not easy to be a man*".

Gutmann observed a support group in Mexico for men who batter their wives and describes the men's behavior as, "rummaging around in an identity grab bag, pulling out whatever they happen to seize upon as long as it is

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<sup>15</sup> The Nigerian economy has experienced a decline in oil revenues since the 1980's. Falola states that "the formal economy is dominated by the various governments who employ the majority of the wage labour.....When oil revenues decline, the impact is immediate, especially on the state governments, which become unable to meet their recurrent expenditures" (2001: 9). In addition Falola claims that "Current economic indicators reveal a society in trouble" (2001: 12).

culturally distinct” (1996: 235). He explained that these men would be talking one minute about controlling their wives, looking down on lesser men who were unable to, and the next moment would be “expressing bitterness at being the ones on the bottom” (1996: 235). This is reminiscent of the men I interviewed who explained how they disciplined their wives and families, yet complained about their marginalization as men at the same time. I paraphrased more than once during the interview “if I am hearing you correctly, with money problems, political situation and women who have ‘bad mouth’, it is very difficult today here in Nigeria to be a man”. All the men shouted ‘yes!’ in agreement.

The men were so disturbed by Okeagba’s experience that they took him aside in order to advise him on what it takes to ‘be a man’ in Nigeria. Victor scoffed at Ifeanyi “*a man has no business in the kitchen*”. Nigerian men must perform their masculinity within the constraints and boundaries of their culture.

Silberschmidt (1999) tackles the issue of Kenyan men’s inability to find new ways of ‘being a man’ in contemporary Kisii where women are forging new roles for themselves and conjugal violence is on the increase. Silberschmidt quotes Sorenson and suggests that, “male violence should rather be analyzed as a result of a new reality (in which men are at a loss) where new rules have not yet been created, and outdated traditions are still made use of in order to impose male power (1999: 123). I agree with this proposal with the exception of men imposing their power. I would suggest that these men propagate tradition and engage in violence in order to maintain their subjective masculine identities in a

changing socio-cultural environment. According to the men's narratives, any *tangible* power that these men actually have or expect to have is questionable.

The failure of Ifeanyi and Okeagba to measure up to the expectations of appropriate gender roles within Nigerian society and the response of the other men in the group, illustrates these men's constant negotiation of their masculine identity in their everyday lives. Perhaps there is a paradox with respect to male identity; masculinity creates a self that constantly needs to be re-affirmed and re-negotiated in society and indeed in the context of culture.

The failure to achieve the necessary attributes in the construction of a successful masculinity demanded by Nigerian culture and society results in what is referred to by theorists as a "crisis of masculinity" (Connell: 2000, Ramirez: 1999, Hatty: 2000, Gutmann: 1997, Kaufman: 1998, Cornwall: 2003, Brod and Kaufman: 1994). Brod and Kaufman consider that the manner in which masculinity and its relation to power and authority has been constructed, results in men experiencing feelings of pain, isolation and alienation when they fall short of expectations (1994:142). Thus, conjugal violence can be construed as a response to a threatened masculine identity and an individual sense of inadequacy on the part of the male. In keeping with this ideology of masculinity in crisis, Silberschmidt offers a constructive explanation for why more men are resorting to conjugal violence in Kisii culture and one that might be applied in the context of Nigeria. She states that "as a result of the lack of fit between the traditional moral universe, norms and values and the actual/changed social

reality my data indicate that men seem to find themselves in a much more vulnerable situation than women" (1999:128). While not releasing the men from their responsibility for their behavior, the problematic associated with their male identity offers an explanation for why men turn to conjugal violence as a mechanism of control.

Men in Nigeria actively and purposely engage with a multiplicity of masculine identities (Lindsay: 2003) in their everyday life, at work and at home. Masculinity is perceived as being both problematic and dynamic (Connell: 2000, Collier: 1998) and indeed the constraints felt by these men tend to concur with the ideal that men are bounded by the construction of their masculinity (Hatty: 2000, Ramirez: 1999). Lindsay suggests that "the concept of plural masculinities rightly emphasizes that maleness and femaleness can carry multiple meanings within society, and that power relations affect which definitions become normative" (2003:13). In Nigeria, masculine identity is fluid and moderated by a number of factors such as age, wealth and status resulting in a plethora of models that shape men's notions of masculinity. Furthermore, Ifeanyi and Okeagba's narratives are in keeping with Butler's notion of "performance"; where masculinity is constantly being performed and reified through public displays of manhood. That performativity is "not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual" (Butler, 1999: xv). The men's narratives revealed that they must be seen to be publicly performing their masculine role before other persons and sustaining control over their household, particularly their wives.

## **Fragile Masculinities**

During and following the colonial era (Cleaver: 2002, Lindsay: 2003, Gutmann and Chant: 2000, Gilmore: 1990) the notion of breadwinner became an ideal closely associated with male identity in Nigeria. As I have already discussed<sup>16</sup>; in Nigeria prior to colonialism, gender relations, division of labor and contributions to the household reflected a more egalitarian socio-cultural environment. I wanted to ascertain if the notion of the breadwinner continues to exist in present-day Nigeria. Is the notion of breadwinner fundamental to masculine identity and how does this impact conjugal violence?

I asked the men a number of questions related to the ideal of being a breadwinner; being the head of the household, in charge of the finances and the decision-making process regarding their families. I hoped these questions would give me a clear impression of the men's subjective realities regarding their construction of masculinity and factors that might pose a challenge to their male identity. In addition to responding to the question, the men I interviewed in Lagos digressed somewhat and spoke about how they felt about women with more education and how this might impact their lives. This was an area I intended to cover if we had the time. However, I found it worthy of note that the men introduced the topic themselves while discussing the issue of control and decision-making.

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<sup>16</sup> See chapter on colonial masculinity.

Ade answered *"money makes you a man. You have to protect and provide for your family. A man must carry out his responsibility"*.

Moshood said that *"a man is the one in control, he is the one catering for the family. We sometimes have collective negotiations but the man must make the decisions in the case of sending children to school and a daughter is about wedding, the decision can be taken on whom she is to be married. As a man you have to be responsible and carry out responsibilities as a man or head of the household"*.

Hassan said *"I am the leader and I earn more money. I consult my wife on some issues before taking final decisions. As a result of being a man you have to be responsible for your wife and children, take proper care of them. You can also contest and hope to rule your society"*.

Deji answered *"I am the man and the head of the family and I brought her into the house. Both of us talk but I have the final say about the type of friend she keep and the number of children. A man must carry out his responsibility and be hardworking. Provide for his family"*.

Danjuma said, *"I am the man and the head of the house. Our religion gives me priority to take the decisions for the family. A man must be patient and responsible for his wife and children"*.

Funmi said that *"I am the head of the family and I must take all the decisions as a man. A man is a responsible person and you must make money, work hard and face life seriously"*.



Gbega said, *“The man is the head of the house. Decisions should be taken jointly but the man is having 70% share in it, how money should be spent at home and the children, the type of friends she keep”*.

Hezekiah said, *“I am the one in control. I am only concerned with my salary and what she is making is her business. The decision-making is from me. Like if I want her to come down from Lagos, the preparation is from me. I cannot just allow her to come here and be idle when she has something she is doing in Lagos. As a man, to take care of my family is first and foremost, that my children go to school and that I can help my younger ones”*.

Imo said, *“I am in control of the finances because men handle the bigger resources and when you are disbursing you have a chance to set priority. We take bilateral decisions but I have the final decision. As a man you should face the challenges society throws at you without flinching”*.

Joke answered *“I am the head of the house but we take some decisions together. It is my job to take care of the family and provide for them”*.

Ambrose said, *“You are not a man if you do not have money or intelligence. People do not regard you. A man is the head of the house, it is our custom and it is important for a man to be seen as the boss. Men will make the decisions concerning the family and the money but you can discuss with them (women)”*.

Napoleon said *“my wife tells me that her sister can buy everything and tells me, what are you doing to help me, nothing, you are a useless man. I just slap her and tell her that she is a lazy woman. I know that her family is telling her to abandon me”*.

Udom said that most men will say *“to take care of the family, it is my job”*.

Okeagba said that it would be difficult for him to be head of the house after his experience with his wife. She took all the decisions in the family. He continued *“we have many problems today being a man. Looking after yourself and your family, knowing finally that you are a man”*.

Victor said that he tells his wife *“I am the man. I cannot leave my house for a woman to control. I am a traditional African man. I don’t want to hear you. I brought you here. The bible say, man are the head of the house so what rights do you have?”*

Kingsley said, *“a man must be in control of his family. Even when a woman is educated, it will be a threat to my domination and control of the house. Some men go out of their way to stop women from working”*.

Ifeanyi agreed with Kingsley and added *“yes, if a woman has more money or education, she will begin to have more authority and express herself, negate his own perception of himself as a man. My mother wanted to get a degree and work but my father made sure that he threatened her and told me that she would take over the house if he let her”*.

Victor said *“a woman working will not stop a man from taking the responsibility in the house. He may not rely on the woman’s money or any contributions she wants to make for the good fluencies of the family. The woman know they can’t rely on their living”*.

I asked the men to tell me about some of their frustrations.

Victor explained that, *“I have a woman boss and I have to listen to her all day if I want to work and chop. What am I going to do when I come home and there is no food ready for me, there is no light and no water? I ask her (wife), where is the food now? She just*

*gives me bad mouth. I ask her "what is this". She should just cool things down but she just hots it up and I tell her, "Look, I will kill you" and so on. Why can't she just shut up her mouth and say I am sorry, cool things down".*

Odusanya complained about his wife being influenced by other members of her family and judging him accordingly. He is not working at the moment and therefore must be experiencing extreme hardship. He said that *"Family will come to the house and be looking at the way you live with your wife. If she say my husband give me one naira, the other will say five naira. The wife is too stupid, they will destroy your house. The way your wife will answer you will surprise you. You can't tell her not to have friends or let her family come, but they will influence her against you".*

Udom expressed his frustrations with respect to Nigerian society's ideal of 'being a man'. He said *"in this our culture, a man is brought up to live as 'commander in chief'. There is pressure to be a man like Tarzan of the jungle. Woman is not understanding my position as 'commander'. Woman does not understand the pressure working on me. He takes it out on the women. He is not really happy about it. Woman have attitude of man will provide and manage it all. How can you manage unmet expectations? He can provide it all and woman does not need to work as hard. We (men) do not know of shopping list of expectations and woman do not want to talk to you, they think you know it. Yoruba background of having six wives and having to provide for them all. Pressures are there working on man. He is expected to be in charge of even his in-laws".*

In Abuja I asked the men what they thought about a woman having a higher standard of education than her husband. All of the men in Abuja made varying comments about their inability to control a wife who had more education and earned more than them. Only two of the participants elaborated on their answers.

Imo commented *“a man should be the one to earn more money because from an African perspective a man is the head of the household and you have more responsibility hanging on you. But education does not matter so far as the woman submits to you”*.

Funmi said *“if a woman earn more than me, there is the possibility of her disobeying my order and I cannot control her”*.

### **Analysis**

Conveyed in the men’s narratives is the notion that they comprehend their position as breadwinner to be a constraint for them but at the same time it contributes to their definition of what it takes for them to ‘be a man’. In expressing their conceptions of manhood the men use words such as control, provider, head of the house and responsibility. Many of these men earn a low salary. Eades characterizes this bracket of Nigerian men who have a basic education as being limited with respect to upward mobility and he describes the difficulties they experience in maintaining a job and salary. He claims that,

*“with incomes similar to the lower-paid groups of clerical workers, but rather less chance of upward mobility, are manual workers in industry, mostly literates with primary or secondary modern schooling. Employment for this group is less permanent and increasingly difficult to obtain. Keeping the job depends on the whims of a superior and the main hope for an increase in income is to save enough capital to move into*

entrepreneurship. With the rising cost of living in the urban areas, this is increasingly difficult without the help from kin and friends" (1980:155).

The men consider themselves to be the breadwinners but in effect their wives do contribute to the household, a factor that was diminished by them with comments such as "*I cannot leave my house for a woman to control*" and "*you cannot rely on a woman's contributions*". Ogundipe-Leslie found that irrespective of the burden Nigerian men experience with respect to them being the breadwinner, most "would rather shoulder their marital burdens alone in order to be able to give orders to their wives" (1985: 126). These men conveyed a similar notion to me when they explained the burden of being the breadwinner while at the same time negating their wives earnings and contributions to the family income.

The men spoke of how they felt about having a female boss and how this aspect increases the frustrations they experience in their daily lives. Keeping their job depends on them working with a female as their superior and accepting orders from her, clearly something these men have difficulty with. The men are compelled to work in order to provide the salary that will define them as the 'breadwinner' for their families and subsequently as an evaluation of their manhood. However, Gilmore claims that "a man's effectiveness is measured as others see him in action, where they can evaluate his performance" (1990: 35). These men conflate being seen as the breadwinner and provider for their families as an integral element of their masculine identity. This creates a paradox, since

apparently these men do not derive much satisfaction from either their work or the performance of their masculine identity.

Prior to colonialism, couples did not have joint incomes and would operate their finances independent of each other. As a result, men were not expected to be the sole providers for their families. The breadwinner ideal reflected a radical change in the regions' social history and gender relations.<sup>17</sup> According to the men's narratives, the concept of breadwinner prevails in present-day Nigeria and is an organizing principal that contributes to the construction of masculinity. Gutmann and Chant argue that,

“declining prospects for assuming the economic responsibilities attached to the idealized male role of ‘breadwinner’ have undermined man’s status and identities and are often linked with their weakening integration into family units” (2000:1).

There are few generalizations that can be derived from the “traditional” African man or family. As I have already discussed previously, Nigerian families consist of not only the couple and their children but also a complex organization of extended family on both sides. There is always a family member in need of financial assistance; a man might help to pay for his junior brother's education for example. Therefore, there is pressure on men to succeed as breadwinners in order to support the extended family as a unit. Lensky, Bachman and Straus suggest that

“perhaps family members become the ‘targets of convenience’ for aggressive behavior because their proximity and accessibility. Or perhaps violence passions are more easily

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<sup>17</sup> Lindsay states that the concept of breadwinner was introduced during the colonial period. Railway workers in Nigeria “seized upon the strategy of representing themselves as key providers in the household economies, downplaying women's incomes as they made claims on the basis of their ‘breadwinner’ status” (2003:88).

ignited with the context of relationships that are already infused with the intensity and intimacy of the family. Either way, the family appears to act as a collection point for stresses emanating in the wider society. This view is contrary to the model of the family as a safe haven that moderates or buffers its members against exigencies of the wider world (1995:93).

According to the men's narratives, the family does become an outlet for the stress and frustration that men experience in managing their day to day lives. It is the sphere where these men can and do wield control and authority over those within it without fear of sanctions. McKee argues that in some traditional Andean communities "wife beating is a tacitly accepted outlet for male frustration and hostility... he may beat her in order to invoke his masculinity through a display of anger and strength" (1999:168/179). There are parallels with respect to the pervasiveness of conjugal violence in Nigerian society and the justifications used by the men.

Traditionally in Nigeria men have fulfilled their role 'as men' in society while enjoying certain privileges associated with it. However, the likes of Silberschmidt have noted that in contemporary Kisii, men "are left with a patriarchal ideology bereft of its legitimizing activities and not able to fulfill new roles and expectations" (1999:173), leading to an increase in conjugal violence. UNESCO notes that "where men have economic advantages over women, they have a privilege to defend, which may be defended with violence, or may make women vulnerable to violence" (1997:6). Thus, women conceivably become the objects of men's anger and frustration as men lose their privileged status. I feel that the men's' narratives bear out the assumption that violence is a

manifestation of them defending their male status and renegotiating their masculine identity.

Consider how some of the men feel about marrying a woman who has more education than they themselves have. The men communicated their fear regarding the loss of control and status as head of the family. The dominant discourse associated with Nigerian masculinity exemplifies man as the primary breadwinner and provider for his family. Cornwall posits that,

“the idealized version of masculinity embodied in the man-as-controller discourse has come to be bound up with the capability of husbands to fulfill obligations as providers: “talking proper care”, bringing in the bread, spending money to secure women’s happiness, and, of course, compliance” (2003:244).

A man’s authority is conditional; subject to his performance, both public and private, of masculinity and its correspondence to the dominant ideals of Nigerian culture.

Status plays a crucial role in Nigerian society where an individual who is considered a ‘big man’ is associated with both money and authority. Men aspire to become ‘big men’ in their society and Lindsay posits that through “acquiring wealth and the loyalties of many people, owning a house, and gaining prestige in their communities of origin” (2003: 134), their ambition can be realised. Those men who fall short are struggling to maintain their sense of self and male identity in the larger socio-cultural environment where they are considered ‘small boys’. Green (1999) suggests that conjugal violence occurs when a husband feels powerless but “lives in a society that expects him to be powerful”



(1999:29). Most of the men I interviewed would have little status in the larger Nigerian society and their narratives illustrate the struggle they experience in their day to day lives. The men's subjective realities do not mirror the prevailing ideals of male domination, authority and control. Lindisfarne describes men who are unsuccessful in achieving the elements that structure a dominant masculinity "become extremely vulnerable to further exploitation" (1994:85). The men's daily challenges to their fragile sense of masculine identity serve as a reminder of their failure and inadequacy to 'be a man'. Thus conjugal violence serves as a medium for "remasculization"<sup>18</sup>.

The decision-making process could not be considered shared and despite one or two of the men disclosing that they discuss certain decisions with their wives, it is the husband who takes the final decision. Remark Victor's previous comment, "*men here don't want woman beating his ears (talking too much). Marriage is not a democracy it is a dictatorship. Your advice is free but I don't have to take it*". The perception of control is fundamental to these men's sense of masculine identity. Therefore, the men inevitably take decisions regarding finances and the family themselves. Karanja (1983) conducted a study among couples in Lagos regarding the decision-making process and found that in all strata of society husbands command the majority of the decision-making. However, Karanja claims that "there was only one issue for which there was a

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<sup>18</sup> "Remasculization" occurs as a result of the crisis of masculinity. Green states that "In whatever way they attempt to assert their masculinity, where it is a socially sanctioned 'recipe for living' the behavioural option of violence toward women is available to all men of all ages" (1999: 60).

majority support for the wife making decisions alone and that was the domestic food menu" (1983:237). Matters related to food and cooking are perceived as a woman's culturally designated gender role. According to Pesquera, tasks such as cooking and laundry are resistant to "defeminization" (1997:208).

Masculinity derives some of its authority from men being in control and the shifting representations in the accounts given by the men mirror what Anderson and Umberson refer to as "the instability of masculine subjectivities" (2001:374). With a failing or stagnant economy in Nigeria (Atinmo: 2000), men are finding their access to resources is limited and as a result their role as breadwinner can no longer be taken for granted. Silberschmidt maintains that,

"social values linked to male identity have become very complex and contradictory...in practice men's role as head of household is becoming more theoretical than practical...their authority has come under threat and so has their identity and sense of self-esteem" (1999:174).

Men turn to conjugal violence in order to recover a measure of control and to renegotiate their masculine identity. According to Green, men's inability to meet social and cultural expectations associated with their role as father and breadwinner "undermines their confidence in their role as head of the family and their sense of their right to demand respect from their wives and children. They may take part in a variety of activities aimed at restoring their threatened masculinity" (1999:63). Reflected in the men's accounts are conjugal violence and marital rape, the restorative activities referred to by Green (1999).

The men assert themselves within what they perceive as the narrow boundaries of their masculine identity. Victor argued, *"It is an insult that a woman shouts on me. Fighting the woman, it is not fair for a man, women must cook the food and take care of the house and children. To take care of the family is my job"*. Victor feels that, as a man, he should not be challenged because he is the provider and breadwinner for the entire family. The men's narratives substantiate Cornwall's<sup>19</sup> idea that,

*"being a man was not enough to maintain authority: much came to depend on a more performative identity as man, through which men asserted dominance through enacting the role of provider. Cast as part of the "conjugal bargain"<sup>20</sup> that requires constant maintenance, men's control thus becomes open not only for negotiation but also for realignment. The impact of shifts in responsibilities for provisioning, whether through deliberate choices or as a product of circumstances, have impinged on men's ability to retain those aspects of identities associated with having the means to assert authority" (2003: 244.)*

Giddens suggests that there is a "waning of female complicity" (1992: 122) with respect to male privilege and patriarchy (Campbell: 1992) and as a result, men are experiencing a challenge to their authority. Many theorists agree that the shift in gender relations is partially responsible for the increase in conjugal violence (Effah-Chukwuma and Osarenren: 2001, Gutmann: 1999, Silberschmidt: 1999, Green: 1999, Campbell: 1992). The participants' frustration concurs with Chant and Gutmann, who claim that "some men resent the obligations imposed on them; that this resentment is manifesting itself in anger and violence toward

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<sup>19</sup> Cornwall studied the shifting ideals of masculinity in Yoruba men in the south western part of Nigeria.

<sup>20</sup> Whitehead, A. (1981). "I'm Hungry Mum": The Politics of Conjugal Budgeting." In *Of Marriage and the Market: Women's Subordination in International Perspective*. Kate Young, Carol Wolkowitz and Roslyn McCullagh. Eds. London. CSE Books.

women and other men" (2000: 28). Men lack alternative ideals and scripts regarding their masculine role (Gutmann and Chant, 2000:28) and continue to follow traditional gender practices such as being the breadwinner in order to maintain their male identity. Irrespective of how well the men are doing or the violence that they resort to as a result of frustrations, Victor commented "*I am the man, I am a traditional African man*". The men's narratives support the paradigm of a man in crisis as a result of changing gender roles, their inability to live up to the ideal of breadwinner challenges both their public and private masculine identity.

### **Part Three: Female Deviance and Provocation**

Problems of authority and control in the family often seemed to focus on the wife's perceived negligence in terms of; the refusal of sex, a wife's inability to provide her husband with a son, food preparation, cleaning and improper child care. The men perceive their wives stubbornness and refusal to follow their instructions with regards to looking after the house and children as a form of provocation. Instead of following their husband's commands or expressing regret, women argue back or retaliate and according to the men, "*hots it up*" leaving them with no other recourse than to discipline their wives.

### **Sex and Marriage**

I asked the group "tell me about what would shame you". Victor said "*my wife and her family shamed me before all of the village*". I asked him to tell us about it.

Victor explained that, *"Women over manipulate. I will give you an instance. The woman woke up, carried all her things and left the house. I am informed that the marriage is dissolved. What happened? I ask her if we could have conjugal relations. She said, I have a headache here, a headache there. The bible says you have to do this; the marriage is not yet ended. He lifts the pillow and brings out the knife, sex by violence. I told her to pack her things and come home where your children are. She instructed me to come back to her village, talk with her parents and redo marriage entirely. She wants to shame me in front of the village and she has succeeded in humiliating me. The crisis escalates. Men don't advise each other to beat their wives! Don't give her the opportunity; she will repeat it again and again. Give her an inch and she will take a mile. You have to beat her. Such a woman will be told, "not in my house, not in my house, I paid your dowry, I am keeping you under my roof, you are taking my bed, eating my food and I buy things for you. You beat the woman and look elsewhere"*.

### **Analysis**

Victor was enraged with his wife but he managed to coax her home without redoing his marriage and experiencing the public humiliation associated with it. Victor gave his in-laws gifts and money to appease them. However, to please his wife, Victor agreed to move to an apartment in order to have their own space without sharing facilities with other families. Victor sees his marriage as being a private affair between him and his wife and despite their tumultuous relationship, his wife remains with him. Victor's brother criticizes his wife for being stubborn and lazy and tells him that he must control his wife and family.

Victor said, after this, *"I say to myself, you are a useless man, a useless man"*. Victor's humiliation derives, not from his own behavior, but from his wife's inability to conform to the constructs of a good wife. In addition, other people witness his failure to control his wife or in other words his failure to 'be a man'.

Victor has a clear idea of what, he feels, constitutes a good wife and marriage, he must be in control of the situation and his wife should follow his instructions. Sexual relations from a wife and as a wife are expected irrespective of how a woman might feel about it. Kingsley agreed with Victor and said *"here is a man, each time he meets the wife there is virginity all over again. She is not helping him at home; he will not come out and tell anybody because he may not feel like a man. I am driving the house and the woman is not responding. He wants to see the manifestation of his work and he feels insulted. One day he will react"*. Women refusing sex threatens the men's concept of being in control of them and their success in living up to the cultural archetype of manhood.

In Nigeria, marital sex is the obligation of both parties. However, men can use violence or force to take what they consider is their right as a husband. Sex or adultery is rarely used as a reason for a wife leaving or dissolving a marriage (Eades, 1980: 58) while they might threaten to leave if they feel that they are not financially being taken care of. Green suggests that *"rape within marriage is deemed an acceptable part of the wider social recognition of a man's right to chastise his wife...Wife rape is rationalized as a man taking what is his, punishing his wife for her failure to obey and her duty to serve"* (1999:34).

Clearly, Victor's narrative substantiates this view and following his wife's departure from the family home, he asserted his authority over her in the manner he described. Victor told his wife "*I paid your dowry*". This aspect of a husband's ownership is fundamental to conjugal violence and men's right of access to sexual relations as part of the conjugal bargain. Victor leaves no doubt that he views his wife and child as his property and his job 'as a man' is to maintain control over them.

Abane (2000) surmises that marital rape is considered non-existent in Ghanaian culture because there is a dowry paid to the parents and family of the bride. She states that bride-wealth or dowry,

"gives unrestricted access not only to the labor of his wife but also sexual services. Thus if not properly structured, the others may conceal the actual dimensions of the problem. Violence then becomes something which can be defined only against a backdrop of culture, tradition and custom" (2000:21).

Research conducted in Ghana by Ofei-Aboagye (1994) cites a number of informants who admit to having had sex with their husbands against their will. Green quotes Sanday and states that "where interpersonal violence is a way of life, violence frequently achieves sexual expression" (1999: 34). According to Green, marital rape is a likely transgression in societies where conjugal violence occurs without sanctions (1999:34). The other men nodded and encouraged Victor while he spoke to the group, giving me the impression that they do share Victor's experience and views regarding marital sex.

Victor's wife exposed him to a form of social control that he admitted could have humiliated him. Victor managed the situation without having to remarry his wife and be paraded before everyone in the village. However, according to Victor, his wife made him feel "*useless*" and in so doing challenged his authority and his manhood. Gilmore posits that, "manhood ideologies force men to shape up on penalty of being robbed of their identity, a threat apparently worse than death" (1990:221). Victor's experience demonstrates that a husband's behavior can be held to negative and informal sanctions. Moreover, his male identity is called into question if boundaries are crossed and he is forced to respond to social pressure. Marital rape is one such boundary. When challenged, these men feel powerless and react accordingly in order to restore their manhood, respectability and honor. Ramirez argues that "men who are less able to show control and power tend to exaggerate their masculinity. Resorting to a range of expressions of violence seems to be part of that exaggeration" (1999:77). The men's experiences of conjugal violence bear this out.

Silberschmidt (1999) refers to 'machismo' and the arrogant, aggressive behavior associated with it as "rendering comprehensible men's sexual violence against and exploitation of women in order to achieve social value" (Melhuus quoted in Silberschmidt, 1999:166). Silberschmidt's study of Kisii gender antagonism, found that men complain of their wife's 'stubbornness' and lack of sexual interest in them leading to problems in the men's self confidence and social value (1999:167). These men feel unhappy, alienated and resort to conjugal



violence because, unlike generalized violence, there are few consequences for them as a result of beating their wives. In fact the men's social and cultural value subsequently improves accordingly.

There is a common thread between Ramirez and Silberschmidt's model of men's performance of masculinity. The semblance of male power and control that these men are presumed to hold masks reality; in the context of Nigerian culture and society, these men assert little power or control. Ramirez argues that contrary to the popular notion that men derive power and authority from their male identity, in reality, masculinity acts as a form of constraint and oppression for them (1999:190). These men's masculine identity is contested by their wives' behavior, considering they have the capacity to shame their husbands and at the same time destroy their respectability. This dilemma compels certain men to shore up the boundaries of their masculine identity or perform masculinity in order to achieve success before others. A man should demonstrate his control of his wife and family and if he fails to measure up, the result is public humiliation.

### **Son Preference**

Nigeria is a patrilineal society; property and name is handed down through sons. My experience in Nigerian society offers a constant reminder of the importance of sons because I have two daughters. My first daughter was born in Nigeria and following her birth, the midwife informed me, "*ah, when the first born is a girl, the father must be very lazy*" and then added, "*do not worry, I am sure the next one will be a boy*". Okeke-Ihejirika substantiates this notion of failed masculinity and

states that “the man who produces only female children is simply not man enough” (2004:44). The importance of a male child is central to Nigerian culture and values, not only for a father but also for the mother of a son. A mother will have more status within the extended family and society once she produces a son. Ostensibly a son never leaves the family and his future wife will become part of his family whereas daughters marry and become part of her husband’s family (Falola: 2001).

I wanted to learn how son preference might be related to these men’s notions of masculinity. I disclosed to the men in the group that I have two daughters and that often other people told me that I should give my husband a son. What did they think about the importance of sons for a man?

Hezekiah said, *“very important, I can even marry another wife. If she could not give me a son I would not be able to speak in the presence of my brothers and friends. If I sent my wife away, the children will stay with me”*.

Joke said, *“it is important enough that I would marry another woman, the children will belong to me because I can take care of them”*.

Ade said that *“a son can always help the family in my absence and he will inherit. Any children for this marriage belong to me”*.

Moshood said *“a son will help carry out the responsibilities of the family if the father is sick or old and he will inherit from me, a daughter cannot”*.

Hassan said, *“it is of high importance to have sons. Sons will inherit my legacy. If my wife packs out, the children will rest with me, I am the father”*.

Ambrose commented that *“people will gossip over a man who has no son, they will blame the woman but gossip about you as a man. Women cannot inherit from husband or father, so it is very important to have a son”*.

Kingsley said *“you can have children, but as soon as you have a son that makes you a man. If you go out of the house and you have nothing you are not a man”*.

Udom added *“in our country it is true, if you don’t have male issue you are not a man”*.

Victor said, *“It is a point of shame not having male issue. My mother, my father they want I should bring issue for them. I am ready to take two wives, it is not good, and God will have it. My wife, she said that I must have male child. Now every time I come home late, she say I have girlfriend who give me male child. What is wrong with you, I am the one who bring issue. Man make population, woman no make population. It is one of the problems. Female, let me have another one that give me male child. It is important how people see you as a man”*.

Odusanya said *“wives fight among themselves if they have girl children, they will have to produce sons. Not the fathers, men are mediators”*

### **Analysis**

In a patrilineal society the requirement of a male child is recognized. Okeke-Ihejiriki maintains that *“the rigid social stance on son preference complicates the dilemma for any couple. Male heirs are important to men, not only for the continuation of their lineage, but also as proof of their manhood”* (2004:44). The men’s subjective realities attach importance to children, especially sons, as being

fundamental to them being conceived as men in their society. The failure to produce a son is considered a woman's fault<sup>21</sup> and a man has the right to enter into another marriage in order to achieve success in this area. However, as Ambrose said, "*others will talk about me as a man*" at the same time.

These men demonstrate a vested interest in producing sons in order to sustain their masculine identity. Vigoya quotes Nolasco and states that "fatherhood is a way that men insert themselves into society to fuse the processes of masculine identity construction with the authoritarian model that is performed by men" (2003: 38). The notion of performance is imbibed in the masculine identity, that masculinity has to be constantly attended to, not in just being a man but also how men negotiate and perform their masculine identity.

Silberschmidt claims that,

"maleness and men's identities, however, are also bound up with the way in which a man performs his social functions: it is not only a question of being (a father) and doing (a matatu driver); it is also a question of how. Consequently, it is not enough just to be a father, a husband, a head of household or do a job. It is important how a man is a father; how he contributes to the household with his income from driving a matatu (bus); how he performs as head of household" (1999: 177).

Thus a man should be the father of many children, especially sons so as to furnish the evidence that he can perform his manhood adequately. Gilmore contends that, in Italy, a husband's masculinity can only be sustained through a wife's pregnancy, otherwise people question his manhood (1990: 41). The men's narratives reveal that sons are not only a requisite to propagate the patrilineage

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<sup>21</sup> Hodgson and McCurdy. (2001) "Wicked" Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa

and take over some of the responsibility of the family, they also need to produce sons to be considered a man in Nigerian culture and society.

### **Food, Neatness, Child Care and the Element of Stubbornness**

In order to explore what set off the violent episodes and how the men would describe the violence from their own subjective experiences, I asked them to “tell me about the last fight you had with your wife” and “what makes you angry in your house”. The men did not hesitate in answering these questions and they all attempted to talk at once. I told them that we would go around in a circle in order that everyone who wanted to talk could. I asked the men to elaborate on comments they made and paraphrased their answers in order to make sure I understood them. In comparison to their previous dialogue where there was flippancy and laughing, the men were more serious when talking about this aspect of their relationship. Their faces reflected the gravity of what they were communicating to me and there was less joking around.

Moshood said *“she make a friend that I don’t like her relating with. She did not desist and I slap her in the face. The last time I suspect her of telling lies and I struck her. She ran to her family and she come back”*.

Danjuma said *“I slap her on the face because she was quarrelling with the neighbor’s wives. Last time I slap her it was a result of negligence towards the children. I was provoked”*.

Hezekiah said *"You will complain. Normally I will tell my wife and say 'this is what I asked you to do, why you do like that?' They say you are giving a woman order. It is that stubbornness. If it is not the way I want it. You understand what I am saying"*.

Ade said *"when my wife refuse to take orders from me. I don't remember what lead to it, but I recall that she was doing one of the things that I had warned her about. The next time, she locked me out the night of December 25<sup>th</sup>. I pleaded for more than one hour until a neighbor came and said open the door for him so far he is around. When I entered I asked her "what if I am pursued is that how you will lock me out" and she replying me. So I slapped her on the face repeatedly"*.

Odusanya answered *"a woman with a bad mouth. It is an insult that a woman shouts on me. If you are a man in Nigeria you can't live like that, we have our own culture. Mentality of women and men in Nigeria is not like yours"*.

How is it different?

*"I do not like my wife disciplining the children. They must eat on time and the way they are dressed does not make me happy. Feed the children on time, not when it is very late. I do not want to come in and find them hungry and crying. I come in before time and the first thing I ask them is 'what time did you eat? She will know the consequences.*

*Fighting the woman, it is not fair for a man, women must cook the food and take care of the house and children. To take care of the family is my job"*.

Napoleon argued that *"Most of the thing a woman does is in her mind. Take me for instance, I like neatness. I can sweep the house ten times in a day. I leave instructions; it is the way it is supposed to be all the time. As soon as I open my door that is what I*

*check. When you are complaining of what you don't like, the woman will say why she couldn't do it, make excuses instead of saying sorry or I forgot or something of that nature. That will make your mind come down instead of making muscle with your husband. There is a point of tension and can result in anything. (several of the other men said "you are right, you are right"). I do not like such situations. My brother (Victor) also said that women are stubborn. Some women will get it from associating with friends and neighbors. I always give my wife advice. It is no good having a friend that cannot be useful to you, a friend you cannot learn anything from. If your husband says this is what we have and this is what I say. Before you know it your business is everywhere".*

*Victor said that "I do not like the cooking to be late. You can get up in the morning and you tell me that this or that is finished, I am rushed. Why have you slept in the bed throughout the night without telling me this? By the time I am about to go out I would have approached it and been organized. Now I will be late to where I am going. That aspect can cause problem. You can see that by the time you get back the food is not ready. Much later the children will be waiting for their rice and be carried away by sleep. Such things bring misunderstanding".*

How do you deal with those situations, what do you do?

*Victor replied "Actually me I try to avoid beating woman. When I get annoyed, I tell her please out of my way (he claps his hands loudly above his head). I always use the word, I'll kill you. When I have to I will drop my hand and I will wound her. You had better go or else I will deal with you so you won't like yourself anymore. That is what I normally do. The last one, I told her, look, you are going out of my house, just go, I don't*

*want you to be in this house again. So by then my children are about taking exam. Our pastor was in my house, even my in-laws, the mother was there till twelve midnight. I said OK because of this situation I will allow you back in my house, let my children start their exam. This my wife, she will quote bible for me. I tell her, you are not doing what I tell you to do, you see the problem I have. No woman that takes to the husband's instructions can't enjoy herself".*

Victor added, *"first and foremost stubbornness of women. I told my wife to leave or I'll kill you because of repeated details. If there is any word more than stubbornness that is what I give my wife.*

How do you feel when your wife is not listening to you?

Victor replied, *"I do not feel happy. I feel disturbed. Talking too much, you get tired. I go out sometimes and calm down. You do not need to be challenged. What can a man do, he has to do something or they will laugh and talk about you. I learn from the people where I grew up. If you know that a man is annoyed and tension is high, walk away and give peace a chance. If you begin to stand on the foot of a man and begin to say this and that, it can lead to other things and this is where you just slap her".*

Is this the way it happens each time you fight?

*"in many ways, in many ways. One of the ways is cleanliness of house, just like my brother (Napoleon) has said, let it be neat. We keep on saying these things till the road meet, keep it tidy" (Victor told us at length about his experience of living in a shared apartment. Most days upon his return from work, the landlady told him of his wife's failure to keep the courtyard tidy and the place neat. His wife*



accused him of taking sides with the landlady and not believing her when she told him that she had cleaned the place. Since he was in a good position at work, he decided to move to an apartment in order to avoid further problems with his wife). *I don't know that I am killing myself. I could have used my money for better things. I am killing myself. So I moved to a flat eh, in my own flat. This woman have put this pain through me, all this time I am discovering through my children that this is what is happening. They (the children) had to sweep and dust everything. It is a lie, she not dust or clean the place. I said I would send her packing one day. She came here. We discuss and we discuss and then we set to again. We set to on the issue of cleanliness".*

What did you do?

*"I told her that I would not take it again, I will not take it. She went back quarrelling and talking and talking unnecessarily. You make me too annoyed. I am a man, I cannot leave my own house for a woman to control. I am a traditional African man, I don't want to hear you. I brought you here. The bible says men are the head of the household. So what rights have you here?"*

Do you hit or slap your wife when you are fighting like this?

*"Of course, of course, yes. I am the man and the head of the house. I can beat her very well, it is the only way out for her".*

Victor added *"another time 12.30 I come back from work and my wife close the door before I come in. I shouted her and say I go work tomorrow, I come sleep. She say I go back and see girlfriend outside. I tell her I am talking to you and I say you are neglecting*

*me. She open the door and I push her out locking the door. My daughter begin to cry. I opened the door and she come in. My daughter is still breast feeding. Then I ask what happened? She just hiss on me. That hiss mean big thing in my place. Hiss on you, you have nothing. If a woman hiss on me then I am nothing. I am nothing compared to her. I got annoyed and I hit her that day and tell her to go out of the house. Later I called my women to the room and tell her you have not given me food. I keep quiet and she talk and talk. I say better to kill you now. I told you once, better I kill you now or I kill myself one day. When I go back to my house, I tell her I close my eyes and I see you. I go kill you one day. Why you talk to me in such a way and I keep quiet”.*

### **Analysis**

The men’s narratives reveal the link between their construction of masculinity and conjugal violence. For example, *“I am the head of the house”, “as a man in Nigeria”, “what can a man do”, “if you stand on the foot of a man”*. These quotes illustrate the men’s perception that their masculine identity is being undermined by what they consider to be their wives deviant behavior. Wicks argues that contrary to the general idea that men are inherently violent, *“it is men who do not feel masculine who hit women...Much male violence results from a man’s being deprived of the opportunity to achieve a healthy sense of masculinity”* (1996:54). The dominant cultural construction of masculinity in Nigeria alludes to men being the heads of household and ‘in control’ of the family. In their study of male batterers accounts of violence conducted in the United States, Anderson and Umberson conclude that, *“violence represents an effort to reconstruct a*

contested and unstable masculinity" (2001: 375). The men's accounts of their anger and violence reflect this pattern. Men cannot be passive regarding their male identity and these men's accounts of conjugal violence reflect the performative nature referred to by Cornwall (2003), that "being a man is not enough" to ensure its success.

In general the men's rhetoric indicates a displacement of both responsibility and blame for losing control or being "provoked" into beating their wives. The men blame their wives inability to perform her duties adequately or her *stubbornness* as the source of their violence. Cavanaugh, Dobash, Dobash and Lewis posit that "blaming others allowed men to admit to acts of violence whilst at the same time absolving themselves of some, if not all, of the responsibility for them" (2001:703). By listing their wives faults, the men are shifting blame and distancing themselves from culpability, resulting in the violence being conceived as the women's problem. Gutmann, in his study of conjugal violence in Mexico confirms that,

"the central importance of children and parental care in the angry and violent episodes experienced by the many men was one of the number of themes that emerged in the sessions" (1996:209).

The men use excuses, such as untidiness and meals not ready on time, in order to explain them resorting to violence, subsequently justifying the abuse by blaming their wives for it. All of the men uniformly projected the blame for the violence on their wives, releasing themselves from any responsibility for their actions.

Women are a fundamental component, not only to the men's notions of masculinity, but also the context in which men justify their violence behavior.

Anderson and Umberson reported in their study of male batterers conducted in the United States that

"violence is (at least temporarily) an effective means by which batterers reconstruct men as masculine and women as feminine. Participants reported that they were able to control their partners through exertions of physical dominance and through their interpretive efforts to hold partners responsible for the violence in their relationships" (2001: 375).

The Nigerian men I interviewed gender the acts of violence through their performance of masculinity and inculcate a code of feminine behavior for their wives, reproducing a binary and hierarchical gender system (Anderson and Umberson, 2001: 375). The men blame their wives for the violence, using excuses such as poor parenting and lacking in their wifely duties but they also locate themselves as victims of their circumstances. Narratives such as "*it is hard to be a man in Nigeria*", "*this woman have put this pain through me*", "*what can a man do?*" all reflect the men's feelings of victimization. Furthermore, Umberson and Anderson quote Butler and state that "these shifting representations evidence the relational construction of gender and the instability of masculine subjectivities" (2001: 374). Indeed, the men's rationalizations and accounts of their experience of conjugal violence reflect an insecure masculine identity.

Victor remained the most violent toward his wife and did not hesitate to resort to varying methods of intimidating her. Her challenging him posed an imminent threat to his manhood and he resorted to aggression and violence as a

way of regaining and maintaining control of his situation. Furthermore, Victor did not see himself as being violent or unreasonable. He said "*no woman that takes to the husband's instructions can't enjoy*". Victor shifted the blame for his violent response to what he perceived as his wife's stubbornness. Dobash, Dobash, Cavanaugh and Lewis claim that "how men define violence has an impact on how they respond to it. Batterers only seldom defined their behavior as violent and aberrant" (2001:697). Fundamentally, the men used reasons such as stubbornness and untidiness in order to justify and rationalize their violence and release them from any accountability (Gutmann, 1996). None of the men defined their acts as violent, abusive or deviant. They explain conjugal violence as being a normative response to their frustration.

#### **Part Four : Social Shame and Injury**

##### **Bodily Evidence**

While visiting the office of Project Alert, I browsed through their catalogue of pictures of women who had sustained injuries from beatings inflicted by their husbands. I observed that all of the women were injured about the head and face as well as other places but overwhelmingly their injuries were visible. Was it deliberate on their part, to hit or slap their wives on the body where other people would notice it?

During the interview, I asked the men where you hit your wife. They appeared to be taken aback by the question. Their faces registered some confusion and no one answered me, including Victor who had been very vocal

up until that time. I explained that, in Canada, most men hit their wives where it would not show, on the body for example, where a woman could hide or cover an injury. Finally, the men answered me, short and to the point. All of the men said, "the face" or "the head". I was left wondering if I had introduced a sensitive topic or maybe I was too direct in my questioning. Nevertheless, none of the men could explain why they hit their wives on such a conspicuous area of the body. I made the decision to move on and we continued with other issues.

Victor answered, *"I slap her anywhere, on the head, I just slap her"*.

Funmi said *"I use a belt and flog her all over her body"*.

Hassan said *"I hit her on her face because it is the only place that makes her cool down for me"*.

Deji admitted that *"Yes I hit her on her face, you cannot hit a woman just anywhere. I can slap her again and again"*.

### **Analysis**

The literature I read on the topic of conjugal violence does not refer to where the men hit their wives on the body. There is the notion that men hit their wives where it will not show in order to avoid any intervention either by family or the police (Dobash and Dobash: 1983). The men I interviewed at the McGill Conjugal Violence Clinic told me that they tried not to hit their wives where it would be visible because they did not want anyone to know about it.<sup>22</sup> By keeping the injury hidden and invisible, a woman is able to continue to work,

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<sup>22</sup> I conducted research at the McGill Conjugal Violence clinic in the early part of 2002. I interviewed five men who attended the support group for men who batter their wives.

look after the children and conduct her daily life. However, in Nigeria with limited legal avenues and few social sanctions in place, concealing the evidence of conjugal violence is of little consequence. Atinmo (2000) suggests that a Yoruba woman's injuries do not provide the impetus for others to act when faced with the obvious signs of conjugal violence and concludes that culture dictates,

*"that a man does have the right to control his wife, to be head of the household, the boss, without being queried...Ultimately, women's injuries reflect the effects of aggressive masculinity, but society feels that the sanctity of marriage is more important than a woman's physical safety" (2000:82).*

The public evidence of conjugal violence is a contradiction in terms to its apparently private nature. The literature on conjugal violence expounds the private nature of conjugal violence (Silberschmidt: 1999, Harvey and Gow: 1994, Counts, Brown and Campbell: 1999, Hatty: 2000, Effah-Chukwuma and Osarenren: 2001). Beatings as a rule occur indoors and are considered a private matter between a husband and wife, hence the reluctance of institutions to intervene. Most of the men told me that they beat their wives in the bedroom or in a room behind a locked door. Only Victor and one of the participants from Abuja spoke of beating their wives anywhere an argument started.

In effect, other family members often advise men to discipline their wives and with obvious evidence of a wife having sustained a beating, a husband's value might increase in the eyes of his relatives. Remember Victor's brother and Ifeanyi's mother, both intervening and suggesting that they should control and discipline their wives properly. Victor's brother remarked to him on one

occasion "*what else are you not dealing with, you have to deal with this your wife?*"

Silberschmidt explains that "wife beating is a disciplinary device by which a man 'marks' his spouse in order to expose her to public scorn" (1999:123). A wife's injuries are a testament to the control and discipline metered out by her husband. Furthermore, it is a public expression of his manhood demonstrating that he has the authority in his household.

In addition, is making the violence visible a public display of a wife's failure to be a 'good wife'? In Nigeria, conjugal violence is regarded as a legitimate measure of force and is broadly accepted as a means of discipline, predominantly where the wife is consistently insubordinate to the husband's authority (Kalu, 1993). In this context, a wife can avoid being beaten by her husband if she behaves appropriately. In Ghana, women who experience conjugal violence elicit little sympathy from other women because custom dictates that a wife is obedient and cautious in her marriage and in doing so will avoid the consequences (Ofei-Aboagye: 1994). Thus, hitting a spouse on a part of the body where the injury will be obvious to others accomplishes several goals; publicly demonstrates a man's masculinity and his control over his wife as well as shaming her publicly.

### **Social Shame, Honor and Respectability**

The aspect of honor and shame feature prominently in the literature related to masculinity and violence, particularly in the context of non-Western cultures and societies (Chopra, Osella and Osella: 2000, Murray: 2002, Ogbomo: 1997, Smith:



1970). In Nigerian culture I would be more inclined to describe this aspect of manhood as respect and shame. For a Nigerian man, his respectability is fundamental to his place in society. Falola argues that “interpersonal relations are characterized by a code of behavior that places emphasis on respect” (2001:138). This includes showing respect to and receiving respect from others. However, a wife can bring shame on her husband thus destroying his respectability and family name. Keeping family matters private facilitates the appearance of respectability. The common response by the men, to other persons being aware that they engage with violence was, “*I would not be happy about it*”.

I asked Ambrose, my mother-in-law’s cook, what would be a point of shame for him? He told me that “*marriage is not easy, it is endurance. If a woman packs house (leaves) and goes, it is the fault of the woman, but they will blame you and talk about you, you don’t feel happy about it. A woman can bring shame on the family if everyone knows what is going on in your house*”.

I asked the participants in Abuja, what would shame them as a man and what would happen?

Moshood replied, “*to be caught in a shameful act, I would not be respected by others.*”

Deji replied, “*joblessness and not being able to provide for my family. I would not feel like a man and it would show that I am not in charge*”.

Danjuma replied, “*shame on man if he can’t give wife and children clothes and house, he is not a man*”.

Hezekiah said that *“if I hear that my wife steal, because that means my children will have stealing blood in him”*.

Joke replied, *“if I don’t keep my family and wife neat, they will not respect me”*.

The other men confirmed that failing to provide for their families would bring them shame as they would be seen by others as not being man and losing control of their household.

In Lagos, the responses were more varied.

Victor said *“it is my brother telling me that I am not dealing with my wife. When I tell my wife, this my wife will tell me that I am inviting talking to family. She will quote the bible for me. I tell her you are not doing what I tell you to. You see the problem I have”*.

Ifeanyi said *“the point of shame is from the background I am coming from. I find it embarrassing if she goes outside and starts to talk loud about it. Public impression of what goes on in my house. It is a point of shame, they don’t see how you feel and will talk about you as if you are not a man and not looking after your house”*.

Napoleon said, *“pressure from relatives that she has to see to her husband and doing her work properly. He is being told what is expected, families telling her what to do.*

*How can you allow your wife to do such things? (let other people see that she is not performing her duties). When you come back to the house a man has to show himself”*

Kingsley said, *“what shames me as a man? When another person asks me what has gone wrong? I would prefer to handle it and talk with my wife. Why should you come to me now and ask me about my wife. Going to talk to other people would be the last option. That somebody would not be anybody but someone that loves our relationship. The*

*person loves me and my wife too. Not someone who want to scatter the whole thing. I will settle it”.*

### **Analysis**

The responses to shame and respect were varied. However, the concept of the private nature of the family is a recurring theme. The men do not want others to know their private affairs, how they and their family conduct themselves. The involvement of the extended family, particularly the wife’s family, is a question of shame for the husband and impacts how a man defines himself as the head of the household. Effah-Chukwuma and Osarenren confirm that “in Nigeria, the great influence of the extended family on husband and wife/wives cannot be underestimated... it is oftentimes negative... and has contributed a lot to conjugal violence in general” (2001: 26). Often, if a wife returns to her natal home, she will be sent back to work things out with her husband. Her family cannot afford to keep her at home and risk losing the financial support they receive from their son-in-law. Anderson and Umberson claim that “the use of violence to achieve respect is a central theme in research on the construction of masculinities among disenfranchised men (2001:372). There is a paradox with respect to conjugal violence and the role of shame and respect. The men’s narratives indicated that the men felt exposed when other people became involved and this subsequently had a influence on the level of violence.

Men are expected to have control over their wives, any failure of weakness on their part results in humiliation and others questioning their

masculinity. According to Butler's framework of performance, the male identity is bound up in how he performs and in 'doing' as opposed to 'being' a man (1999:33). Ifeanyi says that he is shamed by the "*public impression of what goes on in my house*" and Napoleon states that, "*when you come back to the house a man has to show himself*". Both these narratives evoke the ideal of performativity and the public reproduction of masculinity. Simply being a man is not enough, but the process of becoming a man, or doing masculinity, is fundamental to it. In keeping with this framework, Cornwall suggests that "while discourses make available subject positions for men to take up, as Holloway (1994) shows, men as agents actively make and shape these identities, rather than simply play out scripts that are given to them" (2003: 244). This suggests that men strategically draw on notions of masculinity that are conducive to them maintaining their respectability and position as men in society. From this perspective, conjugal violence is associated more with men acting out their masculinity than the relationship between a husband and wife (Brown: 1999).

Nigerian culture and tradition stress the importance of maintaining silence regarding conjugal violence. It is considered a private family matter. Keeping in mind the diversity of the Nigerian family organization and obligations to the extended family, secrecy is fundamental to the respectability of the entire unit. A wife's transgression will have far-reaching implications and can have an impact on the husband's brother or the wife's father for example. Green suggests that discussions of gender violence are rendered difficult,

“because of the existence of the public/private dichotomy and the protection of the family as private and sacred. In many families worldwide a husband’s use of some level of physical violence to discipline his wife is considered acceptable behavior” (1999:15/16).

The narratives suggest that a man is most vulnerable to shame and loss of respect in the private domain of his life. Gutmann argues that this is the area where “the basis of masculine identity can be most affirmed or most questioned” (2003: 147).

The men’s narratives bear out this notion.

In Nigeria often the wife is expected to atone for any real or alleged indiscretion. Food, cooking and the kitchen is the area where penance takes place. Women are expected to cook their husband’s favorite meals in order to gain favor following a dispute. Furthermore, a man can refuse his wife’s food in order to make his point. Two of the men interviewed in Abuja said that they would refuse their wife’s food if she brought shame on him. Green posits that

“Ibo society condones punishment of such women who eat food without giving any to their husbands and who steal and gossip. In sum, bad women are poor cooks and housewives, are adulterous, and are accused of generally enjoying wrongdoing. Within this context, disciplining one’s wife becomes a matter of honor, it is not only the husband’s right but his duty to correct his wife for such unseemly behavior” (1999: 32).

The men’s narratives concur with this model of what the men, as husbands, expect from their wives in order to retain their honor or respect. They expect their wives to maintain the house and family in an orderly and neat manner and as dictated by the men themselves, they should follow their orders without “*talking, talking unnecessarily*” or challenging their authority. Others can view their performance as men and confirm their status as men by bestowing respect.

Gutmann reviews his work with male batterer's support group in Mexico and claims that

"the violent tempers and eruptions of the CAVI men were consistently rekindled, the men said, when they received less respect and obedience than they knew they deserved. Such challenges to their authority were personified by the women in their lives, often regardless of the immediate source of rancor" (1996:212).

In Nigeria, the aspect of respectability and reputation is central to male identity.

Money can win respect but a good name is crucial with reference to a man's place in society. Silberschmidt argues that "in Kisii (Kenya) a man's reputation is a central resource, and how a man behaves within his family and his ability to protect it, certainly provides a guide to his reliability and effectiveness in the public sphere" (1999:166). In Nigeria, male identity and respectability is somewhat constrained or dependant upon a woman's ability to perform her duties as a wife in a manner bound by culture and tradition. Ramirez argues that in addition to strength, courage and control of situations, men must demonstrate that, "we handle ourselves with authority and are invulnerable and respectable...to be accepted...we have to constantly show that we possess the attributes of masculinity" (1999:63/64). The element of respect from other men based on the public performance of masculinity is evident in the men's subjective evaluation of their masculine identity.

### **The Question of Adultery**

The majority of the men interviewed admitted to having affairs outside of their marriage and many were in long-term relationships. However, to their

knowledge, their wives do not know about their relationships. In my experience in Nigeria, women do expect that men will have affairs during their marriage and possibly have other children as a result. Women do not encourage this behavior but claim that it is not a reason for leaving their husbands as long as the men are supporting them adequately. In addition, Nigerian law offers full rights of inheritance to a man's children, irrespective of their legitimacy.

I wondered what would transpire if a woman had a relationship outside of marriage, how this would impact the relationship and the husband's masculine identity. Therefore, I asked the men, what happens if you or your wife has an affair with someone else? Who do the children belong to if you spilt up from your wife?

The men responded directly and apparently did not have to reflect on their answers. It was immediately evident that these men could not forgive their wives committing adultery. The issue of paternity is essential for the men. Seven of the ten men interviewed in Abuja referred to their wife's adultery as being a point of shame and an indiscretion that they could not forgive.

However, the men in Lagos were more eloquent in describing their feelings about what might transpire if they found their wives were cheating on them.

Hassan said, *"if my wife commit adultery. It will make people to think I am not a man and I will feel inferior"*.

Hezekiah said, *"if she is meeting another man. I would send her away. They will not see me as a man if I don't send her away"*.

Imo said, *"if my wife steals or commits adultery. I will divorce her"*.

Victor said *"woman you are married with your husband, why you like that. You will pack out and I will move in another one"*.

Kingsley said *"if a man is not interested in wife, she will suspect and create problems. But childbearing can collapse the relationship and the husband can put his leg in another place"*.

Odusanya said *"a man can go out. If a woman go out it is a grievous crime traditionally, culturally and everything else. Men do not want their wives to work, they can be having affairs with other men. They are touching up if the man has money. Let him carry the child"*.

I asked Odusanya why he said that.

Odusanya replied *"when this thing happened, I called her. Confess and we will pray for her, confess what you have done"*.

What happened?

*"she refuse to confess her sin and ask for forgiveness. I told her, pack your things and go from this house"*.

Ifeanyi said *"a woman should overlook it, after he finishes he will come back to you.*

*You can look at the other side but for woman there is no looking at the other side"*.

Victor said *"man make population, woman no make population. In my own state you kill a cow if you have an affair. Your wife, you will kill her"*.

Napoleon said, *"Shari'a code is good, the woman is stoned if she go out of the house with another man, we should all have Shari'a code. The Shari'a penal code encourages*



*man to beat his wife for reason of correcting her. Not cause grievous bodily harm. The harm must keep her in hospital for 14 days. No harm done if she is not in hospital."*

*Ambrose said that "if a woman has affair, I would not eat her food, I would just ignore her and send her back to her family. People say it is not the fault of the man but you do not feel happy about it".*

*Udom said men in Nigeria think that, "if a woman is pregnant from another man you cannot accept, you look for your own children".*

### **Analysis**

The overall response from the men was that they would not tolerate their wives having an affair and they would keep their children if the marriage dissolved, unless the child was breast-feeding. They perceive their wives' adultery as being a serious transgression that results in severe consequences and isolation for her. Odusanya, Victor and Udom expressed their concerns regarding the paternity of a child if a woman is conducting an affair outside of marriage and becomes pregnant. The men attribute importance on the aspect of ownership and control; of both their wife and their children from a marriage. Okehie-Offoha and Sadiku claim that in Nigeria, particularly in Igbo land, marriage involves the concept of possessiveness,

*"a form of sexual and emotional property. This property relationship gives the man exclusive sexual possession over his wife, but grants him freedom to have intercourse with other women, because the custom allows them to have more than one wife" (1996:70).*

The men sustain their masculine identity through their relationships with women outside of marriage; the cultural regulation of masculinity supports men having affairs and polygamy. Ortner and Whitehead refer to the social value associated with sexuality and argue that,

“for men....although the issue of sexual control does not actually generate categories of masculinity, there is nonetheless a correspondence between status and sexual activity that is the inverse of the female system” (1981:9).

The connection between men’s sexual freedom and the control of women’s sexual reproduction is fundamental to the construction of Nigerian masculine identity.

Unlike the participants from Abuja who disclosed their extra-marital affairs, the men I interviewed in Lagos did not. However, it was implied by comments such as *“a man can go out”*, *“a woman should overlook it”*. A man’s capacity to engage in sexual relations with women other than his wife is an integral element of their masculine identity. Silberschmidt argues that, for Kisii men, *“having relationships with more than one woman is a sign of virility and a way for men to demonstrate their maleness and their ability to ‘manage’”* (1999:155). On the other hand, a woman is expected to remain faithful to her husband, thus, guaranteeing the paternity of the children (1999:156). A woman’s sexuality is directly related to her husband’s respectability and status in society. Ambrose commented, *“they do not blame you but I would not feel happy about it”* and the other men referred to a woman’s demise if she was found committing

adultery. Okehie-Offoha and Sadiku argue that in Nigeria, a wife's adultery can bring dishonor and humiliation to a man "who is assumed unable to control his wife (sexual property)" (1996:70). The punishment associated with a wife's indiscretion reflects the seriousness of the offence.

Silberschmidt cites male honor and respectability as being vulnerable to his wife's chaste behavior and subsequently brings shame on him and her entire family. Silberschmidt claims that,

"a man's honor, his masculinity, his reputation is severely affected if he cannot make her stay away from other men. When men are not successful in this, their prestige in the society is diminished and they lose honor. Honor is not only the value of the person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of society" (1999:165).

The men's accounts reflect the serious nature of a woman's adultery. They feel it should be permitted to kill a woman if she commits adultery or with respect to Shari'a law, stone her. Despite the law disallowing men to meter out these punishments, Project Alert has found many instances of femicide in Nigeria. However, in many cases brought to the attention of the police, charges end up being dropped due to lack of evidence (Effah-Chukwuma and Osarenren: 2001).

Ambrose and Odusanya's experience reflect these men's belief in the cosmos and spiritual world. Ambrose said he would not eat his wife's food and he is convinced that he would die as a result of eating any food prepared by an adulterous wife. Silberschmidt found that in Kisii culture, the whole family would be at risk of death until a woman confessed her adultery and entered into a cleansing ritual (1999: 164). Odusanya's attempts to persuade his wife to

confess her sins failed, and he divorced her. I had not pressed him further regarding what the outcome would have been if she had confessed to having an affair, would it have been any different? However, there exists the possibility that she was not having an affair and Odusanya wanted her to leave without it reflecting badly on him. Falola explains that "adultery on the part of the woman constitutes a ground for divorce. In polygynous settings, men justify adultery as an attempt to seek their next wife, but women do not put forward similar reasons" (2001:121). Divorce is unusually low in traditional marriages because the extended family becomes involved in resolving conflicts and they apply pressure on the couple in order to prevent a divorce (Falola: 2001, Eades: 1980).

These men construct their masculine identity within the context of the family through the practice of conjugal violence. Gutmann reflects that, in Mexico, "the site for many skirmishes over gender identities and relations with the *colonias populares* is often the family" (1996:256). This is substantiated in the men's narratives. Ifeanyi told me "*as a man in Nigeria, how my wife and family behave is important for me*". With limited choices at their disposal, the men use violence in order to win back or maintain respect. Olajubu argues that, for men and their masculine identity, the "boundaries are constantly shifting and reconfigurations attend its expressions constantly" (2000:8). Thus a wife who commits adultery jeopardises the whole family and results in other persons questioning a man's masculine identity.

Thus the act of adultery is devastating for all those affected, a wife may lose all things that makes her a social being, marriage and her children, and both the wife and husband are shamed. Mookherjee, in her discussion relating to South Asian masculinities and a wife's sexuality, argues that, "the very role of social insult ensures that one should beat a woman..., a deed one is bound to perform in order to reply to people's gossip" (2000: 153). Victor's behaviour supports this paradigm. He demonstrated that his response to criticism and gossip regarding his control and authority over his wife is anger and violence. Hezekiah explained that others would not see him as a man if he did not act. The role of social shame guarantees that, if a wife is accused of committing adultery, a man must take some action in order to protect his masculine identity and respect before others.

There are documented testimonies of women who have been publicly humiliated after they have been accused of adultery<sup>23</sup>. One such case relates to an Igbo woman, "Mrs. Gladys Keshi was paraded naked for allegedly committing adultery in Ubulu-Uku in Aniocha Local Government Area of Delta State, south south Nigeria. According to reports, the tradition in Ubulu-Uku dictates that a woman alleged to have committed adultery must walk around the town naked to save herself, her husband and the entire community from unpleasant consequences" (2003). There are further examples relating to women being publicly shamed in this manner as well as many documented cases of

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<sup>23</sup> Project Alert publishes two yearly reports regarding documented cases of violence against women. These include conjugal violence, femicide, acid attacks, rape and assault.

husbands killing or maiming their wives as a result of them being accused of committing adultery. Adultery exposes the family to external sanctions and judgements and unlike conjugal violence, it is no longer a private affair between a husband and a wife.

Green suggests that the police become involved “only when the conjugal abuse exceeds tacit limits or when this private behaviour becomes a public nuisance, forcing the police to act as mediators” (1999: 112). Adultery force men to take specific action in order to recover the public face of their masculinity. There are few successful prosecutions as a result of men killing their wives and only one is documented; a farmer received a death sentence for killing his wife with a machete<sup>24</sup> (Effah-Chukwuma, Osakwe and Ekpeyong, 2002: 7). Green claims that when a husband murders his wife the case is tried in family court thus minimising the offence. Furthermore, “honour defences, in which the husband justifies the crime by claiming his honour was impugned by the victim’s behaviour, are often accepted and successful” (1999: 118). The insignificant number of Nigerian men who are successfully convicted for femicide confirms this supposition.

Given the egregious nature of a woman’s adultery, I question if any of the men would have spoken about it and admit to having lost control of his family. Odusanya told the group about having dealt with his wife’s possible adultery and subsequent divorce. Harvey suggests that men “would rarely use the courts

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<sup>24</sup> Cases documented by Project Alert on Violence Against Women for 2000-2002.

against a woman as he would thus further damage his injured masculinity by calling in a higher male authority...a woman's sexual infidelity automatically challenges the man's position in the conjugal hierarchy" (1994: 76). The consequences of adultery extend to both a husband and wife. Men are expected to act in order to recover their male identity and women suffer as a result. The Bible and Shari'a law counsel capital punishment for adulterous women. Remember Victor's statement that, in his village, killing a woman is permitted if she has committed adultery.

### **The Bible and the Control of Women**

Many of the men were religious, either Christian or Muslim, and two actually worked as pastors in their church. Nearly all of the men quoted the Bible at one time or another in order to support their claims of what they believe to be a woman's role in marriage. In essence the Bible was used as a means for justifying their acts of violence. It is interesting to note that, according to Effah-Chekwuma and Osarenren, chapters Leviticus and St. John in the Bible suggest that women who engage in the act of adultery will be condemned to death (2001:19), a view posited by some of the men I interviewed. Callaway and Creevey cite Dan Agbese in the Nigerian Outlook, who suggests that,

"The bible provides all the valid excuses men need to assign lowly places to women...Subordinating women to the will and rule of men was an immediate divine punishment imposed in the threat of anger...when Eve took the serpents advice and ate the forbidden fruit...Adam made a good job of perpetuating it. And all men like it" (1994:29).

Prior to colonialism, women played a powerful role in Yoruba religion and many other indigenous religions. However, Olajubu argues that when the missionaries arrived “the presence of powerful women was in sharp contrast to mission churches’ agenda, characterised mainly by hierarchical structures and a strict male-dominated ritual setting” (2003: 45). Furthermore, as a result of colonialism and the presence of missionaries, women in the Islamic north who previously had a measure of freedom, were driven indoors (Ogundipe-Leslie 1985: 122).

Though the men I interviewed are too young to have experienced colonialism, according to their narratives they interpret religion based on the same hierarchical principals. Okeagba said that he quoted the Bible for his wife so that she understands how she should treat him as her husband and know her place in the relationship. Victor often referred to the Bible in order to qualify gender roles and sanction his authority within the family. Odusanya took his wife to church in order that she confess her adultery. Danjuma, a Muslim man, said, *“I am the man and the head of the house. Our religion gives me priority to take the decisions for the family. A man must be patient and responsible for his wife and children”*.

These men use the Bible as a model to emphasize women’s inferior and dependent role within the family and society thus justifying their exploitation of them. Furthermore, the Qu’ran is misinterpreted and manipulated in order to support claims of authority and control (Effah-Chukwuma and Osarenren, 2001). The Bible is open to interpretation and Effah-Chukwuma and Osarenren argue



that the role of women in Christianity is evident in the compositions of St. Paul who advises wives to “regard their husbands as they regard the Lord. Ephe, 5:21” (2001: 19). There are many other examples that extol men’s privilege<sup>25</sup>. The Bible and the Qu’ran become a source of legitimacy for the men’s actions through which they can support their notions of masculinity.

Religious belief and practice forms an integral part of Nigerian existence and guides many aspects of life. Okehie-Offoha and Sadiku claim that most African religions are “very pragmatic and realistic. It is applied to a situation as the need arises” (1996: 71). Thus, used in this context the men’s religion becomes complicit in their search for justifications and explanations for their predicament. Women are unable to seek support from the church since religion is an institution in which “male ideology is being propagated and executed” (Effah-Chukwuma and Osarenren, 2001: 21). When women do attempt to seek help from their church, they are advised to return home and try harder to please their husbands (personal conversation: Josephine Effah-Chukwuma, 2004).

I am reminded of Ortner’s assertion that,

“the Sherpas’ religion becomes something that can be harnessed by humanity, allied with human purposes, drawn upon for human needs. This view of power is one that gives a great deal of agency to the nominally unpowerful; the name of the game is neither bowing before power nor resisting it, but figuring out how to both acknowledge its force and shape it to one’s own purposes” (1999:159).

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<sup>25</sup> According to the Book of Sirach or Ecclesiastics “a perfect wife is the joy of her husband, he will live out the years of his life in peace” (Effah-Chukwuma and Osarenren, 2001: 19).

This paradigm suggests that religion can be adapted and misappropriated by these men in order to support and explain their norms and values. According to the men's worldview the Bible offers a model of how women should conduct themselves as wives and confirms men's rights as a husband.

## CHAPTER 7

### **Conclusions**

The men's narratives provide a clear representation of their experiences and worldview concerning how they construct their masculine identity and conjugal violence. They illustrate the manner in which gender impacts the male batterer's experience of conjugal violence. Although it is too small a sample upon which to infer any generalizations about Nigerian society, there are patterns that can be deduced from the men's narratives and the subsequent analysis. I am reminded of Harris's claim regarding the analysis of violence, that "to attribute blame is a very inappropriate short-circuiting of the task of anthropology, which is to elucidate the context of such behavior" (1994: 43). These men's construction and negotiation of their male identity is fundamental to how they conduct their daily lives and the narratives demonstrate the complex dynamics of the relationship between conjugal violence and the construction of masculinity.

Ifeyanyi and Okeagba narratives demonstrate the efficacy of the cultural rules guiding the construction of masculinities in Nigeria and the consequences for those who deviate from them. Ifeyanyi's interest in helping his wife in the kitchen demonstrates his failure to live up to the cultural expectations of masculinity and leads him to beat his wife in order to feel like a man, restoring his feeling of control and manhood. The other men's reaction to Okeagba reinforced the ideals about what it takes to 'be a man' in Nigerian society and culture. The men's household and families are central to how they negotiate this

complex construction of masculinities and their reflections of what makes each of them a man demonstrates this point. Segura refers to Chicana gender constructs and posits the thought that, “traditional gender roles and gender ideologies are particularly resistant to change when they are framed within what Caufield (1974) terms a “culture of resistance” (1997: 305). Masculinities qualify as a “culture of resistance”. The men’s narratives and their experiences illustrate their resistance to change as they cling on to what they perceive to be traditional ideals. Gutmann and Chant suggest that worldwide research reports that “men are confused about their roles in the family and about the meanings of masculinity in general” (2000: 28). In addition, Foreman states that, “in a world in which masculine values no longer seemed to provide for their fathers and grandfathers, men’s fear is growing” (1999: 21). The shift in gender relations and the economic recession has encouraged these men to maintain traditional ideals and values in order to negotiate their male identity in their everyday lives.

The men’s competence with respect to sustaining a successful masculinity is vulnerable as a result of economic concerns, a shift in gender role and women’s inability to conform to the ideals of a good wife. These factors form the basis for these men committing acts of violence against their wives thus highlighting the relational structure of conjugal violence and their public performance of masculinity. Victor’s acts of violence are a result of other persons questioning both his masculine identity and his failure at maintaining control over his wife.

I identified patterns and commonalities' regarding the men's responses to what makes them men in their society, what sets off the violence and their views regarding gender role. Conjugal violence manifests itself when women are perceived to have failed in their duties, such as child care or food preparation and challenging their husband's authority as head of the household. The narratives illustrate the men's sense of inadequacy, that they use violence in their intimate relationships so as to maintain their public image of masculinity and be regarded 'a man' in society. The concept of breadwinner brings us closer to considering a link between the construction of masculinity and conjugal violence. As men fall short in their efforts to provide for the family they use violence as a strategy in order to renegotiate their masculinity.

There is a dissonance between the dominant discourse and the men's subjective realities regarding the construction of masculinity. Certain factors, such as Nigeria's economic decline, contribute to the men's failure to meet societal expectations regarding masculinity and are outside of their control. Their use of violence as a method of renegotiating their manhood supports the paradigm of 'crisis of masculinity'. These men demonstrate little authority or power except within their families and over their wives. The family becomes the place where men can communicate their frustrations and affirm their male identity without fear of consequences.

The notion of performance of masculinity has brought me further in my analysis of the men's narratives. None of the men exhibited any shame

regarding the violence and indeed discussed it openly with each other and without guile. Conjugal violence is a vehicle through which these men negotiate control and authority, hence their masculine identity. The men refer to their need to be regarded as men by other persons. They see their wives' behavior as fundamental to their male identity and, as such, women must be controlled. According to the men's narratives, any situation they perceive as a challenge to their authority as head of the household and the public performance of their masculine role manifests itself in acts of conjugal violence.

The men's narratives and the subsequent analysis support the link between the complex nature of these men's construction of masculinity and acts of conjugal violence. This does not, however, relinquish men from blame or suggest that there is no possibility for change. Green argues that "those concerned with gender violence make the important point that abuse thrives because it is treated as too traditional, too culturally sensitive to tackle, because it belongs to the private realm" (1999: 20). However, the men's willingness to partake in discussion related to conjugal violence, albeit a small number of men, demonstrates a willingness to recognize this important issue and possibly instill change.

### **Applications for Research**

How can this research be applied in the field of gender and violence or possibly the treatment of men who perpetrate the violence? In Nigeria the issue of conjugal violence is just beginning to emerge as a public discourse; the

establishment of a shelter for women and move to introduce a conjugal violence bill reflects this shift. Statistics confirm that conjugal violence is the most common form of violence against women in Nigeria and that it is on the rise (Effah-Chukwuma and Osarenren: 2001).

The Nigerian NGO's I worked with affirmed their desire to include men in the discussion and intervention regarding conjugal violence. Indeed, Cleaver suggests that "emphasis is placed on the need to involve men as victims as well as perpetrators of violence and to involve men in discussions that deconstruct traditional perceptions of masculinity" (2002: 12). The group interview I held in Lagos produced a rich source of data. Contrary to current opinions regarding Nigerian men not talking about personal matters, it appears that they do want to talk about the issue of conjugal violence as they themselves experience it and as perpetrators of the violence.

Support groups for male batterers currently do not exist in Nigeria. Therefore, in the safe and supportive environment of a support group, men can be given the opportunity to reify their definitions of themselves and how they negotiate their masculine role in their socio-cultural environment. In essence, support groups for men as perpetrators of conjugal violence provide an environment for learning, an opportunity to talk about their frustrations and feelings, as well as improve their conflict resolution skills. Gutmann and Chant suggest that men "lack ideas, or alternative gender scripts, to find other meaningful roles in the family in this changing economic environment" (2000:

29). Thus, with a trained counselor acting as facilitator, a support group could offer “new scripts” on ‘how to be a man’ and maintain their male identity within Nigerian society.

While in Lagos, I watched a television program where a group of invited guests discussed the topic of conjugal violence.<sup>26</sup> An Oil Minister from the Hausa ethnic group, when asked what he thought about the plight of women and conjugal violence, commented that, “*no country has a policy to under develop women*” and “*women are weaker vessels*”. This demonstrates the difficulty in instigating change at the structural level. However, despite this; school, churches and government must become involved in the process of change and provide alternative ways regarding gender role and relations. Boys should be taught to negotiate their masculine identity in a manner that does not elaborate the attributes of control and authority over women. Taking into consideration the importance of marriage as well as providing support for women and men in violent relationships is essential. Religion is an integral part of Nigerian society and culture and one of the primary domains where men learn to interpret gender role and constructs. Thus, the participation of religious leaders is fundamental for implementing change.

The men conveyed to me that conjugal violence is cultural. Victor told me, “*I am a Nigerian man, it is our culture. It is not the same as your own*”. The men feigned surprise when I explained that conjugal violence is not unique to

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<sup>26</sup> The show was “Potito’s Gang”. It aired on Nigerian Television on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> October, 2004.



Nigeria. Kandirikirira argues that in Namibia, “as domestic violence became commonplace some men argued that the abuse of wives is ‘cultural’” (2002: 120). By suggesting that conjugal violence is cultural, the men attempt to determine their actions as natural and inevitable with no possibility for change. However, any such behaviour is open to change. The social and cultural shift brought about by colonialism and its subsequent impact on gender demonstrates this point. The men’s narratives and views offered by church pastors, doctors and government ministers make evident the adversary and long-term obstacles that projects such as those I have discussed will experience. However, given that statistics confirm at least one-third of all women experience conjugal violence, the benefits for those involved are enormous.

#### **Avenues for Future Research**

Research that involves men relating their personal experiences is intrinsically difficult. Enlisting men who agree to be interviewed on the topic of conjugal violence results in small samples of participants and in my experience, many cancelled or missed appointments. Conjugal violence occurs in all social strata. and there are few studies that have included men from privileged backgrounds. Thus, I would endeavor to interview men from diverse social class and explore the impact of social class on the construction of masculinity and conjugal violence.

In essence the group interview I held in Lagos was successful with regards to the data it produced. However, Gutmann found that,

“on certain sensitive topics, such as conjugal violence, rather than being more difficult to discuss these issues with women, it was often much easier to speak with them than it was to get men to think reflexively and report honestly about their experiences and ideas” (1996: 279).

I am aware of the limits to the men’s subjective realities. In the context of a group interview, the men’s responses to each other can elicit more truth and discussion than through individual interviews. However, by engaging both the couple in a study on conjugal violence, it might bring us closer to establishing an etiology for this complex issue and answer “why do men beat their wives”?

## CHAPTER 8

### **Reflexive Thoughts About the Interview Process**

I have been asked why I think the men spoke so openly with me. Initially I believed that they just forgot that I was there and that they were immersed in the moment talking about their experiences. The men did laugh at one another, nod in agreement and occasionally shout out a 'yes' if there was a comment or experience that they all shared or wanted to elaborate on. However, I did intercept from time to time, asking questions or paraphrasing their answers thus making it difficult for them to forget I was in the room. So, why did the men speak so candidly to me about their experiences? In Nigeria, everyone warned me that no one would speak to me and some even ridiculed me when I explained to them what I was hoping to achieve. However, I have good people skills, the ability to put people at their ease and make them laugh. I thought that if I could only find a few men who would participate then I would be able to do the rest.

My husband is from a well known Yoruba family in Nigeria. I was concerned that not only my gender and race would impact how the men would relate to me but my family name might as well. Having previously interviewed men about their experiences of violence, I was aware of the impact my gender would have on the process. The men would be more careful with their language, their accounts of violence and some might seek my approval or advice. However, my experience of Nigerian culture over the years has made me aware of the importance of social etiquette. Thus, I told Josephine that I did not want to

use my married name, Lambo, on the invitations. She urged me to use it, saying that the men might be more likely to come if they saw a Nigerian name, especially Lambo. I saw this as a double edged sword. Using my married name might encourage the men to come but would they speak candidly to me once they saw that I was an older white women? I preferred to conduct the research on my own terms and I did not want the men arriving and expecting to see a Nigerian. In Nigeria, I am torn between my own western cultural norms and being perceived as an independent woman. However, in Nigeria I am someone's wife or daughter-in-law. Olajubu argues that in Nigeria,

“Yoruba social identities were and remain fundamentally relational, changing, and situational, with seniority as the crucial determinant of making. The social roles of the Yoruba woman were therefore informed to a large extent by her relationship with others in the society. Such social roles included mother, wife, and daughter. Privileges and obligations within the social framework, i.e., the family, attended these identities” (2003:25).

I acquiesced to Josephine's experience and we sent the invitations with my married name.

Bridget introduced me to the men. She explained to them that I had lived and spent time in Nigeria and therefore they should consider me a Nigerian. Indeed most of the men did ask me if I was related to Professor Lambo, my father-in-law, confirming Josephine's belief that my name alone would ensure them attending the interview. I was happy that the men addressed me as “Ma” throughout the interview, the term of address traditionally used when speaking with an older married woman. This validated me as being considered a Nigerian

and not an expatriate that would have been the case had they addressed me as 'Madam'.

I feel that the men were more open with me because of my seniority. I was the oldest person in the room. If I had been younger, the men might be more careful with respect to what they say in my company. Respect for seniority and status is an integral part of Nigerian culture, as women age they gain more authority and respect (Falola: 2001, Okehie-Offoha & Sadiku, 1996:140). In many African cultures an older woman is considered post menopausal and as such accorded a higher status when compared to that of younger women. Ogbomo argues that in Owan society, in the Delta region of Nigeria, post-menopausal women were accorded the status of an honorary male and "since they were considered 'males', it was proper to accord them the same respect and dignity as biological men...and as a 'male' she did not require any special permission to speak" (1997: 154). However, Olajubu indicates that the construction of gender in Yoruba culture "is essentially culture bound and should be differentiated from notions of gender in some other cultures. Yoruba gender is fluid and modulated by other factors such as age (seniority) and personal achievement (wealth and knowledge acquisition)" (c2003:8). I am not convinced that the men considered me post menopausal. Despite my grey hair, I do not carry myself or dress in the conservative manner that someone of that ilk would do in Nigeria. I maintain that being senior to the men in both age and status afforded me their confidence and made me an honorary male.

Past studies conducted in the United Kingdom and the United States (Dobash, Dobash, Cavanaugh and Lewis: 2001, Anderson and Umberson: 2001), reveal that men underreport the violence and are therefore likely to be involved in more violence than they disclose. Through such accounts, batterers deny responsibility and save face when describing behavior that might result in formal sanctions against them. In the context of Nigeria, the men do not have the same fear of sanctions. Although Victor was very candid with the group, according to Bridget, the other men were more cautious about describing the degree of violence that they were engaged in. The failure to disclose the scale of violence that they are engaged in is a legitimate concern that I had regarding the data I gathered from interviewing the men about conjugal violence. However, my research was based on the men's personal statements. Project Alert had offered me the opportunity to look at each man's personal file prior to the interviews, but I felt that it would be prudent to attend the interview without any prior knowledge of their past history that might bias my judgment of them.

I had not expected the men to talk about sex in my company. I did not ask them about sex and in my experience, Nigerian men do not talk about sex in the company of women. I did not permit myself to reveal the shock that I felt when Victor described how he raped his wife. I was nodding my head in response along with the other men and looking at Victor. It was obvious by their responses to him that neither he nor they looked upon this act as rape. Indeed, there is no law in Nigeria preventing a man from raping his wife. As I have

discussed, if a woman wants to bring charges against her husband regarding any form of violence, she must press criminal charges of against him.

I had informed the men at the beginning of the interview that I would not judge them. I wanted to provide a safe environment for them to share as much as possible with me. I began to wonder what they would tell me next. However, I just nodded and continued to ask questions when there was a quiet gap, which at this point was not often. The conversation flowed and the men often shouted “yes !, yes !” in agreement with each other. The tone of the interview was very light and amidst the questions and responses the men were joking with each other and me. In my experience, Nigerians do have a wonderful sense of humor and an ability to laugh in the face of misery, therefore, I did not reflect too much on this point. However, following a study conducted in Nigeria on the issue of conjugal violence, Atinmo observed that,

*“the sociocultural implications of wife beating have been difficult to determine, investigate and record because of low official reporting, perhaps coupled with societal indifference. This became apparent to this researcher from a cursory observation of people’s attitude to wife beating. They seem to find it funny, so they laugh and shy away from discussing it seriously” (2000: 83).*

Thus, in laughing along with the men, am I confirming their conviction that conjugal violence is an issue that is not taken seriously? In order to discuss the topic of conjugal violence and the men’s ideas about masculinity I needed them to feel that they were in a safe environment and would not be judged. I could not see any benefit in my marginalizing or isolating the men during the interview process. In addition, humor should not be discounted as worthless

with respect to finding out about the men's subjective realities. Humor is an important form of discourse that can prove to be revealing. Moreover, I am reminded of Ortner's suggestion that,

"if one cares about those lives, and if one imagines, however, naively, that there is a possibility of gaining access to them despite the blinders of one's own culture, then one must still make the Geertzian move into 'culture of meaning'" (1999:158).

I am aware that studying men's views can appear as though colluding with the perpetrators of violence against women. I am torn between applying my own judgments on the men's justifications, labeling the acts of violence<sup>27</sup> and explaining or analyzing the acts of violence from a relativist stance. Victor's account of his sexual attack on his wife made me very uncomfortable and for the first time that day I wondered what I was doing here. How could I write about Victor's narrative? As a woman, how could I remain detached?

On a personal level, I found Victor's narrative very difficult to process. I felt embarrassed and regretful that another woman had suffered the indignity that Victor had just described. However, I am reminded of Smedley's notion that "research revealed that Third World women did not perceive their world in terms comparable to such concepts in the West" (2004:4). Was my ethnocentrism manifesting itself by labeling this act as rape when clearly no one else had? On a professional level, I felt elated that Victor had shared something very important regarding my research. I had not anticipated this level of discussion and I was

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<sup>27</sup>I have hesitated to label Victor's narrative of him forcing his wife to have sex at knifepoint as rape as it was apparent that neither Victor nor the other men perceived it as such. There is currently no legislation in Nigeria regarding marital rape.



unprepared for it. I was unsure how I would use this particular information. I want to represent these men who participated in my research appropriately while remaining unbiased. How will I be judged when I write about the interview and my response, or lack thereof, to such information? Counts, Brown and Campbell suggest that,

“We respect the right of other peoples to hold values different to our own, and it is not our place to criticize them for behavior that is acceptable in their society but is unacceptable and the subject of political agendas in our own. On the other hand, we are uncomfortable with analyses that are restricted to describing and explaining violence that we personally find abhorrent.....We are caught up between our own ethnocentrism, on the one hand, and the sterile aloofness of extreme relativism, on the other” (1999:xviii).

By analyzing men’s accounts of for why they commit such acts perhaps it will lead to reducing the statistics related to conjugal violence and I might be excused “the sterile aloofness of extreme relativism” (Counts, Brown and Campbell, 1999: xviii).

It is very difficult to reconcile the narratives and stories with *these* men. They were well dressed and treated me with respect, standing when I stood and addressing me in a proper manner. They say that, as men, they feel marginalized by their wives and by society. They feel that any subsequent violence or behavior should be understood in these terms. They perceive their male identities to be fragile and they continually re-negotiate and reflect upon it. Indeed, Ramirez points out that contrary to men feeling elated and celebrating their masculinity, “the masculine ideology also oppresses them” (1999:109). Analyzing the way in which these men view their sense of self and male identity,

perhaps Ramirez's paradigm has validity. The men spoke about the pressure they feel in maintaining their manhood and measuring up to the dominant ideology of the construction of masculinities in Nigerian society.

I felt a level of empathy with the men during the time I spent with them and I still do when I think back to the time of the interviews. They placed a level of trust in me, that I would represent them properly with respect to their narratives. None of the men questioned my ethics or reasons for interviewing them about their most personal issues; they appeared pleased that anyone was interested in their stories. Limon, reflecting upon the discourse analysis regarding the men he observed while conducting his field research in Texas, asks, "how does one produce a narrative construction, one's ethnography, that does not wholly objectify and violate the 'feel' of such events" (1997:71). I have, therefore, sought to represent the men and their narratives genuinely, without sensationalizing them in any way.

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