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Antithetical Gendered Stances in Readers' Comments on Domestic Violence against Men

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Abstract

Domestic violence against women (DVAW) has received much attention from scholars across disciplines, leading to a circumvention of studies on domestic violence against men (DVAM). This paper, therefore, engages in a qualitative dialogic analysis of readers' comments on cases of DVAM reported in select blogs in order to elicit opposing gendered stances on DVAM in the selected readers' comments; interpret the linguistic resources and interactional practices used in projecting the identified opposing stances; and explicate on the implications of the gendered stances on cases of DVAM in Nigeria. The data comprises 248 readers' comments on cases of DVAM culled from the archives of *Bella Naija* and *Linda Ikeji's* blogs. The two blogs constantly report on domestic issues. Haddington's (2004) Stance taking model is adapted as the analytical framework. The study portrays opposing gender-based stances on DVAM in Nigeria in order to construe gendered perspectives on the phenomenon and to portray the dynamism of domestic violence (DV).

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1. Introduction

Gender, as a social construct, demarcates between “biological sex differences” and the various ways such differences inform behavioral expectations “which are then assigned as either ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’” (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004, p. 56). Since the 1970s that gender was viewed as a social construct, the issue of gender and language has become a scholarly pursuit for linguists. There are theories explaining observable differences in the language of male and female. The three basic theories are the deficit, the dominance and the difference models (Mei, 2006). Proponents of the dominance and deficit approaches (e.g., Fishman, 1983; Lakoff, 1975) espouse female subjugation and male dominance while proponents of the difference approach (e.g., Coates, 1993; Tannen, 1986) focus on the differences between the communicative styles of the two genders (Healy, 2008); they do not relate gender differences in language to gender difference in power (Mei, 2006). However, Coates and Cameron (1998) conclude that the three models are inadequate in their postulations on gender and language since they ignore the social contexts of the speech events (as cited in Mei, 2006).

Earlier studies on gender and language have largely focused on language usage and patterns in traditional face to face communication (Li, 2005). Scholars like Tannen (1994) and Lakoff (1975) reveal that men use more linguistic patterns like interruptions, aggression, longer speeches and take more turns than females, while women use indirectness, silence and question tags more than men do. Li (2005, p. 385) summarizes observations from previous research on gender relations in face to face traditional communication into three basic linguistic patterns. Firstly, “evidence of unequal linguistic patterns in the structures of male/female interactions”; secondly “evidence of gender differences in the linguistic practices and strategies that people use in interactions”; and lastly “differences in the purposes for which people engage in linguistic interaction” (Yates, 2001, as cited in Li, 2005, p. 385).

In gender studies however, there was a gradual shift from viewing gender as a noun to a more

assertive way of demonstrating how gender differences are actively represented via gendered practices and behaviors in diverse contexts (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004). The notion ‘gendered’ denotes attributes which spell out the patterns of difference on the basis of gender (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004, p. 59). Therefore, to say something is gendered is an attempt to describe its attributes on the parameters of masculinity or femininity.

Several studies abound that investigate the gendered nature of diverse phenomena in contemporary societies. For instance, using the Dominance and Difference approaches, Kunsmann (2014) examines linguistic features like phonological variability that mark male and female speech differences in diverse speech situations. He investigates whether the observable differences in male and female speeches are closely linked to gender or, alternatively, to status and power. McLaren (2008) also investigates gendered media representations in politics; the study mirrors the different ways female and male political candidates are represented by the media in elections to further buttress the dominance gender approach. His work reinforces how gendered media representations further marginalize the presence of women in politics and constructing their relationship to power as problematic. Sensales, Areni, and Dal Secco (2016) also explore possible gender bias in favor of men in the coverage of five newspapers in order to compare how men and women presidents are portrayed differently in the Italian press communication. Wassen (2015) likewise investigates gender relations by examining how and why female rebels in Syria are differently described from their male counterparts. This study also demonstrates how females who engage in forbidden violence violate expected gender roles and behaviors.

Studies on gendered practices and behaviors are no longer limited to traditional face to face communication. In the last decades, gender equality/difference, effects and roles have been explored in diverse computer-mediated communicative contexts. Early researchers found out that the Internet was initially a male-dominated genre (Land, 1999; Martinez, 1994, as cited in Li, 2005). However, it was discovered that females’ growing interest in

the Internet was gaining precedence in recent years (InterCommerce Corporation, 2003, as cited in Li, 2005), thereby leading to a proliferation of research on the gendered nature of the new medium. The present study, therefore, intends to build on these arrays of research by investigating gendered stances in mixed-sex computer mediated discussions on DVAM, an under-explored phenomenon in the Nigerian context.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Gender Differences in Computer-Mediated Communication

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) which comprises “a variety of interactive socio-technical modes including email, discussion lists, web forums, chat, MUDs (multi-user dimensions) and MOOs (MUDs, object oriented), IM (instant messaging), text messaging (SMS), weblogs (blogs), and microblogs” (Herring & Stoerger, 2013, p. 4), also has a gender dimension, which has mostly been underexplored (Adam, 2005) due to the acclaimed degree of anonymity that makes the gender of online users invisible. Online gender invisibility has purportedly rendered equal male/female online participations and recognitions which stand in contrast to the patterns of male dominance commonly observed in traditional face-to-face interactions (Graddol & Joan, 1989, as cited in Herring & Stoerger, 2013).

Existing research on gender in CMC mostly argues on gender visibility/invisibility in diverse CMC contexts. Scholars like Li (2005), Herring and Stoeberg (2013) and Mei (2006) have all argued against the acclaimed democratic nature of CMC environments which has purportedly engendered equal gender participation. Although anonymity and pseudonymity often disguise CMC as a genderless genre of communication, users mostly reveal their gender identity through their interaction styles (Herring, 2000, as cited in Li, 2005). Herring (1994), for instance, uncovers differences in the ways men and women interact in virtual domains. Her study reveals different gendered styles and communicative ethics in both academic and non-academic mixed-sex computer-mediated discussion lists. Her findings reveal that male

communicative style in CMC is adversarial and characterized by contentious assertions, put-downs, self-promotion, lengthy and/or frequent postings and sarcasm while women's style is characterized by ‘supportiveness and attenuation’.

Also, by surveying research on gender and CMC in the United States between 1989, when gender issues gained popularity in print, and 2013, Herring and Stoerger (2013) posit that gender visibility in CMC is predicated on consciously or unconsciously displayed features of participants' discourse style. Linguistic features signaling gender in CMC are “verbosity, assertiveness, use of profanity, (im)politeness, typed representations of smiling and laughter, and degree of interactive engagement” (Coates, 1993; Tannen, 1990, as cited in Herring & Stoerger, 2013, p. 4). By performing a gendered analysis of conflict and harassment in CMC context, Li (2005) reveals that females too can initiate hostility in CMC interactions, thereby transgressing dominant gender behavioral expectations. In mixed discussion CMC environments, Herring (1996, as cited in Herring & Stoerger, 2013) also supports Li's (2005) assertion. Her position is that women exhibit more aggressions in male-dominated groups than among fellow women.

The question answered by these studies border mainly on gender identification in CMC environments. Herring and Stoerger (2013, p. 13) posit that “the Internet and CMC reproduce the larger societal gender status quo” in spite of the degree of anonymity and pseudonymity. Yates (1997, 2001, as cited in Li 2005, p. 388) also suggests that gender of online users can primarily be inferred from ‘the language used in CMC’. Moreover, multimodal CMC enables users to upload their personal photographs. Besides that, even in text-based CMC, users use their real names which most often, suggest the bearer's likely gender (Herring, 1993, as cited in Herring & Stoerger, 2013), and also users' “interaction styles and message content”, most often, render visible users' gender (Herring 1996, as cited in Herring & Stoerger, 2013, p. 12). Li (2005) and Herring and Stoerger (2013) conclude that the same gender behavioral patterns that dominate real life communications also perpetuate virtual

settings, and this reflects the gender dichotomies of our society.

The hues and cries on gender visibility in virtual space amongst researchers have birthed a plethora of research on the gendered nature of different CMC contexts. Mazman and Usluel (2011) and Nazir (2012), for example, investigate the gendered nature of the social networking site, Facebook. Their findings reveal that Facebook, the most popular and widely used social network, exhibits different usage purposes between males and females.

Furthermore, Pedersen and Macafee (2007) investigate and confirm that blogging in the United Kingdom reproduces gender differences in blogging behavior and gender inequalities observed by scholars in studies based largely on U.S. bloggers. The study agrees with research in North America that female bloggers' blogging motivations, blogging focus and technical competence explain their low public representations in the blogosphere. Mei (2006) also analyses gendered linguistic features of dyadic synchronous CMC in order to identify the linguistic features which can facilitate easy determination of the gender of unacquainted users. He also argues that the linguistic styles of male and female users in the dyadic synchronous CMC is similar to that in traditional face-to-face conversations.

With a proliferation of studies on the multi-faceted gendered possibilities of the Internet, the present study aims at adding to the literature by investigating opposing gendered stances in online readers' comments on reports on DVAM in select blogs. The study, therefore, seeks to portray opposing gendered positions in users' reactions to the phenomenon and the linguistic/interactional practices male and female online users employ to project their oppositeness.

2.2. Domestic Violence against Men

Domestic violence (DV) is pervasive globally; however, women are most often seen as the only victims (Adebayo, 2014). Limited societal acknowledgement that men too could be victims of domestic violence has created a huge gap in the research between DVAM and DVAM. There is rather the acknowledgement that men have the potential to be the

oppressor, and women, the oppressed (Shuler, 2010). Studies on gender-based violence have, consequently, given much attention to violence against women rather than men. Hence, DVAM is not well documented in the research on gender-based violence. This explains the expediency of the present study to create a gender-balanced approach to the phenomenon of DV.

Domestic Violence, also synonymous with such terms as spousal abuse, domestic abuse, family violence and intimate partner violence (IPV) or intimate partner abuse (IPA), constitutes a behavioral pattern involving the abuse of one partner (victim) by the other (perpetrator or aggressor) in "an intimate relationship like marriage, cohabitation, dating or within the family" (Adebayo, 2014, p. 14). Men and women could be both victims and perpetrators of DV. However, much has been said on female victims of DV in the last decade, thereby circumventing studies on male victims. Nevertheless, there are a few studies on the prevalence of DVAM in different geographical domains, etiology of such violence, impacts on victims, and probable solutions to the menace (Ali, 2007; Corry, Fiebert, & Pizzey, 2002; Tilbrook, Allan, & Dear, 2010).

Tilbrook et al. (2010), for instance, perform an exploratory study on the experiences of adult male victims of intimate partner abuse (IPA) in Australia. Some forms of abuse identified are: verbal abuse (use of language to degrade, humiliate and intimate like yelling, screaming and insulting), psychological abuse (humiliations), financial abuse (incompetent control of partners' finances), physical abuse (like biting, punching, spitting, screaming, throwing of objects etc.), sexual abuse (deprivation of sex or sexual coercion), legal abuse (manipulative use of legal and administrative resources against male victims), social abuse (social isolations) and spiritual abuse. Some of these forms of DVAM are also identified by Dobash and Dobash (1992) and Ali (2007). Their studies reveal that male victims' reluctance to disclose their experiences are due to denial (failure of the victim to recognize the experience as abuse), fear of not being believed by those they confide in, fear of being ridiculed, lack of protection for male victims, bias judicial

system, hostile reception of the victim by the police and the victim's desire to protect the perpetrator, children and their family (Tilbrook et al., 2010). Male victims' readiness to disclose abuse is, therefore, subject to societal recognition and acknowledgement that males too could be victims of DV (Tilbrook et al., 2010).

In India, Save Family Foundation and MyNation (Sarkar, Dsouza, & Dasgupta, 2007) report that Indian legal system has no existing laws against DVAM due to the Indian mentality that men are superior to women, so male victims are laughed at when they attempt to speak out. The study carried out by the two bodies between April 2005 and March 2006 reveal that from all over Indian, 98% of Indian husbands had suffered domestic violence more than once in their lives. In the United States also, intimate partner violence (IPV) is becoming a prioritized issue due to its steady growth (Shuler, 2010). Even though reports show that women experience more violence than men, male victims of IPV cannot be ignored. DV is now seen as "a serious social problem and a crime" (Shuler, 2010, p. 164). Male victims are often seen as cowards; hence they tend to keep silent in the face of abuse. Swan, Gambone, Caldwell, Sullivan, & Snow (2008, p. 306) report two studies that investigate "the psychological aggression and physical violence of women", and they conclude that, "women use higher levels of moderate physical violence than their partners used against them and about the same level of severe physical violence" (as cited in Shuler, 2010, p. 165). This implies that male aggression is more exaggerated than female aggression in the family context. George and Yarwood (2004) also report that 47% of male victims of intimate partner violence have been threatened with arrest by the police in the United States, 35% were ignored and 21% "were actually arrested instead of the female perpetrators" (as cited in Shuler, 2010, p. 165). Roland's (2009) study likewise reveals a significant bias in the reportage of sexual offences committed by males, as opposed to females in the Australian media.

In Africa, Adebayo (2014), citing 21 reports in 2011 in Kenya reveals that almost five hundred thousand Kenyan men were beaten by their spouses. He illuminates further that the

"chairman of Maendeleo ya Wanawake – 'Progress for Women' -- in Kiswahili, publicly stated that men who don't provide for their families should be beaten ...". The rising cases of DVAM in Kenya are hinged on growing "female superiority complex" (p. 15). In Nigeria, although it is reportedly claimed that the patriarchal nature of the society makes men predisposed to violence against women, nevertheless, DVAM is still a reality which has largely remained under-reported due to its sensitive nature (Adebayo, 2014). Men victims often choose denial and silence. Disclosing abuse by one's spouse in a patriarchal society is a "misnomer". Adebayo (2014) cites some cases of the experiences of male victims of DV in Nigeria; one of them is the case of Israel Obi, a victim of hot vegetable oil bath by his wife in Ogun State of Nigeria. Also, in a survey carried out by Dienye and Gbeneol (2009, as cited in Adebayo, 2014), five males out of a total number of 48 victims of DV at the General Outpatient Department of the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital were identified.

Scholars have argued that DV has negative impacts on the victims, irrespective of the gender, hence, similar attention enjoyed by female victims of DV must be granted male victims. Kimmel (2002) posits that women's violence against men must be given much more recognition in order to fully understand the dynamics of violence in domestic relationships. In spite of the trauma linked to DVAM, victims are often reluctant to disclose their experience. This has resulted in dearth of research on the phenomenon.

The present study intends to fill the gap by performing a qualitative gendered analysis of the positions of male and female commenters on reports of DVAM in select blogs. This study seeks a gender-balanced approach to DV by analyzing real life incidents of DV where women are aggressors. The focus of the paper is to investigate antithetical gendered perspectives in readers' comments on reported cases of DVAM in Nigeria via a dialogic approach. Hence, its specific objectives are to identify opposing gendered stances in male/female comments on cases of DVAM in select blogs; identify and interpret the linguistic resources and interactional practices used in projecting the identified opposing

gendered stances; and discuss the rhetorical implications of the opposing gendered stances on the phenomenon of DVAM in Nigeria.

2.3. The Theoretical Paradigm: Dialogic Stance-Taking

In the last decades, stance in diverse multi-faceted contexts has been widely researched in various fields like sociolinguistics, functional linguistics, conversation analysis, and corpus linguistics. Most research on stance focus on the linguistic tools and interactional practices used by participants (Haddington, 2004). Most of these researchers view stance as “a speaker’s or writer’s attitude, displays of emotions and desires, expressions of beliefs and certainty toward given issues, people, and the speakers’ co-participants” (Haddington, 2004, p. 103). Other terms like epistemicity, affect, evidentiality, modality, subjectivity, intersubjectivity, evaluation, attitude, epistemic modality, metadiscourse and appraisal have been used synonymously to represent stance (Englebretson, 2007; Hyland, 2005; Keisanen, 2006). Prior studies on stance are reviewed below in order to see the different angles from which they have examined the notion.

Englebretson (2007, p. 361) and Keisanen (2006, p. 13), for instance, see stance as an interactional activity, situated in a specific context and “actively engaged in by language users communicating with each other”. Englebretson (2007) posits five conceptual principles of stance which are: stance taking occurs at the “three levels of physical action, personal attitude/belief/evaluation and social morality; stance is public and perceivable, interpretable and available for inspection by others; stance is interactional and collaboratively constructed among participants with respect to other stances; stance is indexical; and stance is consequential, leading to real consequences for the persons or institutions involved” (p. 362). Keisanen (2006) examines how tag questions and negative yes/no interrogatives in naturally occurring American English conversations project the intersubjective and interactional construction of stance. Biber and Finegan (1988) also identify adverbial stance in speech styles in English. To them, adverbials constitute one of the primary linguistic stance markers in English. From the LOB and

London-Lund corpora (410 texts of written and spoken British English) adverbials marking stance are identified and differentiated from adverbials performing other functions.

Furthermore, some studies also demonstrate that academic discourse, which has always been seen as impersonal, monolithic and mostly devoid of stance markers, is replete with stance elements. Hyland (2005), for instance, reveals that stance is integral to professional academic discourse by presenting an overall typology of linguistic resources writers employ to position their stances to the materials referenced by their text and to propose the active role of an addressee to which the text is directed to. His stance and engagement framework explains writers’ intersubjective positioning. Hyland’s (2005) study deviates from past studies on stance which have only analyzed mass audience texts. His analyses focus basically on academic discourse and his choice of data aims at portraying the interpersonal dimension of academic texts.

Stance elements proposed are hedges, boosters, attitude markers and self-mentions. Hedges are linguistic devices (“like possible, might and perhaps”) that position speaker’s/ writer’s stance to a proposition (Hyland, 2005, p. 178). Boosters are linguistic resources (“like clearly, obviously and demonstrate”) used by writers to mark their certainty and conviction in their propositions (Hyland, 2005, p. 179). They represent the subjective evaluation of speaker/writer. Attitude markers portray writer’s subjective and affective attitude to propositions. Self-mention employs first person pronouns and possessive adjectives to project speaker/writer’s positions to their propositions. It assists writer to create an impression of themselves in the texts and “how they stand in relation to their arguments” (Hyland, 2005, p. 181). White (2003) also proposes a typology for analyzing the linguistic resources of intersubjective stance. That is, how the linguistic resources provide the means by which speakers and writers position themselves toward the different viewpoints being referenced by the text as well as how they position themselves with other subjects who share or disagrees with their views.

Haddington (2004) differentiates between stance and stance taking. Stance embodies speaker/writer's attitudes towards an object, which he calls "stance object", while stance taking refers to a "dialogical and intersubjective activity" (p. 101). Stance, being a complex and elusive notion, led him to propose stance taking as a way of combining conversation analysis and Du Bois' (2001, 2004) discourse-functional "theory of stance" to analyze stance taking in news interviews. Interactants in any talk-in-interaction take their stances via the employment of diverse "linguistic resources and interactional practices" (Haddington, 2004, p. 102). The focus of Haddington (2004) is to present stance as a dialogic and an intersubjective activity as against a subjective one proposed by previous scholars. His stance taking model portrays how linguistic items are used to position speakers'/writers' dialogic and intersubjective viewpoints, feelings etc. on a stance object. The "presence of two subjectivities in interaction both constitute and is a prerequisite to an intersubjective interactional event" (Haddington, 2004, p. 107). Intersubjectivity is, therefore, central to stance taking and it manifests in two basic ways, which are: *backward-type* intersubjectivity and *forward-type* intersubjectivity. The first depicts that "an utterance or an action reflects what has been said or done in the immediate prior utterance" while the latter shows the potential of every utterance or action to be directed towards the subjects (p. 107).

Stance taking in any interactional context combines linguistic expressions with their appropriate contexts. It is achieved via positioning and alignment. Alignment, however, does not signify agreement, but the ways "interactants position themselves in relation to each other, or engage with each other" (Haddington, 2004, p. 109-110). Therefore, stance taking is a "dynamic, dialogic, intersubjective, and collaborative social activity in which speakers actively construct stances by building on, modifying, aligning and engaging with the stances of other speakers" (Du Bois, 2004, as cited in Haddington, 2004, p. 109-111). Du Bois (2001, as cited in Haddington, 2004, p. 111) also reveals that part of the theory of stance is that co-participants often "use, borrow and recycle" one another's "linguistic units

(morphosyntax, lexis, and prosody) when they negotiate and take stances" irrespective of the interactants' agreement or disagreement. This notion is known as 'Dialogic Syntax' which focuses on how commenters take stances in relation to others' stances in the discussion forum. Haddington (2004, p. 111) interprets this as the "intersubjective unfolding of stance taking". His combined approach assists readers in seeing how stance taking relates to cultural issues, values and beliefs.

The present paper builds on past studies that see stance as a dialogic and intersubjective activity. With the comprehensive nature of Haddington's (2005) stance taking model, it is adapted as an analytical framework in this study. The study adapts the relevant aspects of Haddington's (2005) stance taking model to arrive at a dialogic stance taking framework. The aspect of conversation analysis in Haddington's (2005) model is expunged due to its irrelevance to the data. Also, relevant aspects of Hyland's (2005) stance and engagement model are integrated with Haddington's (2005) to enhance a detailed data analysis.

The dialogic nature of the two stance models informs their selection. Haddington's (2005) stance taking model is now adapted as Dialogic stance taking which locates the writer/speaker "intertextually within a larger web of opinions" (Bakhtin, 1986, as cited in Hyland, 2005, p. 176). It positions writer/speaker's proposition as a response to a larger discourse already in place and an anticipation of readers' response. This makes stance a dialogic and intersubjective endeavor. Stance markers in any texts are dialogic because they "refer to, anticipate, or otherwise take up the actual or anticipated voices and positions of potential readers" (Bakhtin, 1986, as cited in Hyland, 2005, p. 176).

3. Methodology

The primary data for the study were selected readers' comments from reports on DVAM in selected blogs. The readers' comments were selected from Linda Ikeji and Bella Naija blogs. The selected reports are: *When a Man is the Victim of Domestic Violence-A Twitter User's Story* (Naija, 2017) and *Woman who Allegedly Stabbed Husband to Death in*

Ibadan Led Back to Scene of Crime (photos)" (Ikeji, 2016). Very few reports on DVAM were available online; that explains the limited number of data. The two news reports were labeled A and B respectively. Data A is a narrative of a male victim of DV, while Data B is a report on a female aggressor of DV. There are 43 readers' comments in Data A and 205 in Data B. All the readers' comments under each news report were studied to portray opposing gendered stances among the commenters. Gender identification in the data was based on the gender orientations of the participants and the contents of their comments. The body of comments under each news report was labeled Forum 1(F1) and Forum 2(F2) respectively. A qualitative analysis of the readers' comments was performed using some aspects of Haddington's (2005) Stance taking model with some insights from Hyland's (2005) Stance and Engagement model.

4. Results

Stance taking in any interactional context is achieved via positioning and alignment (Haddington, 2004). Alignment does not connote agreement, but the manner participants position themselves in relation to others' views. The data analysis, therefore, demonstrates how male and female interactants achieve alignment and positioning to produce opposing stances on cases of DVAM.

In Data 1, four comments project antithetical gendered stances and the comments emanate from three commenters, who are: Adunni, Chief, and Paul Adeyemo. As determined by their gender orientations and the contents of their posts, Adunni is a female while Chief and Paul Adeyemo are males. Excerpts of their comments are revealed below in the order at which they appear in F1:

1. Where are the feminist ... Waoh. Women if given the physical power of men will do worse. Classic case is the way they treat their maids. (Data A, Paul Adeyemo)

2. Oh please shut it. What does feminism have to do with violent women? ... Address the issue and don't bring feminism into everything. A bad woman is a bad woman. Regardless if she's a feminist or not. For all

we know the woman in question may not even be a feminist. (Data A, Adunnie)

3. @Adunnie.Oh yeah I see!! you are one of those. Listen!!Because feminism is a truly ugly ideology encouraging victimization, blame, hate and also portrays men as evil oppressors. Feminists demonstrably ignore male victims of abuse (verbal and physical) from women ... You feminists have all become nothing but bunch of control freaks. Feminism is a travesty used by manipulative women to degrade men, they used it to bully, humiliate and emasculate men and this nonsense is condone and upheld by our society especially western society.

This is what happens when you give women power. I have been saying this "Women are violent in nature" and more vicious, they can inflict serious injury on a man. They are likely to use weapons ... Moral of the story, if the corruption of the domestic violence industry created by feminism has taught us one thing it is that women victim narrative is always the most powerful. (Data A, Chief)

4. @chief one of what???? ... this post has nothing to do with feminism so I dont even understand why you've come to put mouth. Abeg baba swerve. Just look at all the silly accusations you've made. Please there's a huge difference between feminists and men-haters. Not all feminists hate men. So don't generalize... Hate feminists all you want it will never stop the movement. So please carry your accusations and anger and direct them at men-haters. (Data A, Adunnie)

In excerpt 1, stance-taking activity is triggered in F1 when the poster, Paul Adeyemo, takes up some positions on women in his comment. The poster produces two stances using the linguistic devices of a conditional clause, a rhetorical question and a common noun coupled with the interactional practice of claim justification. The rhetorical question at the beginning of the post pitches the poster, a man, against feminists, women. It portrays that the poster's argument is specifically directed at women, assumed feminists. The term, feminist, in the rhetorical question depicts a

forward-type dialogic intersubjective reference to the common noun, woman, in the next sentence. The function is to categorize all women as feminists. Hence, the post positions men against women. The two stances taken by the poster are portrayals of all women as feminists and potential aggressors.

The second stance is projected via a conditional clause and the interactional practice of claim justification. Women are conditionally projected as potential aggressors in the conditional clause: "... if given the physical power of men will do worse ...". The poster's stance is that women could be worse abusers if endowed with the physical strength of men. This presupposes that the poster shares the socio-cultural belief that, in terms of strength, men are more endowed; therefore, women's assumed weakness makes them more prone to being victims of DV than men. The rhetorical function of the poster's stance is to demonstrate to other interactants that women's greater proneness to being victims of DV is as a result of their lesser physical strength when compared to men; if given greater power, they would be more violent than men. In justifying this claim, the poster cites evidence of how women maltreat their maids, whom they have greater power over, to show women as potential aggressors too. In sum, the two stances taking by Paul Adeyemo are: all women are feminists and all women are potential perpetrators of DV.

Out of the two stances projected above, the first stance spurs a counter-stance from Adunni, a female commenter in F1, thereby provoking an antithetical gender-based stance from her. Paul Adeyemo's stance is attributed to all female gender, a group Adunnie belongs to; that apparently explains her opposition. Her counter point is produced via a rhetorical question too depicted in Sentence 2 in excerpt 2, "What does feminism have to do with violent women?" The question casts Paul Adeyemo's post in a different light by projecting a counter-stance which stands in contrast to Adeyemo's. Her stance positions the views that not all women are feminists and not all feminists are violent. These views stand in contrast to Adeyemo's, and therefore, antithetical. It is the notion of feminism that provokes a disagreeing stance from Adunnie. Adeyemo's stances are that all women are

feminists and potential aggressors while Adunnie's counter-stances are that not all women are feminists and women's violence is not the end-result of feminism. The counter-stance aims at casting feminism in a positive light by demonstrating that feminism has nothing to do with women's violence to men.

Excerpts 3 and 4 further extend the thread. Although Adunnie's post aligns with Adeyemo's, Chief, another poster hastens to produce a counter-position to Adunnie's. Chief, a male participant recasts the notion of feminism via the stance marker "because". The implied stance projected by Chief is that feminism engenders women's hatred and violence towards men, portrays men as the oppressors, and consequently renders inconspicuous male victims of DV. His stance specifically engages with Adunnie's via the interactional practice of name-calling seen at the beginning of the post. By mentioning Adunnie, the poster depicts his alignment with the position of Adunnie, although the alignment is marked by contrast in opinions. Also, the declaration in the second sentence, "you are one of those" portrays Chief's subjective evaluation of Adunnie. The declaration casts Adunnie as a feminist, and therefore violent.

Another implied stance in excerpt 3 is that women's innate violent nature can only manifest when bequeathed with greater power than men. The stance supports Adeyemo's. The declarative sentence at the end of the post projects the poster's didactic stance that feminism has rendered partial narratives on DV by giving more recognition to female victims than male victims. The didactic nature of his stance is produced using the NP, "moral of the story". Markers of stance in excerpt 3 are adverbials like "truly", "demonstrably" and personal pronoun "I". The adverbials function as boosters to mark the poster's certainty and conviction in his argument while the personal pronoun "I" represents explicit self-mention used by the poster to project his position on his argument. This assists the poster to bring an impression of himself into the post and his position on feminism.

Furthermore, in excerpt 3, there is a polarity between women on the one hand, and men, on the other hand. The common noun "women";

second person plural pronoun, “you”, third person plural pronoun “they”, and possessive pronoun “those” are used synonymously to represent “feminists”. The multiple reference linguistic markers used by the poster to refer to feminists portray the poster’s backward intersubjective positioning against feminists and women generally. The recurrent employment of the linguistic markers constitutes the poster’s disagreeing stance to Adunnie’s proposition while, at the same time, creating harmony in his views with Adeyemo’s.

Excerpt 4, the last in the thread, is a responsive stance from Adunnie to Chief’s post in excerpt 3. This responsiveness too is dialogically positioned through the interactional practice of name-calling seen at the beginning of the post. It depicts their interaction as dialogic and intersubjective. The implied stance of Adunnie is reflected in the way she defends feminism. It presupposes that she is an advocate of feminism. Her persistent stance aims at changing, though radically, the general misconception about the ideology of feminism.

In sum, Paul Adeyemo, the poster in excerpt 1 sets up a position on feminism that other discussants engage with through their alignments. Therefore, his positioning represents an initiating stance while the other two interactants’ alignments represent responsive stances. The three interactants keep recycling the notion of feminism in order to recast it differently. The two males in the thread project a stance that casts feminism as an ideology meant to corrupt women’s orientation; they position feminists as men-haters and violent in nature, while Adunnie represents a lone female advocate of feminism who keeps recasting feminism positively. The hostile and adversarial nature of their alignments makes their projected stances antithetical, while the difference in their gender makes their arguments gendered.

In Data 2, the same trend is observed. The antithetical nature of the stances of the two genders in the thread is reflected in the following excerpts:

5. For a woman to do that especially as a married woman ... which I'm too with kids

... that means the man must have really really passed 'be careful'. She also, has a really bad temper which the devil used her to stab him. It's really not easy to just walk away from a heated quarrel but I'm sure she didn't intend to kill him. Even if she did, she wasn't thinking about the consequences it would bring... (Data B, kamustaka79 bluestone)

6. she’s evil ... satanic angel ... can't u control ur anger ... even if ur hussy provoked u ... (Data B, Sir benkord)

7. All this ones that are accusing her, were u there with her abi u sent her to kill her husband?? They should investigate well before anything else ooh I don't trust all this Niger "detectives" (Data B, Uche Anaekwe)

8. @ uche Anekwe u are just a feminist what rubbish are u saying? all allegations of him beating her and shit is obviously a lie. does this person look like one that was maltreated by the husband? ... Every time we keep hearing domestic violence ... Women will perform there evil and play to the gallery saying they where maltreated ... (Data B, Roaming Roaming)

The gender of the poster in excerpt 5 is explicitly stated by the poster herself to maintain an empathic stance with the female aggressor in the report. The adjectival clause in the first sentence, “... which I'm too with kids ...”, portrays a shared affinity with the female aggressor. The adjectival is a declarative that both project the poster’s gender status and her shared affinity with the aggressor. The opening sentence in the post pitches the male victim and the female aggressor together with the aim of justifying the aggression of the perpetrator. It also celebrates the societal notion that women aggressors do so in self-defense. So, the stance of the female poster is both empathic and defensive. Although she acknowledges the temperament of the aggressor, she nevertheless, provides a defensive support for her by asserting that it is practically difficult to control anger; hence, the murder was unpremeditated. By using the adverbial “really” twice in the first sentence, the poster presupposes the likely degree of abuse the

male victim might have subjected the offender to.

The post in excerpt 6 emanates from a male poster who overrules provocation as the cause of the violence. The poster maintains an accusatory stance; he uses the stance strategy of a rhetorical question, "can't u control ur anger", to question the offender's inability to control her anger. The rhetorical question is an assumed accusatory counter-point to the post in excerpt 5. The declaration at the beginning of the post "she's evil" and the subsequent NP "satanic angel" are markers of the poster's accusatory and condemnatory stance which stand in contrast to the empathic and defensive stance observed in excerpt 5.

Roaming Roaming, in excerpt 8 casts Uche Anaekwe, a female poster in excerpt 7 as a feminist; that demonstrates the gendered nature of their stances. Uche Anaekwe, an assumed female in F2, also maintains an empathic stance towards the aggressor; she argues on the need for proper investigation before the general condemnation of the female offender. Her argument is justified via the rhetorical question, "... were u there with her abi u sent her to kill her husband??" The question projects Uche Anaekwe's accusatory stance towards co-participants condemning the aggression of the offender. She hinges her argument on the need to determine the veracity of the offence by truthful detectives. This expresses her lack of confidence in the Nigerian Police Force. Her stance too is both empathic and affinitive. The responsive stance of Roaming Roaming portrays women aggressors as feminists. His counter stance is produced using the declarative sentence: "all allegations of him beating her and shit is obviously a lie". This declaration produces an antithesis to Uche Anaekwe's accusatory stance. Roaming's stance is that the offender's allegation of acting in self defence due to the victim's assaults is what should be seen as a lie, not the reports of the aggression as suggested by Uche. By maintaining such a stance, Roaming produces a counter point.

5. Concluding Remarks

The stance analysis above demonstrates that male and female online participants differ in their stances on reports and victims' narratives on DVAM in Nigeria. Females, as seen in

excerpts 2, 5, 7 and 10, are naturally empathic towards female aggressors of DV. Their arguments reecho the rhetoric on women victims' need for self-defense. Their stance presupposes that both male victims and female aggressors are mutual combatants; that is, female aggressors were first victims while male victims were first aggressors. Females' stance on the etiology of DVAM is a reversal of female victim/male perpetrator to male victim/female aggressor positioning. Although the females examined in this study still condemn the violence; they however, maintain an empathic stance towards the female aggressors.

Males examined in the two forums, however, maintain a counter stance by arguing that women are naturally more violent in nature than men despite their assumed weak status. Also, men's stance resonates around their conception on feminism. Men in the forums see feminism as an ideology that propagates and celebrates female aggression against men in the family setting.

Opposing gendered stances in the forums are recycled via the notion of feminism. Men's stance opposes feminism while women's stance defends and celebrates it. The most recurrent linguistic devices the selected commenters used in producing their stances are rhetorical questions. The recurrent use of rhetorical questions as a stance marker in the forums presupposes some degree of tacit agreement among the interactants. For instance, Uche's comments, "were u there with her abi u sent her to kill her husband??" is a subtle way of emphasizing to co-participants they were not witnesses of the assault and should not come to a condemnatory conclusion yet.

The study presents Haddington's (2004) stance taking model as a dialogic and intersubjective framework for analyzing qualitatively antithetical gendered stances in online discussions on DVAM in Nigeria. The analysis portrays a polarity in the alignment stances of male and female discussants on reports on DVAM. The study also reveals that forward-type and backward-type dialogic intersubjective references and positionings are amply employed by the commenters as linguistic and interactional practices to portray

their gender-based stances. The paper, therefore, enhances understanding on the linguistic and interactional devices used to portray antithetical gendered stances in online discourse on DVAM. This is also expected to assist sociolinguists and law enforcement agents in gaining a comprehensive understanding of the dynamism and complexities of DV in the family context.

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