

## An Analysis of Metaphorical Representation of Men in Selected Nigerian Newspapers

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### Abstract

This paper presents an analysis of metaphors used to depict men in selected Nigerian newspapers, examining their meanings, implications, and socio-cultural contexts. Metaphors are powerful linguistic devices that shape perceptions and convey cultural values, particularly within media discourse. Despite the growing body of literature on gender representations in the media, there is a notable gap in research specifically focused on the use of metaphors to portray masculinity in Nigerian newspapers. Drawing on conceptual frameworks from critical discourse analysis and metaphor theory, this study investigates the dominant metaphors employed to represent men in selected Nigerian newspapers and explores how these metaphors contribute to the construction of masculinity. Through a systematic analysis of newspaper articles, headlines, and opinion pieces, this research aims to uncover the underlying ideologies and socio-cultural constructs embedded within these linguistic representations of masculinity. Key research questions addressed include: What are the prevailing metaphors used to portray men in Nigerian newspapers? How do these metaphors contribute to the construction of masculinity? What social, cultural, and political factors influence the choice and interpretation of these metaphors? By critically examining the use of metaphors on men in Nigerian newspapers, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of gender representations in media discourse and sheds light on the complex interplay between language, gender, and power in Nigerian society.

**Key words:** metaphor, gender, men, media discourse

### Introduction

Metaphors are powerful linguistic tools that not only facilitate communication but also shape perceptions and convey cultural values. Within the realm of media discourse, metaphors play a crucial role in framing narratives and constructing representations of various social groups, including men. In the context of Nigerian newspapers, where language serves as a primary medium for disseminating information and shaping public discourse, the portrayal of men through metaphors holds significant implications for understanding gender dynamics and societal norms.

Numerous studies have explored the use of metaphors in media discourse, revealing their pervasive influence on shaping public opinion

and reinforcing social ideologies (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Charteris-Black, 2004; Ahmed, 2019). However, while there is a growing body of literature on the representation of gender in the media, including analyses of stereotypes and portrayals of masculinity (Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 2010), there remains a gap in research specifically focused on the use of metaphors to depict men in Nigerian newspapers.

This paper seeks to address this gap by conducting a systematic analysis of metaphors used to portray men in Nigerian newspapers. Drawing on conceptual frameworks from critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003) and metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), this study aims to uncover the underlying meanings, ideological implications, and socio-cultural

constructs embedded within these linguistic representations of masculinity.

Nigerian newspapers serve as influential platforms for shaping public opinion and disseminating cultural values. The language employed in newspaper articles, headlines, and opinion pieces reflects and reinforces prevailing social norms and stereotypes (Ahmed, 2019). Therefore, an examination of metaphors used to depict men in these newspapers offers insights into how masculinity is constructed, negotiated, and contested within the Nigerian socio-cultural context.

By interrogating the metaphors employed in Nigerian newspapers to represent men, this study seeks to address several key research questions: What are the dominant metaphors used to portray men in Nigerian newspapers? How do these metaphors contribute to the construction of masculinity? What social, cultural, and political factors influence the choice and interpretation of these metaphors?

Through a nuanced analysis of metaphors on men in Nigerian newspapers, this paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of gender representations in media discourse. By unpacking the meanings and implications of these metaphors, this study seeks to stimulate critical reflection on the complex interplay between language, gender, and power in Nigerian society. In doing so, this research not only fills a gap in the literature but also offers valuable insights into the ways in which metaphors shape and perpetuates societal perceptions of masculinity, thereby enriching scholarly discourse on gender, language, and media studies in the Nigerian context.

### **Metaphor, Gender Representation, and Discourse**

Metaphor serves as a critical lens through which discourses depicting individuals and groups are analyzed. Reisigl and Wodak (2001: 56) note that within linguistic construction of identities and collective subjects, metaphors play a pivotal role in creating a sense of sameness and homogeneity, thereby influencing how

individuals are perceived and treated. This function of metaphor in discourse is closely linked to Halliday's (1985) ideational function of language, which pertains to language's role in understanding and constructing social reality. As Semino (2008) observes, conceptualizing one concept in terms of another can shape attitudes and evaluations, influencing power relations between different genders or social groups.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphors not only highlight certain aspects of experience but can also shape social realities, guiding future actions and reinforcing coherent experiences. This perspective aligns with critical discourse analysis (CDA), which posits that discourse constructs its object from particular socio-political viewpoints. Studies on language and gender in sub-Saharan Africa, such as those by Mele (2008), Atanga (2010), Ellece (2012), and Ahmed (2019) reveal how gendered discourses are articulated to reinforce or contest gender identities and ideologies. For instance, Mele (2008) demonstrates how metaphorical expressions in gendered discourses sustain male dominance and female oppression, while Ellece (2012) highlights how speakers use metaphors to shape social reality and construct gender identities.

This study posits that authors from different gender groups may employ different metaphors to represent women and men, thus achieving distinct communicative goals. Building on the theoretical framework linking metaphor and gender representation, the subsequent subsection discusses the procedure used to identify metaphors in the corpus.

### **Metaphor Identification**

This subsection focuses on the criteria for identifying metaphorical expressions related to gender and the methodology used to group and analyze them. A metaphorical expression is considered as such when there is semantic tension or incongruity between it and the entity it refers to (Charteris-Black, 2004). The Pragglejaz Group's Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) serves as the primary method for this process.

The MIP involves several steps, including reading the entire discourse to establish meaning, determining lexical units, establishing contextual meaning, and marking lexical units as metaphorical based on contextual contrasts (Group, 2007). Additionally, the study employed Steen's (2002) metaphor identification procedure to identify and formulate conceptual metaphors by analyzing the underlying conceptual structures of metaphorical expressions.

Using these complementary approaches, a total of 165 metaphorical expressions relevant to representation of men in five selected Nigerian newspapers were identified in the corpus. These expressions were manually categorized into three groups: entrenched, conventional, and novel metaphors. Entrenched metaphors have become naturalized and invisible, while novel metaphors represent new ways of thinking or conceptualization (Semino, 2008; Charteris-Black, 2013). Despite ongoing efforts to automate metaphor identification, manual searching remains the most reliable method.

#### **Data and Methodology**

The data for this study comprises linguistic expressions utilized to describe or refer to men in opinion articles on gender, sourced from five prominent Nigerian newspapers: *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian*, *The Punch*, *New Nigerian*, and *Vanguard*. These newspapers were purposively selected due to their national coverage and widespread readership across Nigeria and beyond. Despite being published in English, these newspapers attract readership from diverse regions of the country. They were also chosen because they have consistently covered gender-related issues from 1999 to 2014, a period marked by a significant increase in gender discourse within the Nigerian print media landscape.

To ensure a comprehensive examination of linguistic representations of gender, the chosen period spans from 1999 to 2014. This extensive timeframe allows for the identification of overarching trends in the portrayal of gender in

newspapers. The data utilized for analysis was primarily sourced from the archives of the selected newspapers. For clarity and ease of reference, each newspaper is assigned a unique code: DT for *Daily Trust*, NN for *New Nigerian*, TG for *The Guardian*, TP for *The Punch*, and TV for *Vanguard*.

Given the abundance of opinion articles on gender published in these newspapers and the practical limitations imposed by time constraints, articles were selected based on their relevance to the research topic. To ensure representativeness and analyzability, a "Quota sampling" method was employed. This method, as explained by Saunders et al. (2009: 235-236), enables the selection of salient articles without necessitating complex probability calculations. By employing this sampling technique, the study aims to ensure that the selected sample accurately reflects key characteristics of the overall study population, thereby facilitating a rigorous and insightful analysis of linguistic representations of men in Nigerian newspapers.

#### **Data Analysis and Discussion**

In this section, the analysis examines how men are conceptualized via metaphor in both male- and female-authored texts authored by both male and female authors. These (conceptual) metaphors are further categorized into two groups based on their recurrence in the data. Thus, metaphors that repeat themselves within and across the texts are grouped and discussed as common metaphorical conceptualizations, while those that predominate or exist only within particular text are treated as been specific to it. First, however, the analysis identifies some statistics concerning metaphors about men identified in the corpus.

#### **Metaphoric conceptualizations of men in the corpus**

In this sub-section, the analysis focuses on patterns of conceptualization of men common to both male and the female-authored texts. Two (2) patterns of these conceptualizations can be identified in the corpus, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Metaphors about of men by male and female authors

S/N	Conceptual metaphors	Frequency	Percentage
1.	men are the leaders	136	82.4%
2.	men are animals	29	17.6%
		<b>165</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 1 shows that expressions drawn from the source domains of power and leadership (1) and animals (2) have been used by both male and female authors to describe men. The table also shows that men are described in terms of leadership role than other roles they play in society or the qualities they possess. Below examples of these conceptual metaphors are presented and discussed.

**Men are leaders**

As just noted, over 80 per cent of the metaphors that constitute this pattern constructs men as the leaders of the households. Extracts 1 – 5 present examples of expressions used by the male authors to describe men and/or refer to their gender roles. Please note that identified metaphoric expressions were bolded for ease of reference.

1. [...] since the man is **the head** of the family, there must be away of subjecting a woman under him so that there would not be clash of “two captains in the same boat.” Men should therefore continue to play the role of **a counsellor** and women the helpers. (TG, 7.3.2006: 33)
2. God created man for leadership. As Christ is the head of the church, so is man the **spiritual head** of his own home. (V, 24.7.2011: 13)
3. Women are also seen as personal property of men, personal servants whose only purpose is to meet the needs of their **masters**. (NN, 11.9.2005: 25)
4. A wise wife respects and treats her husband as a **Dad** in the sitting room, as a **King** on the dining table, as **a President** in the public (NN, 10.9.1999: 33)
5. A MAN, to all intents and purposes, is expected to be ‘**officer in charge**’ of his home, in very many respects. Apart from being the ‘**Decision-maker- in-chief**’, in matters relating to the smooth-running of the home, on his shoulder also squarely rests the onerous task of **the Captain**, who must deftly steer the vessel known as ‘MY FAMILY’ to safety, in stormy times. (TG, 11.1.2005: 45)

In 1 - 5, expressions from the source domain of power and leadership, ranging from entrenched metaphors, such as the “head” (of the family or household) in 1 to novel or unconventional expressions, such as “officer in charge” in 5, were used to ascribe leadership role to men. Of interest here is the way religion is used to promote patriarchal ideology, which perpetuates male supremacy and female subordination. This can be seen in 2 for instance, where men are described as the spiritual heads of the family. By this description, men are, in a way, depicted as the “priests” of the home, who are expected to not only lead their families but also, help them grow spiritual relationship with God.

Interestingly, this perception of men as the leaders is also shared by some female authors, as 6-10 show.

6. In the home, God says man is **the master**, the **o/c in charge** of the family [...] As **the head**, the man is supposed to lead the woman and love her while the woman is supposed to love and respect him. (V, 3.2.2013: 17)
7. I understand that in everything there is **a captain** and a co-pilot; they are both responsible for the working of the system. But when there is a final decision to make, it is up to the captain to make it. He is **the head** and has more experience and [therefore] the one with the responsibility. But any mature **captain** will not ignore his co-pilot because she is not a cabin attendant. (TG, 7.3.2014: 6)

8. When you are being **piloted** by a man who knows how to do the take off and land, you are relaxed. But when you know that **this pilot** cannot lead you safely to your destination, there is bound to be panic and chaos. (TG, 20.8.2005: 29)
9. [...] God created both men and women equally, though in the world, men are **the rulers**. (NN, 13.12.2004: 13)
10. How submissive would she be to a man who constantly reminds her of his headship in the home? **Oga**, hear this: if you are in the habit of reminding your wife and putting it on her face that you are **the head** of your home, it speaks of one thing; you are yet to become **the head** indeed. When a man is truly **the head** of his home, even a little child entering the home for the first time will know that there is order in there. There will be so much peace and serenity in that home. (TG, 8.3.2011: 13)

Reading the expressions in 6-10, one can sense a discourse that perpetuates the stereotypical role of men as the heads of households. These metaphorical expressions describe men as the leaders of the family in a number of ways. In (6) for instance, men are described as the masters, O/C (officers commanding), and as the head of the family. This is also the case with (7 and 8), where they are conceptualized as the captains (7), the pilots (8), and the rulers (2), which collectively ascribes leadership role to men. Of interest here is the term of address: *Oga*, a Nigerian Pidgin English term for the boss, which is used to refer to men in (5). This term of address can also carry the further meaning of the superior, the master and the dominant person.

#### **Men are animals**

In this pattern, men are described “in terms of some (assumed) properties or characteristics of animals” (Kövecses, 2010: 19), as 11-12 and 14 -15 show. Note that although these metaphorical expressions are more of animal metaphor, they also depicts men as disempowered, thus overlapping with the expressions grouped under the conceptual metaphor: men are endangered.

11. [...] how many songs (I wish there was any) have been composed to sing the praise and lift the spirits of fathers for their labour of love, as breadwinners and **beasts** of every family’s burden? (TG, 7.12.2014: 38)
12. In this campaign, all men are portrayed as **tigers** lacking civility in dealing with women (DT, 9.11.2003: 34)
13. [...] men who claim to be affected by some kind of indecent dressing are **brutes** who lack self-control. (DT, 12.11.2010: 48)
14. [...] to demonise men and make them look like **ogres** most dangerous to the health, safety and general wellbeing of women (DT, 12.11.2010: 48)
15. In this campaign, all men are portrayed as insensitive **brutes** and **dangerous animals** fit only for the zoo (DT, 12.11.2010: 48)

We can see from these expressions that men are conceptualized as animals. For example, they are portrayed as “beasts” in (11), “tigers” in (12), “brutes” in (13), “ogres” in (14) and “dangerous animals” in (15). All these expressions liken men to (wild) animals. Implicit in these expressions is the depiction of men as disempowered. We shall return to this point in the next sub-section.

In contrast to the way in which male authors used expressions that portray men as wild animals, their female counterparts have used expressions that largely describe men in terms of some assumed behaviours of certain domestic (or home) animals, as can be seen in 16 – 19:

16. [...] if a woman doesn’t cook well, problem will start in the home because men like **dogs**, the way to their heart is through their stomach (TG, 3.3.2000: 19)
17. The earlier a woman understands that men are like **guinea fowl**, which cannot roost on the bare floor, the better for her. (DT, 21.4.2004: 44)

18. [...] men are like **a cock**, they give grains and eat stones. (NN, 21.4.2001: 27)
19. a man is like your **pet animal**, the more you treat it well, the more it becomes attach to you. (DT, 13.12.2004: 13).

In 16 -19, the expressions compared the attitudes of (some) men to those of animals. Implicit in these expressions, is the patriarchal gender ideology that promotes self-denial and husband-centeredness on the part of the woman. In four out of the five examples presented here, the woman is encouraged to treat her man (or husband) well. Particularly interesting is the expression in 16 *men are like a cock, they give grains and eat stones*, which compares men with a cock. A cock, it is assumed, can provide its female partner with good food while, it feeds on crumbs or leftovers. Similarly, men are conceptualized here as having the tendency to provide expensive things to women – things that some men cannot afford to buy or use for their own selves. Thus, this conceptualization of men can be seen as a form of “rationalization” (van Leeuwen, 2008) aimed at persuading the woman to devote herself to the service of men, because of the seeming benefit that she may derive from doing so. It is also interesting to note that men are not only described here in terms of some assumed animal-like behaviour but, they are also domesticated. Thus, metaphor overlapping occurs here, also. The expressions in this pattern (of conceptualization), as gender as socially learned theorists (e.g. Tannen, 1990; Risman 1998) would suggest, are capable of socializing the reader and by extension the woman, into perceiving men as individuals, who require “VIP” treatment. In the next section, the analysis will present and discuss other conceptualizations of men peculiar to particular texts. We shall begin with the male-authored texts.

#### **Conceptualizations of men in the male-authored texts**

In this section, patterns of conceptualization of men identified to be specific to the male-authored texts were presented and discussed. It shows how men are perceived and described as disempowered gender.

#### **Men are disempowered**

Expressions used exclusively by the male authors to describe men as disempowered. Examples of these expressions are provided in 20-22.

20. A lot of men these days are **walking corpses**, who due to gross psychological and emotional abuses [they suffer from women] (V, 8.8.2014: 40)
21. [...] the men are **endangered species**. Their jurisdiction has been encroached upon and they need some assistance to recover. (TG, 16.2.2000: 38)
22. These days, not many men are capable of acting as effective heads of the family [...] in fact, some have become **door mats** to their wives. (DT, 12.11.2010: 38)

Examining the examples in 20-22, we can see that the authors have used expressions, which portrays men as disempowered. For example, in (20) men are described as “walking corpses”. This is also the case with (21) and (22), where they are referred to as “endangered species” and “door mats” respectively. These metaphors do not only portray men as socially disempowered, but also serve as a strategy used by some male authors to protest their perceived oppression of men in society. This discourse that portrays men as oppressed, has not yet been provisionally identified and named in the literature, to my knowledge.

#### **Conceptualizations of men specific to female-authored texts**

In this section, patterns of conceptualization of men specific to the female-authored texts are analyzed. Three (3) patterns conceptualization have been identified to be peculiar to the sub-corpus, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Metaphors about men specific to female-authored texts

S/N	Conceptual metaphors	Frequency	Percentage
1.	men are unfaithful	17	40.5%
2.	men are commodities	14	33.3%
3.	men are a failure	11	26.2%
		<b>42</b>	<b>100%</b>

From Table 2, it can be seen that metaphors drawn from the source domains of faith (1), commodity (2), and success and failure (3) were used exclusively by the female authors to describe men. The table reveals the prevalence of expressions that describe men as unfaithful. This shows that men are perceived by the authors to be unfaithful (in relationship with women), as discussed below.

### Men are unfaithful

As indicated in Table 2, this conceptual metaphor is the most productive pattern of conceptualization of men specific to the female-authored texts. An examination of examples that constitute this pattern has revealed a number of novel or un-conventionalized expressions, such as “Bluetooth” as in (23), “players” and “shade made of stalk” as in (24), and “He-goat” as in (25), which collectively describe men as unfaithful and unreliable individuals, as discussed below.

23. [...] men are like **Bluetooth**, they can connect with any woman that can accept or listen to them. (TP, 8.3.2001: 20)
24. Examples of men who aren't open to emotional connection include the following: **Players**, this category of men are **shade made of stalk**; they can quit once they satisfy their selfish desire (NN, 22.12.2001: 9)
25. Many men are like a **He-goat**, they cannot stay with only one woman. (DT, 25.12.2010: 40)

In (23), men are described as *Bluetooth*, a wireless networking technology that interconnects electronic devices through short-wave radio frequencies. By describing men as Bluetooth, the author depicts men as having the tendency to easily connect with any woman that opens her doors of affections to them, portraying them as unfaithful in relationship with women. While (25) metaphorically compare some men's attitude with that of a *He-goat* which, it is assumed, can have relationship with as many she-goats as possible. Particularly interesting is (24), where men are described as *players* and a *shade made of stalk*, which depict them as not only unfaithful but also, unreliable. It is also interesting how the authors described men in terms of a shade made with stalk (24). A stalk shade erected only a day or moments ago can be destroyed by strong wind, fire or even removed by the owner when they feel like because, it is not needed anymore or due to an incidence or unforeseen circumstances. Similarly, the life of a woman, who is happily married, can suffer a reversal of fortune if her man (or husband) decides to terminate the marriage or abandons her in favour of another woman.

### Men are commodities

This conceptual metaphor is realized mainly through novel or unconventional expressions. And, it was used exclusively by the female authors to commodify men, as illustrated in 26 – 28:

26. A lot of us treat men in ways that diminish their egos, making them feel like **goods** whose prices have fallen down (TV, 8.11.2006: 18)
27. The **value** of a man who is lazy and cannot provide for his family is zero even in the sight of God. (NN, 3.3.2007: 34)
28. As hard and independent as men seem, they are just **wrapped** in hard muscles. Beneath this rugged cover are **the stuffs** which teddy bears are made of. (NN, 12.5.2007: 34)

Extracts 26 - 28 represent examples of expressions used by the female authors to commodify men. Here, it

can be seen that men are described as goods whose prices can fall or rise (26), as having value or worth (27), and as materials that can be used to produce or manufacture something (28). All these expressions describes men as commodities. Implicit in this pattern of conceptualization is the patriarchal ideology that promotes male dominance and female subordination. In (27) for instance, men are portrayed as the providers of the family. This discourse that depicts men as a commodity has not yet been provisionally identified and named in the literature, to my knowledge.

### **Men are a failure**

Based on the failure of some men to perform their traditional gender role of providing the material needs of their family, they are perceived to be a failure by some female authors, as in 29 – 31.

29. I also know that a woman could get desperate [to get married] for a lot of reasons [...] But, she doesn't have an excuse to stay desperate because, desperation isn't going to get her a husband. Maybe, she will end up with an **apology** that looks like a man and, believe me, there are a lot of **apologies** out there that look like men! (V, 1.2.2010: 33).
30. Some men are just out there claiming to be men whereas deep inside them they are still **little kids** (DT, 28.8.2010:47).
31. If you are married to an **otondo**, you have to wear the trousers in the family even if you don't want to (TP, 12.12.2001: 30).

It is clear from the expressions above that men are perceived to be a failure when they fail to play their traditional gender role in the family. In (28) for instance, the metaphor “apology” is used to refer to men that may not be able to play their traditional gender role, questioning the masculine gender identity of this category of men. Similarly, in (29) men are likened to “little kids”, suggesting that some men are incapable of taking care of even their own selves. Particularly interesting here, is the depiction of a man who cannot provide the material needs of his family as *Otondo* (30), a Nigerian Pidgin English term used especially in military and paramilitary circles to refer to any recruit or trainee, who is lagging in any of the training activities. This pattern of conceptualization shows that men, who for some reasons fail to provide the material needs of the family are considered as “unreal men.” With regard to categories of metaphor, most of the metaphorical expressions that constitute this pattern are of novel origin.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study has provided an analysis of metaphors used to depict men in Nigerian newspapers. Through a systematic examination of linguistic expressions across opinion articles on gender published in five prominent Nigerian newspapers, namely *Daily Trust*, *The Guardian*, *The Punch*, *New Nigerian*, and *Vanguard*, the analysis have uncovered nuanced insights into the ways in which men are represented in media discourse. The findings of this study shed light on the multifaceted nature of gender representations in Nigerian newspapers, highlighting the diverse range of metaphors employed to construct and reinforce societal perceptions of masculinity. From entrenched metaphors that have become naturalized within discourse to novel metaphors that offer fresh

perspectives on gender, our analysis has revealed the dynamic interplay between language, culture, and gender ideologies.

By employing a combination of qualitative content analysis and metaphor identification procedures, we have identified and categorized over seven hundred metaphorical expressions relevant to the study, providing a rich dataset for further research and inquiry. Through careful examination and interpretation, we have unraveled the underlying conceptual structures and ideological implications embedded within these metaphors, offering valuable insights into the construction of gender identities and power dynamics in Nigerian society.

It is evident from our analysis that metaphors play a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of masculinity and framing discourses on gender in



Nigerian newspapers. Whether perpetuating traditional gender norms and stereotypes or challenging prevailing ideologies, metaphors serve as powerful linguistic tools that influence how men are perceived and positioned within societal frameworks.

Moving forward, this study underscores the importance of critical engagement with language and media representations in understanding and addressing issues of gender inequality and social justice. By interrogating the role of metaphors in shaping gender discourse, we can foster more inclusive and equitable

representations of men and women in media narratives, contributing to broader efforts towards gender empowerment and social change.

Finally, this study contributes to a growing body of literature on gender and media studies, offering valuable insights into the complex relationship between language, gender, and power in Nigerian newspapers. It is our hope that the findings and analysis presented in this paper will stimulate further research and dialogue on the role of metaphors in shaping gender representations and perceptions in media discourse.

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