Social Construction of Hegemonic Masculinity in Pre-Wedding Pictures: An Assessment

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Abstract

This study explores how pre-wedding pictures are used in constructing hegemonic masculinity: how principles of patriarchal gender roles are hegemonically constructed and sustained through pictorial composition of assigning different heights, body touch and occupying space by the intending couples. The study is hinged on the tenets of the social constructionism theory. Two research questions: how has hegemonic masculinity been socially constructed through pre-wedding pictures, and to what extent are pre-wedding pictures used in socially constructing hegemonic masculinity served as guide to the study. Also, pictorial content analysis was utilised as the method for this study. A total of 230 pre-wedding pictures were purposively pulled from many social media pages (Facebook and Instagram) that are engaged in publishing wedding pictures. Coding decisions were subjected to online intra coder reliability coefficient calculation using Cohen's kappa and Krippendorff's alpha with a returned coefficient of 0.89 and 0.87 respectively. Findings from this study show that principles of hegemonic masculinity like male power, domination of environment, proactive dominance of men over women, social superiority of men over women and familial patriarchy are subliminally sustained in the pre-wedding pictures. The study concludes that the pre-wedding pictures are used to achieve hegemonic masculinity through three principal features of picture composition so that men are shown to be taller than women and to occupy more space than women in the pictures. Also, men are mostly shown to grasp women through the midriff touch which signifies power, possession and control while the women's touch are socially constructed to show dependence through leaning on men by touching men's shoulders and faces.

Keywords: *Hegemonic-masculinity, pre-wedding pictures, social construction & gender*

Introduction

Communication is about social negotiation of power. It is used to ascribe and assign power and values in human interactions. Through communication members of a given society get to know their expected responsibilities, their societal values and how they should go about playing their parts to become optimal members of their respective societies. It is through communication and communicative practices that meanings are socially constructed, defined and institutionalised in various societies. As such, communication is central in cultural power

negotiation, subtle cultural power inculcation and legitimization of such cultural powers within gender relations. Through communication, social formations about gender expectations are enshrined and gradually such formations become the lived reality of many societies (Kenix, 2011; Tonny & van Bauwel, 2015;van Djik, 2009).

Humans have many capacities and technologies for communication. One of such technologies used by humans to communicate and negotiate meanings is that of pictures. Pictures are used to provide documentation or to create an instance-record of the sort of behavioral practice which can be documented as social negotiation of roles. A picture can serve as an instance-record evidence of negotiated and acceptable means of communication. A picture which records an instance of a practice tends to instantiate such practices as socially acceptable norms. It is observable that pictures can be used not merely to provide instantiated and socially acceptable forms of practices already known, but also to help us become aware of such practices theretofore giving them form of acceptability and society wide use (Dewan, 2015).

Communication and communicative practices create boundaries through which masculine and feminine characteristics evolve over time. In the long run, such communicative practices tend to evolve into autonomous gender orders with definite roles given to each binary of the communicated gender order. Such gender orders are not necessarily enforced using culturally coercive means such as cultural sanctions. Rather, gender orders are subliminally constructed in such a way that they innately become part and parcel of societal nuances of gender relations. One such subliminally and culturally constructed power tool of gender relations is *Hegemonic Masculinity* (Jewkes, Morrell, Hearn, Lundqvist, Blackbeard, Lindegger, Quayle, Sikweyiya, & Gottzén, 2015).

Hegemonic masculinity identifies the hegemonic position of males within cultural relationships and argues that men's multiple, performed communicative practices grapple for cultural power along the spectrum of gender negotiations. Hegemonic masculinity subordinates women thereby allowing men who perform this ideal masculinity to retain social control and domination of women as part of men's environment (Hatfield, 2010). Hegemonic masculinity comes with at least five (5) broad features: physical force and control, occupational achievement, familial patriarchy, frontiermanship and heterosexuality (Trujillo, 1991).

In relation to the above, hegemonic masculinity is about the ways in which males establish and maintain their domination in gender relationships. It is their ability to impose certain definitions of expected roles thereby setting the realms in which intersex relations are understood and discussed. Hegemonic masculinity involves persuasion of the other gender binary, particularly through the media, communicative practices and the organization of social institutions in ways that appear natural, ordinary and normal for all members of the society to not only accept it but to also practice it (Donaldson, 1993). What becomes discernable about hegemonic masculinity is its ubiquitous, generous and subliminal capabilities. By hegemonic masculinity being ubiquitous means, it can assume physical force and control, by it being generous it means it can assume features of occupational and other human endeavor achievements and by being subliminal means it can be below the radar of easily understandable human communicative practices. In order words, hegemonic masculinity can be latently hidden in plain sight of human communicative practices.

Conceptualizing Pre-wedding Pictures

One of the human communicative practices in Nigeria among intending couples is the pre-wedding picture sessions. Intending couples from across Nigeria set aside time and place, and hire the services of professional photographers to pictorially document their moments of love, bliss and wishful family beginning. This new development in Nigerian wedding plan cuts across ethnic and religious divides as pictures pulled for this study indicate. Pre-wedding picture session is a mounting tendency where about-to-wed couples choose to have specialized photos taken in a unique spot prior to their wedding day. In Nigeria, pre-wedding pictures have become part and parcel of the wedding celebrations where the intending couples set aside time and money to make their sessions unique expression of their love for each other and eventually an expression of what type of family they intend to build.

Pre-wedding pictures encompass photographs of the intending couple before marriage. From the setting to the props and the mood, everything is set to show happiness, love and wishful family setting. While the wedding culture across Nigeria still bare some cultural affinities, their pictorial documentation has evolved drastically over time. Pre-wedding picture sessions are mostly designed to capture the intending couples' wish about illusionary fairytale of romance and family idealism through beautifully constructed pictures. The pre-wedding pictures are constructed to show cultural attires, family affluence, modernity,

glamour, love, romance and ideal family settings. However, pre-wedding pictures are social constructions that are not gender-neutral concepts. They are social concepts that reveal ideally social norms expected of the intending couples as they settle to build families (Stephen & Sunday, 2017).

Indeed, pre-wedding pictures as recent human communicative practice in Nigeria come in nuanced throngs of ideological leaning. Though socially constructed to depict a new beginning for a new family, such pictures tend to be framed in forms that "depict unbalanced power relations between men and women, women are portrayed as submissive or less empowered than men, and men are depicted in power poses (Lewis, 1997, p. 176). In such pre-wedding pictures, there are subtle constructions of ideal gender images through posing of ideal body language by the photographers to indicate family order. Therefore, these pre-wedding pictures are akin to what Goffman (1979, p. vii) hints that pictures that repeatedly depict particular gender stereotypes "serve the social purpose of convincing us that this is how men and women are, or want to be, or should be."

Statement of the Research Problem

Pictures as with other forms of human communication and communicative practices come within the spectrum of at least two functions: the manifest and the latent functions (Dewan, 2015). Pre-wedding pictures are also within the same dual manifestation of meanings and functions. Manifest functions are those recognized and intended consequences that people observe or expect in a social pattern or social institution. They are the recognized and intended consequences of any social patterns of communicative practices. Manifest functions stem from all manner of social actions but are most commonly discussed as outcomes of the work of social institutions like marriage, family, religion, education, and the media. In this case, the manifest functions of the pre-wedding pictures are adduced to be a show of love between couples that intend to wed and build a happy and lovable family. On the other hand, latent functions are neither conscious nor deliberate but also produce benefits or dysfunction. They are, in effect, unintended positive or negative consequences of manifest functions. The problem is that pre-wedding pictures, being recent development among about to wed couple in Nigeria, is only assumed to be about portrayal of happiness, wishful family setups with no ideological underpinnings. However, the quest is to ascertain if pre-wedding pictures are more of the manifest functions and meanings or are replete with latent functions which include both ubiquitous, generous and subliminally cultural nuances of hegemonic masculinity.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to assess the social construction of hegemonic masculinity through pre-wedding pictures while the specific objectives of the study are:

1. To examine how hegemonic masculinity is socially constructed through pre-wedding pictures in Nigeria.
2. To assess the extent to which pre-wedding pictures are used in socially constructing hegemonic masculinity in Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. How has hegemonic masculinity been socially constructed through pre-wedding pictures in Nigeria?
2. To what extent are pre-wedding pictures used in socially constructing hegemonic masculinity in Nigeria?

Social Construction and Pre-Wedding Pictures

Social construction of reality is understood as a dialectical process through which a given society creates and maintains meanings from their social worlds through communicative practices. This is a consequence of social interaction through one's externalization of imbibed cultural practices. In essence, the process of constructing human reality is collectively social where societies, by their communicative practices, gradually create and assign values to their reality.

Social Constructionism theory insists that persons and groups interacting together in a social system form concepts or mental representations of each other's actions. These concepts eventually become habituated into reciprocal roles played by the actors in relation to each other. The roles are made available to other member of society to enter into and play out; the reciprocal interactions are said to be gradually institutionalized (Cojocaru, 2010). It is in the process of this institutionalization that meanings are intricately embedded in society. Gradually, new concepts and ideas of what reality is become embedded in the institutional fabric of society. From social constructionism perspective, pre-wedding pictures are more than just a way of expressing love and the beginning of a new family; it is a way of passing on culturally sanctioned gender roles to the intending couple. This therefore means the focus of Social Constructionism is not on the individual person but rather on the social interaction, in which meaning is generated, sustained, negotiated, adopted or abandoned (Gergen & Gergen, 1991).

Furthermore (Speed, 1991, p. 400) posited that "people socially construct reality by their use of agreed and shared meaning communicated through language." Social constructionism focuses on the artefacts such as pre-wedding pictures that are created through the social interactions of a group and it focuses on an individual's learning that takes place because of their interactions in a group through various communicative practices like pre-wedding pictures (Cojogaru, Bragaru, & Ciuchi, 2012). Thus, our understanding and acceptance of meanings, including gender ascriptions are social inventions mediated through media of communication such as pre-wedding pictures.

Hegemonic Masculinity, An Overview

According to Gul-Unlu (2017, p. 114) "hegemonic masculinity basically refers to the condition in which men, who have a specific set of characteristics, hold power over women and 'other' men." Hegemonic masculinity is also referred to as *patriarchal masculinity*, *sovereign masculinity* and or *masculine virility*. Hegemonic masculinity was conceptualized by Connell (1987). Connell insisted that what brought different masculinities on the same ground was the power established on women. According to this, hegemonic masculinity is process of communicative practices that ensure masculine values and structures are imposed on the rest of the society, men and women alike, through different means such as subliminal domination of the environment, proactive dominance in communicative and cultural practices and willful design to extort values of being the man. Hegemonic masculinity has been proposed as a form of subtle masculinity or configuration of male gender practice which is in contrast to other more dominant forms of masculinity.

According to Selek (2014, p. 48) "what Connell implies in the concept of "hegemonic masculinity" is not a physical and vulgar power, but rather a social superiority, which penetrates organisation of the private life and cultural processes, and which is gained in the game of social processes." Therefore, hegemonic masculinity is one of the basic mechanisms produced within the framework of gender inequalities and a popular construct, in which the social power negotiations are shaped on the basis of conflicts of gender binary identification. It is based neither on the psychological existence nor on the body of a particular individual male figure. It is based on the individual's inferences from what is attributable to being a man: bread winning, head of the family and a domineering environmental figure. To Trujillo (1991, p. 291) hegemonic masculinity is an aggregate of five broad features of being a man. These features

include: physical force and control, occupational achievement, familial patriarchy, frontiersmanship and heterosexuality. In relation to the above, the two hegemonic masculinity features more relevant to this study are physical force and control, and familial patriarchy.

Indeed, to the first feature, masculinity is hegemonic when power and its derivatives are represented in terms of physical force and control. That power and its associated features are embellished into textual representation of the body of men as holders of power while women are translated as subordinates of that power. This is one of the main ways in which the superiority of men becomes legitimized through social construction. In this way, the male body as depicted in pictures comes to represent conditioned power in gender relationships through this representation of gender relationship. Power is normalized as physical strength. Also, that masculinity is hegemonic as patriarchy; it is the rationalization and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in family narratives. Conventionally, such patriarchal representations in family communication include men as "breadwinners," "family protectors," and "strong father figures" whereas females are "housewives," "sexual objects," and "nurturing mothers." Thus, what so far becomes discernable about hegemonic masculinity is its capacity to include certain characteristics to the body and textual (pictorial) depiction of men and exclusion of those characteristics to the body and textual depiction of women. Therefore, the question asking for answers from the literature so far reviewed is: are these two features of hegemonic masculinity socially constructed through pre-wedding pictures?

Theoretical Framework

This study is premised on the assumptions of Social Constructionism Theory. Works on social constructionism theory could be traced back to the sociologists of Chicago School, phenomenological sociologists and the works of William Isaac Thomas. However, the major contribution to social constructionism studies by Berger and Luckmann is seen as the real breakthrough towards a rigorous academic activity leading to a theory (Hibberd, 2005). Social constructionism theory believes that a great deal of human knowledge and experiences exist and are learned due to social and interpersonal influences. Social constructionism theory view individuals as components of cultural development, learners in political advancement and participants in the evolution of cultural meanings in specific times and places. “Social Constructionism or the social construction of

reality is a theory of knowledge of sociology and communication that examines the development of jointly constructed understanding of the world" (Galbin, 2014, p. 82). The theory insists that apart from the inherited and developmental aspects of humanity, all other aspects of humanity are created, maintained and renegotiated via individual's interactions with others through time, space and cultural text (Mallon, 2007).

Thus, Social Constructionism theory explains the five broad conceptions of how ideas are socially constructed via our communicative practices. The first concept is through *Idea Typification* which refers to how new ideas are named in typologies by people interacting in a social system. The new ideas that are named and typified gradually become concepts of mental representations of collective societal actions. As time goes by, such mental conceptions become institutionalized (*Institutionalization*) as objective definitions of reality thereby becoming *Internalized, Institutionalized, Legitimized* and *Habituated* as real rather than constructed reality (Weinberg, 2014). Therefore, social constructionism theory insisted that new conceptions of gender definitions, if typified, internalized, institutionalized, legitimized and habituated by the pre-wedding pictures, can become the intending couple's and their society's both objective and subjective reality (Low, 2006).

Methods of the Study

This study explored Visual Content Analysis (VCA) as a method of gathering, synthesizing quarrying and analyzing data from the pre-wedding pictures. Visual content analysis is used to understand and interpret images (Barbour, 2014) such as photography, film, video, painting, drawing, collage, sculpture, artwork, graffiti, advertising, and cartoons. VCA add value to already existing content analysis methods by bringing visual dimension to the rich literature body of content analysis through incorporation of multidimensional visual text data.

Population of the Study

A total of 230 pre-wedding pictures were purposively pulled from many social media pages (Facebook walls such as "Nigerian Wedding Pictures", "Pre Wedding Nigeria," "Pre Wedding Gallery" and Instagram pages such as "Hausa-Fulanii", "Nigerianwedding" and "Prewedding Nija.") that are engaged in publishing wedding pictures. The pictures purposively pulled were the ones that were composed of only the intending couples with no other people captured by the camera.

Unit of Analysis and Content Categories

Each independently pulled pre-wedding picture serves as a unit of analysis for the study while the following served as content categories of the study:

I. Composition: by ratio composition, who is given most space between male and female in the pre-wedding pictures?
II. Height: among the intending couple, who is mostly depicted as taller than the other?
III. Touch: among the intending couples, who is constructed as having soft, careful and or powerful, midriff and controlling touch?

Reliability of Data

To maintain reliable coding protocol, this paper relied on consistent a priori content categorization, classifications of units of analysis and testing of intra-coder reliability coefficient at the stage of both pulling the data from Instagram/Facebook and testing of the assigned categories before the eventual coding of the generated data. To test for the intra-coder reliability coefficient, this paper made use of *Recal* (http://dfreelon.org/utils/recalfront/recal2/) an online reliability coefficient calculator (Freelon, 2010; Freelon, 2013). To achieve reliable validity, this paper made use of Cohen's kappa and Krippendorff's alpha with a returned reliability coefficient of 0.89 and 0.87 respectively. Also, to test statistical significance of how hegemonic masculinity was socially constructed between men and women in pre-wedding pictures pulled for this study a Chi-square test was conducted because data generated for this study were of nominal order of measurement. The calculated Chi-square statistic is 74.4025. The *p* value is < 0.00001. The result is significant at $p < .10$. This means there is significant relationship between how males and females are socially constructed to sustain hegemonic masculinity in the pre-wedding pictures under study.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Tab 1: Construction of pre-wedding pictures to indicate occupying more space

	Frequency	**Percentage**	
Male	210	91.30	
Female	20	8.70	
Total	**230**	**100**	$P < .10$

Table one indicates that by the composition of the pre-wedding pictures, males are always constructed to occupy more space than their female counterparts. This was mostly achieved through pictorial techniques of either making the females to sit down or to face an angle other than that of the camera lens.

Tab 2: Construction of pre-wedding pictures to show height among couples

	Frequency	**Percentage**	
Male	205	89.13	
Female	25	10.87	
Total	**230**	**100**	$P < .10$

Table two shows that in a majority of the pre-wedding pictures, males are predominantly constructed to look taller than females. This is achieved through either asking the females to sit down, lean on the men or sit on a chair handle where the man is sitting.

Tab 3: Construction of pre-wedding pictures to show body touch among couples

	Frequency	**Percentage**	
Male	145	63.04	
Female	85	36.96	
Total	**230**	**100**	$P < .10$

With a chi square statistical significance of $p < .10$, table three shows how pre-wedding pictures socially construct body touch among the soon to be married couples. Men are mostly composed to be the ones touching females. Even where the females are shown to touch the men, it is a soft touch to the shoulder and above. In contrast, the men's touch is always a midriff touch in between the navel and the waist of the women.

Discussion of Findings

This study is hinged on two research questions: how has hegemonic masculinity been socially constructed through pre-wedding pictures in Nigeria and to what extent are pre-wedding pictures used in socially constructing hegemonic

masculinity in Nigeria? These research questions are the pedestals upon which the discussion of findings of this paper is made.

In relation to this study's research questions, table one indicates that an absolute majority (91.30%) of the pre-wedding pictures was composed in such a way that men were socially constructed to occupy more space than their women counterparts. Men's relative physical stature was a biological difference that was elaborated and exaggerated in the production of such pre-wedding pictures. Even where the women in the pre-wedding pictures were seen to look bigger than their male counter parts, picture techniques were used to reduce their relative biological sizes. This was achieved through asking the women to look not directly to the camera lens, asking them to sit down or to stand behind the men in the picture. Doing this means institutionalising the idea of man being the head who dominates not only the family that would be in place but also the memory of how the family comes to be. This accentuates the position of Goffman (1976) when he asserted that "while there is no biological reason for women to be shorter than their male mates, an enormous majority of couples exhibit this height relation – far more than would occur through a process of selection in which height was random." In this essence, the pre-wedding pictures are not only depicting a happy couple about to settle down to family chores, they do more than that. They socially construct man as the one who dominates the family, whose authority cannot be challenged even if it is through picture composition. In the long run, such pre-wedding pictures are narrative construction sites that are explored to socially typify and legitimize the hegemonic masculinity of man. What more, to a larger extent the pre-wedding pictures were used to socially construct hegemonic masculinity by showing that 8.70% of such pictures depicted women as occupying more space than their male spouses.

Furthermore, table two showed that the pre-wedding pictures were composed to socially construct men as taller than their women. Though this may seem a normal pictorial composition technique, Bogaert and McCreary (2011) assert that "couples typically pursue male-taller arrangements because height differences between spouses are symbolic of traditional power differentials and because gender ideals are linked to stature such that tallness is associated with dominance, masculinity, and higher status among men." That's why even where the women seemed to be taller than their male spouses, distortion techniques such as use of the men's cap to accentuate their height and or making the women to squat or sit down while the men were made to stand were explored. In the pre-wedding

pictures, the height characteristic was prone to distortion because being tall is a valued characteristic in most societies; this is particularly so for men. These findings tally with the assertion of Blaker, Rompa, Dessing, Vriend, Herschberg and Vugt (2013, pp. 1 - 2) when they averred that "research shows a positive relationship between tall stature and measures of status and leadership. Height is positively associated with income authority status in the workplace… That there is a link between height and dominant or assertive personality traits." Therefore, this study found out that apart from the pre-wedding pictures ascertaining the dominance of man over women, they are also used in legitimizing that dominance through exaggerating a biological trait of height. To this point, Bogaert and McCreary (2011) extrapolate that the concept of being a superior masculine being is sustained through communicating eleven normative masculine ethos which comprise winning, emotional control, risk-taking, violence, power over women, dominance, playboy, self-reliance, primacy of work, disdain for homosexuals and pursuit of status. Tall height can be construed as a hegemonic masculine requirement that is of particular relevance to three of the above masculine social constructs comprised of winning, dominance, and pursuit of status. This is given because to achieve some level of dominance and power control, a man should be seen as taller than his object of control – woman.

Also, table three showed that 63.04% of the body touching in the pre-wedding pictures was by men. Touching being a basic sensory process and the earliest and most elemental form of none verbal communication (Major, 1981) comes with replete meanings. Henley (1973) proposes that men touch women more often than do women touch men due to a status difference. This status difference, according to Henley, gives men a touching privilege that, in turn, contributes to their domination of women. What more, while to a lesser extent, women were shown to touch (36.96%) men in the pre-wedding pictures, their touch was mostly composed to show dependence on the men. The women were always shown to either hold the hands of the men or to lean on the shoulders of the men, indicating their reliance on the power of the man to stand and be socially composed in the pre-wedding pictures. However, in sharp contrast to the loving and pleasing touch of the women, the men's touch was always that of holding the women at their midriff: between the women's waist and their chest. The men's touch itself was more of grasping from behind or pulling the women to their chest and wrapping their masculine hands around the women to habituate man's power, domination and control over his environment, part of which is a woman, thereby justifying Goffman (1967) when he insisted that "touching may indicate power of

dominance over another." Therefore, pre-wedding pictures are used to socially construct hegemonic masculinity and to a large extent such pictures are used to habituate and externalize the expected gender role of man as the head and leader of the young family that is about to be formed.

Conclusion

This research concludes that pre-wedding pictures are not gender-neutral pre-wedding props. They are communicative actions that are used in socially constructing hegemonic masculinity principles – principles that are used to naturalize domination of women by men. Pre-wedding pictures are subtly used to socially sustain gender roles of man being an all-powerful being that is naturally the head of the family. In the same vein, pre-wedding pictures are used to socially construct the woman as a binary whose social responsibility is to be in a family under a man. To achieve the sustenance of hegemonic masculinity in pre-wedding pictures, men are to a larger part constructed to be taller than women in same pictures and are also socially constructed to occupy more space in the pictures signifying domination of their environment. Also, pre-wedding pictures are socially constructed to signify power and control by men and mildness, surrender and acceptance of second position in the family by women. Therefore, this study concludes that pre-wedding pictures are communicative tools that are used to not only construct hegemonic masculinity but also to actively sustain social practices that dominate women through latent gender role responsibilities.

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