

African Gender Studies Quarterly



EDITORIAL NOTE

It is with great joy that we introduce this inaugural edition of African Gender Studies Quarterly (AGenSQ), a journal established to provide a dedicated platform for rigorous, interdisciplinary scholarship on gender and its intersections with African societies and the broader Global South. As a quarterly publication, we are committed to fostering critical dialogue and advancing knowledge that is both theoretically grounded and contextually relevant.

In this first issue, we are pleased to present a collection of articles that exemplify the depth and diversity of gender scholarship. The opening paper, "A Biopsychosocial Perspective on Sexual Disorders and Dysfunctions: Implications for Diagnosis and Intervention," offers a comprehensive examination of sexual health through biological, psychological, and sociocultural lenses, emphasizing the need for culturally informed care in African contexts. The authors make a compelling case for destigmatising sexual health discussions and integrating multidisciplinary approaches to treatment.

The second article, "Love in the Digital Age: Rethinking Courtship and Romance in Contemporary Society," explores how technology, shifting gender roles, and evolving social norms are transforming intimate relationships. By examining phenomena such as digital dating, emotional labour, and self-love, this paper illuminates the complex terrain of modern romance and its implications for psychological well-being.

Following this, "Cultural Influences on the Perception, Regulation, and Communication of Sexual Content" investigates the powerful role of media in shaping sexual attitudes and behaviours. Drawing on psychological theories, the authors critically analyse how different media forms from social media to pornography influence sexual socialisation, particularly among young people, and advocate for enhanced media literacy and psychological interventions.

The fourth contribution, "Marriage, Sexuality, and Cultural Norms in Indigenous Nigerian Films: A Comparative Analysis of Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo Cinema," employs qualitative content analysis to examine how indigenous films reflect and reinforce cultural values surrounding marriage and sexuality. The study reveals persistent gender double standards while noting emergent progressive shifts, demonstrating the pedagogical function of cinema in sustaining or challenging societal norms.

The fifth article, "Gendered Constructed Strategies in Conflict Resolution: Challenges Faced by Female Secondary School Leaders in Chivi, Zimbabwe," illuminates how gender shapes leadership in educational settings. Through rich qualitative data, the authors identify three distinct gendered strategies employed by female school heads: the motherly care approach, the relational strategy, and the inclusive gender-sensitive approach.

The sixth article, "Political Education and Voters' Behaviour in Nigeria," establishes a strong positive relationship between political education and voter behaviour. Notably, with women constituting 64.5% of respondents, the findings invite critical reflection on

gendered patterns of political participation and the need for gender-sensitive civic education approaches.

We believe these articles have been thoroughly reviewed, and the recommendations offered will help to properly formulate effective solutions to identified issues. This inaugural issue has done well by providing a space where both emerging and established scholars alike have engaged to present themes that demand attention and open engagement. We sincerely hope that this collection will not only inform but also invite deeper reflection and continued scholarship on the evolving intersections of gender and its dynamics as they affect Africa and the rest of the third world.

Dr. O. A.T.Olatunji,
Editor, African Gender Studies Quarterly,
Associate Professor / Reader @ Department of Psychology,
Faculty of the Social Sciences,
Federal University, Oye Ekiti, Ekiti State,
Nigeria.
Email: ajoke.olatunji@fuoye.edu.ngvii

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MARRIAGE, SEXUALITY, AND CULTURAL NORMS IN INDIGENOUS NIGERIAN FILMS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF YORUBA, HAUSA, AND IGBO CINEMA

Osaghae Stephen

Department of Psychology,
University of Lagos

Email: osaghaejapheth6@gmail.com

Emmanuel Ayomide

Department of Psychology,
University of Lagos

Japheth Osasere

Department of Psychology,
University of Lagos

Abstract

This paper explores the representation of marriage and sexuality in indigenous Nigerian films, examining how cultural norms, gender roles, and societal expectations shape portrayals. Using qualitative content analysis, three films, Jenifa (Yoruba), Sangaya (Hausa), and Living in Bondage (Igbo), were analysed for recurring themes related to marital duty, sexual morality, gender expectations, and the influence of economic factors on intimacy. The study found that marriage is predominantly depicted as a social obligation, with sexual behaviour framed within moral and religious boundaries. Gender double standards are evident, with women's sexual autonomy more heavily policed than men's. Economic pressures also influence marital and sexual dynamics, highlighting the intersection of socio-economic realities and cultural norms. While minor progressive shifts, such as negotiation and communication between partners, were observed, the dominant narratives reinforced traditional patriarchal structures. Interpreted through Social Learning and Cultivation theories, these films function as cultural models that both reflect and perpetuate societal norms. The study concludes that indigenous Nigerian films are not only entertainment but also pedagogical tools that sustain prevailing attitudes toward marriage and sexuality.

Keywords: *Indigenous Nigerian films, Marriage and sexuality, Gender roles, Cultural norms, Social learning and cultivation theory,*

Introduction

Indigenous Nigerian films are movies produced and released in Nigeria that are primarily scripted and performed or acted in the native languages of its

diverse ethnic groups, such as Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, and Efik. These films not only serve as entertainment but also reflect the cultural practices, values, and worldviews of the communities they represent. Unlike mainstream English-

language Nollywood productions, indigenous films often highlight local traditions, proverbs, rituals, and moral codes, thereby functioning as storehouse of cultural identity and continuity.

Within Nigerian society, marriage and sexuality are deeply intertwined with cultural and communal values. Marriage is not merely a union of two individuals but a social institution that affirms lineage, fosters kinship ties, and maintains social order.

Sexuality, in this context, is often framed within marital expectations, procreation, and moral codes defined by both religion and tradition. These values are regularly portrayed and reinforced through indigenous films, which depict appropriate and inappropriate sexual behaviors, gender roles in marriage, and the consequences of deviating from established norms.

Films are important cultural mirrors because they reflect the lived realities, aspirations, and anxieties of the people who produce and consume them. By portraying narratives about love, marriage, family, and sexuality, indigenous Nigerian films provide insights into how society negotiates tradition and modernity. They not only preserve cultural ideals but also provoke dialogue about changing norms, especially in relation to sensitive issues such as gender equality, premarital sex, polygamy, or sexual taboos.

This topic is academically relevant within the study of human sexuality because it allows for an examination of how cultural values shape sexual attitudes and behaviors. By analyzing indigenous Nigerian films, scholars can

better understand how sexuality is represented, regulated, and redefined within local contexts. Such inquiry contributes to broader discussions in psychology, sociology, and cultural studies about the intersection of tradition, media, and human sexuality.

Problem Statement

Despite the cultural and academic importance of indigenous Nigerian films, much of the existing studies have their focus on entertainment value, linguistic preservation, or role in projecting cultural identity. Far less attention has been given to how these films portray sensitive aspects of human life, such as marriage and sexuality. Since indigenous films reflect local traditions, moral codes, and societal expectations, their depictions of marital and sexual relationships often carry powerful messages that shape viewers' perceptions.

A key gap lies in understanding whether these portrayals merely reinforce longstanding cultural norms, such as gendered marital roles, sexual taboos, or the primacy of procreation. Or whether they offer progressive alternatives that challenge conventional attitudes. Given the centrality of marriage and sexuality to Nigerian cultural values, the repeated framing of these issues on screen has the potential to influence not only individual behaviors but also broader societal attitudes toward relationships, family life, and sexual morality.

The problem, therefore, is that while indigenous Nigerian films serve as influential cultural mirrors, there is limited academic exploration of how their portrayals of marriage and sexuality

reflect, reinforce, or reshape public understanding of these concepts. This lack of scholarly attention creates a gap in appreciating the role of media in negotiating tradition and modernity in the Nigerian context. The following objectives guided the study (a) To examine how marriage is represented in indigenous Nigerian films, (b) to analyse portrayals of sexuality and intimacy in these films. (c) to identify cultural values, gender roles, and moral themes in marital/sexual depictions. And lastly to evaluate the extent to which these portrayals reinforce or challenge traditional norms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marriage in African/Nigerian Culture

Marriage in African societies is deeply embedded in kinship, lineage, and communal life. In Nigeria, marriage often extends beyond the union of two individuals to encompass entire families and communities. Bridewealth, polygyny, and kinship negotiations remain central features. Isiugo-Abanihe (1994, 2000) documented how bridewealth practices among the Igbo influence fertility patterns and marital timing, showing how socio-economic changes reshape nuptiality. Although urbanization and education have delayed age at first marriage, cultural expectations still emphasize marital stability, especially for women (Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014).

Polygyny remains significant in some Nigerian communities, with scholars linking its persistence to religious and socio-economic factors (Fenske, 2015). Oyèrónkẹ Oyěwùmí (1997) further challenged Western gender assumptions

by showing that Yoruba pre-colonial social organization prioritized seniority rather than gender as the main axis of stratification. This decolonial lens highlights how concepts of marriage and womanhood differ across Nigerian contexts.

Synthesis: Marriage in Nigeria functions as a social contract that ties kinship, economic obligations, and gendered expectations. While modernisation reshapes practices, strong cultural and social pressures still sustain marriage as a normative life goal, with indigenous epistemologies shaping marital roles.

Sexuality in African contexts

Sexuality in African scholarship has moved beyond biomedical and moralistic framings to contextual, decolonial analyses. Tamale (2011) in *African Sexualities* underscores how religion, law, custom, and media shape sexual subjectivities, while highlighting the multiplicity of African sexual identities and practices. In Nigeria, studies show that adolescents often experience early sexual debut and limited formal sexual education, leaving media and peers as key instructors of sexual norms (Ajuwon et al., 2016).

Research also highlights the influence of mass media on shaping youth attitudes towards sexuality. Nigerian studies of music videos and films reveal how repeated exposure to sexualized portrayals normalizes permissive sexual attitudes (Nwabueze, 2012). This aligns with Bandura's social learning theory, suggesting that audiences internalize modeled sexual behaviours.

Synthesis: Sexuality in Nigeria is constructed within intersections of culture, religion, and media. With gaps in formal sexuality education, the media often serve as informal curricula for sexual scripts among youth.

Media Influence on Social Norms

Bandura's (1986) social learning theory posits that individuals learn behaviors by observing and imitating models, especially when such behaviors are rewarded. Media figures act as symbolic models, shaping norms and expectations. Gerbner's cultivation theory (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 2002) emphasizes that prolonged media exposure cultivates viewers' perceptions of social reality, leading them to adopt attitudes consistent with media portrayals.

In Nigeria, these frameworks explain how films influence beliefs about gender, sexuality, and marriage. Social learning accounts for short-term modeling of observed behaviors, while cultivation theory explains gradual normalization of gendered and sexual scripts. Together, they illustrate how media both mirror and modulate social norms.

Synthesis: Theoretical frameworks demonstrate that Nigerian films are not passive entertainment but active agents in shaping marital and sexual attitudes through modeling and cultivation processes.

Nollywood and Indigenous Films

Nollywood emerged in the 1990s through Yoruba travelling theatre and the home-video boom (Haynes, 2000;

Okome, 2007). Indigenous sub-industries such as Kannywood (Hausa) and Yoruba-language films encode local values and cultural norms. Larkin (2008) shows how Hausa video films adapt transnational influences (e.g., Bollywood) while reinforcing religious and moral pedagogies. Similarly, Yoruba films weave melodrama with spiritual, folklore, art and personality in the moral lessons (Adesokan, 2011, Akinwale et al 2024, Akinwale et al., 2025).

Studies reveal persistent gender stereotypes in Nollywood, where women are often cast in domestic or subservient roles (Aromona, 2023). However, recent analyses highlight gradual shifts, with newer films featuring women as professionals and challenging patriarchal norms (Nwachukwu, 2024). Audience studies in Rivers and Abia States confirm that viewers perceive Nollywood as both reflecting and reshaping gender roles and sexual norms (Ekwueme & Akpan, 2011).

Regulation also shapes content, as censorship boards and religious bodies police portrayals of sexuality and morality (Okome, 2007). This tension reveals how indigenous films negotiate between market demands, audience expectations, and cultural gatekeeping. Indigenous films serve as cultural mirrors and moral educators, reinforcing traditional values while cautiously integrating modern shifts. They shape perceptions of marriage and sexuality, operating within the dual frameworks of cultural preservation and social change, such as baby mama (Akinwale et al 2025; Atiri et al 2025; Ayenibiowo 2017; Akinwale et al 2024).

Gap and Implications

Existing scholarship richly documents Nigerian marriage practices, sexuality, and Nollywood's socio-cultural functions. However, gaps remain: (1) limited comparative studies of indigenous-language films across regions; (2) insufficient linkage between media exposure and measurable attitudes towards marriage and sexuality; and (3) the need for gender-aware, decolonial framings that avoid imposing Western categories.

This study can contribute by empirically examining how indigenous Nigerian films depict marriage and sexuality, and how these portrayals influence audience perceptions, guided by social learning and cultivation frameworks.

Theoretical Review

The portrayal of marriage and sexuality in indigenous Nigerian films can be effectively examined through Social Learning Theory and Cultivation Theory, both of which highlight the role of media in shaping cultural beliefs and behaviours.

Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) posits that individuals acquire behaviors and attitudes through observation, particularly when such behaviours appear rewarded or normalized. Within Nollywood, characters serve as symbolic models who communicate cultural scripts about marriage and sexuality. For instance, portrayals of submissive wives or dominant husbands reflect gender expectations that audiences may internalize. Empirical evidence from Nigerian scholarship supports this

dynamic: a study of Nollywood's portrayal of women in Rivers State found that repeated depictions of women in subordinate roles reinforced traditional expectations of marriage and sexuality (Nwankwo & Nduka, 2022). Thus, Social Learning Theory helps explain how indigenous films function as agents of cultural transmission by teaching audiences what constitutes acceptable marital roles.

Cultivation Theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976) complements this perspective by suggesting that long-term exposure to specific media content shapes viewers' perceptions of social reality. Applied to Nollywood, this implies that consistent portrayals of patriarchal gender relations can normalize such expectations across audiences. Recent analysis of Nollywood films such as Adire (2023) and Wura (2023) demonstrates that portrayals of women as either domestic caregivers or sexualized figures significantly influence societal perceptions of women's roles (Olayinka & Ugwu, 2023). While some narratives such as Isoken (2017) and The Wedding Party (2016) have introduced more progressive gender roles, the dominant patterns still cultivate traditional, patriarchal expectations (Okunna & Duru, 2020).

Together, Social Learning and Cultivation theories highlight the pedagogical role of indigenous Nigerian films. Whereas Social Learning Theory explains how audiences adopt observed marital behaviors and gendered attitudes, Cultivation Theory demonstrates how sustained exposure to such portrayals shapes collective cultural understandings over time. Nigerian scholarship underscores that these films not only

reflect existing cultural values but also play a formative role in sustaining or, occasionally, challenging social constructions of marriage and sexuality.

Method

This study adopted a qualitative content analysis approach to examine how marriage and sexuality are represented in indigenous Nigerian films. Qualitative content analysis was considered appropriate because it allows for the systematic interpretation of symbolic meanings, themes, and patterns embedded within media texts. Through this approach, researchers are able to examine how narratives, dialogue, and visual representations communicate cultural values and social expectations (Krippendorff, 2013). The method is particularly useful for exploring how films function as cultural texts that both reflect and reinforce societal norms related to gender relations, marital expectations, and sexual morality.

Film Selection

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select films that are culturally significant and thematically relevant to issues of marriage and sexuality within Nigeria's major ethnic film industries. Purposive sampling allows researchers to deliberately select materials that provide rich insight into the phenomenon under investigation. Three indigenous-language films were selected based on their popularity, cultural influence, and clear engagement with themes of intimacy, gender roles, and marital relationships. The films analyzed include *Jenifa (Yoruba)*, which was selected for its widespread popularity and its exploration of gender

expectations, fidelity, and marital aspirations within contemporary Yoruba society. *Sangaya (Hausa)* was chosen because of its depiction of romantic relationships, polygamous marriage structures, and the influence of religious and cultural values on sexuality within Hausa communities. The third film, *Living in Bondage (Igbo)*, was included due to its influential status in Nigerian cinema and its exploration of marriage, material ambition, and the moral consequences of personal choices that affect marital relationships.

Data Analysis Procedure

The selected films were viewed multiple times to ensure familiarity with their narratives, characters, and thematic structures. During the viewing process, relevant scenes, dialogues, and character interactions related to marriage, sexuality, gender expectations, and moral regulation were identified and documented. The analysis focused on recurring themes such as marital obligation, sexual morality, gender double standards, economic pressures on relationships, and the negotiation of intimacy within cultural boundaries. These themes were coded and organized into analytical categories that reflected broader cultural patterns present across the films.

Interpretation of the findings was guided by Social Learning Theory and Cultivation Theory. These theoretical frameworks provided a basis for understanding how repeated portrayals in films may shape audience perceptions of acceptable sexual behavior, marital roles, and gender expectations. By analyzing both narrative content and symbolic

representation, the study sought to demonstrate how indigenous Nigerian films function as cultural texts that both mirror and reinforce prevailing societal attitudes toward marriage and sexuality.

Living in Bondage (Igbo) – included for its focus on marital fidelity, materialism, and the moral consequences of sexual choices.

The selection criteria were: (a) popularity among Nigerian audiences, (b) explicit engagement with marital and sexual themes, and (c) ethnic diversity, ensuring representation of the Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo cultural regions.

CODING PROCEDURE

The films were systematically reviewed and coded for recurring themes relating to marriage and sexuality. Following established guidelines for qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000), coding categories were developed through a combination of deductive approaches (derived from theory and prior research) and inductive approaches (emerging from the data during analysis).

The key coding categories included:

Fidelity and Infidelity

This category examines how marital loyalty and betrayal are portrayed within the selected films. Particular attention is given to how fidelity is presented as a moral expectation within marriage and how acts of infidelity are depicted, including the social, emotional, and moral consequences that follow. The analysis also considers how these portrayals reinforce or challenge societal views about trust, commitment, and

responsibility within marital relationships.

Consent and Sexual Autonomy

This theme focuses on how the films represent individual agency and decision-making in sexual relationships. It explores whether sexual interactions are depicted as mutual and consensual, or whether elements of coercion, pressure, or manipulation are present. The analysis also considers the extent to which characters especially women are shown to exercise autonomy over their bodies and sexual choices within the cultural and relational contexts portrayed.

Gender Expectations

This category analyzes the cultural scripts that define masculinity and femininity within the films. It explores how male and female characters are expected to behave within romantic and marital relationships, including expectations regarding authority, submission, responsibility, and sexual conduct. The analysis highlights how these portrayals reflect or reinforce broader societal norms regarding gender roles and marital responsibilities.

Sexual Communication

This theme examines how couples communicate about intimacy, affection, and sexual needs within their relationships. The analysis focuses on whether partners openly discuss issues related to desire, conflict, and expectations, or whether such conversations are avoided or suppressed. These portrayals provide insight into cultural attitudes toward openness,

negotiation, and emotional expression in intimate relationships.

Moral and Religious Themes

This category explores how sexuality and marital relationships are framed through moral, cultural, and religious values within the films. It considers how characters' actions are judged according to ethical or spiritual standards and how religious or traditional beliefs influence decisions about marriage, fidelity, and sexual conduct. The analysis highlights the role of moral discourse in shaping acceptable behavior and reinforcing cultural norms surrounding sexuality.

The analysis was conducted manually, focusing on dialogue, character behavior, and plot outcomes. The coded data were then interpreted through Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) and Cultivation Theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976), which provided the conceptual lens for understanding how film portrayals function as cultural scripts that can reinforce or challenge societal norms.

Findings

The content analysis of *Jenifa* (Yoruba), *Sangaya* (Hausa), and *Living in Bondage* (Igbo) revealed recurring themes in the portrayal of marriage and sexuality within indigenous Nigerian films. Four key themes emerged:

Marriage as Duty/Obligation

Marriage was consistently portrayed as a social and moral duty rather than a purely personal choice. In *Sangaya*, the central conflict highlights how young people are often pressured into arranged marriages to uphold family honor and lineage.

Similarly, in *Living in Bondage*, marital unions are depicted as tied to wealth and social obligations, where family expectations outweigh individual desires.

Sexuality Tied to Morality and Religious Norms

Sexual behaviour was strongly framed within moral and religious boundaries. In *Jenifa*, *Jenifa's* premarital sexual escapades are portrayed as reckless, often leading to humiliation and social consequences, reinforcing the idea that sexuality outside of marriage is dangerous and morally unacceptable. In *Sangaya*, Islamic teachings explicitly guide acceptable forms of sexual expression, condemning premarital intimacy and highlighting the sanctity of marital sexuality.

Gender Double Standards

All three films depicted unequal standards for men and women in marriage and sexuality. *Living in Bondage* presents male characters whose infidelity is normalized or excused, while female characters are harshly punished for the same behaviour. In *Jenifa*, men are portrayed as having more freedom in sexual decision-making, while women bear the moral burden of preserving chastity and fidelity.

Impact of Economic Factors on Intimacy

Economic realities significantly shaped marital and sexual relationships. In *Living in Bondage*, Andy's desperate pursuit of wealth is linked to his desire for status and sexual power within marriage, ultimately leading to tragic outcomes. *Jenifa* similarly portrays how

financial independence or lack thereof influences marital choices and intimacy, with *Jenifa*'s struggles showing how women's economic vulnerability affects their sexual bargaining power.

Discussions

The findings from the analysis indicate that indigenous Nigerian films largely reflect and reinforce traditional cultural understandings of marriage and sexuality, while only occasionally presenting subtle indications of emerging progressive perspectives. Across the three films analyzed, marriage is predominantly portrayed as a socially regulated institution, sexuality is framed within moral and religious boundaries, and gender expectations remain strongly influenced by patriarchal norms. These patterns suggest that indigenous Nigerian cinema continues to function as a cultural medium through which societal values surrounding intimacy, morality, and family life are communicated and sustained.

Marriage as Duty and Social Obligation

The films consistently depict marriage not merely as a personal or romantic decision but as a social obligation shaped by family expectations and communal values. This representation aligns with scholarly perspectives that describe marriage in many African societies as a communal contract embedded within kinship networks rather than solely an individual choice (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1994; Ntoimo & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014). In *Jenifa*, the narrative underscores societal pressure placed on women to marry in order to attain social respectability. Similarly, *Sangaya* highlights the

significance of lineage, family approval, and social honor in marital arrangements, reflecting the kinship-centered understanding of marriage documented in Nigerian cultural scholarship. These portrayals reinforce the idea that marriage remains a normative life milestone tied to collective expectations and cultural continuity.

Sexuality, Morality, and Religious Regulation

Another prominent theme in the films is the moral framing of sexuality. Consistent with earlier studies on African sexual cultures (Tamale, 2011; Ajuwon et al., 2016), sexuality is largely represented within strict moral and religious boundaries. Sexual behavior that falls outside socially approved norms particularly premarital or extramarital relations is depicted as morally deviant and often accompanied by severe consequences. For instance, the challenges faced by *Jenifa* and the tragic trajectory of Andy in *Living in Bondage* illustrate how narratives associate sexual transgression with moral decline, spiritual punishment, or social instability. Such portrayals emphasize the role of religion and moral discourse in regulating sexuality, suggesting that indigenous films continue to reproduce culturally embedded frameworks that link sexual behavior with virtue, discipline, and social order.

Gender Double Standards in Sexual Morality

The analysis further reveals the persistence of gendered double standards in the portrayal of sexual conduct. Female characters are frequently subjected to stricter moral scrutiny than

their male counterparts, reflecting broader patriarchal norms within Nigerian society. While male infidelity may be normalized, excused, or downplayed within narratives, women who engage in similar behavior often face harsher social condemnation and narrative punishment. This pattern aligns with previous research indicating that Nollywood films frequently reproduce patriarchal expectations that prioritize male authority and female sexual restraint (Aromona, 2023). These representations mirror the gendered structures of power discussed by scholars such as Oy  w  m   (1997) and Nwabueze (2012), where women's sexual autonomy is constrained by cultural ideals of modesty, obedience, and moral purity. As a result, the films tend to reinforce traditional gender hierarchies rather than critically challenge them.

Economic Pressures and Marital Intimacy

Economic realities also emerge as a significant factor shaping marital and sexual dynamics within the narratives. The influence of financial stability on relationships echoes Fenske's (2015) argument that socio-economic conditions strongly shape marital practices and family structures in Nigeria. In *Living in Bondage*, Andy's pursuit of wealth as a means of sustaining marital expectations illustrates how economic ambition and financial insecurity intersect with intimate relationships. The narrative demonstrates that economic pressures can influence marital decisions, sexual negotiations, and perceptions of success within marriage. By highlighting these tensions, the films reflect the lived realities of many Nigerian households, where

economic power often mediates intimacy, authority, and stability within relationships.

Emerging Progressive Shifts

Although traditional narratives dominate the films, there are limited indications of more progressive perspectives. In some scenes of the movies particularly in *Jenifa*, the characters engage in dialogue, negotiation, and conflict resolution within their relationships, suggesting a gradual recognition of communication as an important aspect of marital intimacy. These moments hint at evolving attitudes toward partnership and mutual understanding within relationships. However, such portrayals remain relatively marginal and are often overshadowed by stronger narratives that reinforce conventional gender roles and moral expectations.

Theoretical Implications

From a theoretical perspective, these findings can be interpreted through the lenses of Social Learning Theory and Cultivation Theory. Social Learning Theory suggests that individuals learn behavioral norms through observation and imitation of modeled behavior in media. Within this framework, the repeated portrayal of submissive wives, authoritative husbands, and punitive outcomes for female sexual autonomy may serve as behavioral templates that audiences internalize. Cultivation Theory further explains how prolonged exposure to these narratives can shape viewers' perceptions of social reality, gradually normalizing gender inequality and reinforcing patriarchal expectations. Consequently, indigenous Nigerian films operate not only as sources of

entertainment but also as cultural pedagogical tools that transmit and legitimize prevailing social values regarding marriage and sexuality.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that indigenous Nigerian films function as cultural mirrors that both preserve and reproduce dominant societal values surrounding marriage and sexuality. The analysis of *Jenifa*, *Sangaya*, and *Living in Bondage* reveals that these films predominantly portray marriage as a social obligation, frame sexuality within strict moral and religious boundaries, and reinforce unequal gender expectations within intimate relationships. Economic realities were also shown to influence marital and sexual dynamics, highlighting the intersection between financial pressures and family life.

Although there are occasional indications of progressive shifts such as the depiction of communication and negotiation between partners of these movies remain limited and are largely overshadowed by more dominant patriarchal and moralistic narratives.

In line with Social Learning and Cultivation theories, repeated exposure to such portrayals may contribute to the continued normalization of traditional gender roles and sexual norms among audiences.

Future research could examine whether more recent indigenous Nigerian films are beginning to depict marriage and sexuality in more egalitarian ways. Additionally, studies exploring audience interpretations of these portrayals would provide valuable insight into how viewers negotiate, resist, or internalize the cultural messages embedded within film narratives. Such research would deepen understanding of the evolving relationship between media representation, cultural continuity, and social change in contemporary Nigerian society.

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