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## **Sex Objects and Conquered People? Representations of women in Nigerian Films in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

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### **Abstract**

This study examined the subjugation and objectification of women in Nigerian films produced in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century to determine whether the representations of women have changed at the turn of the Century. The objectives of this study were to find out the extent of subjugation of women in Nollywood films in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and determine the extent of objectification of women in Nollywood films in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This study was anchored on the feminist muted group theory. The design adopted was a mixed-method approach that combined content analysis and in-depth interviews. The researchers focused on Nollywood films produced from 2000 to 2021 that have women playing leading or supporting roles. A total of 22 films were coded and eleven film experts and scholars were interviewed. It was found that women were not significantly subjugated in Nigerian films produced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, women are still highly sexually objectified in Nigerian films produced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They are portrayed in a way that viewers can make judgments about them based on their physical appearance and their sex appeal. It was recommended that the Nigerian Film and Video Censors' Board must play its part in reducing the incidence of female objectification in Nigerian films by putting Objectification (O) as a film classification element, in the same breath as Nudity, Strong Language, and Violence (NSL).

**Keywords:** Sex Objects, Conquered people, Nigerian Films



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### **INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria has a vibrant mainstream media and a film industry called Nollywood, coined after Hollywood and Bollywood (Anyanwu, Ejem & Nwokeocha, 2015). Since the early 1990s, the industry has churned out thousands of titles and has successfully brought to the limelight many talented Nigerian actors and actresses. Researchers and critics have identified recurring themes in Nollywood films, some of which have been the subject of stern criticisms against the industry. Onongha (2022) states that one of the major criticisms of this industry is its thematic obsession with the occult world (juju, black magic, sorcery, ritual murder, witchcraft, etc.), obscenity, prostitution, and 'money worship.' These films, along with their Ghana counterparts, have been described as a mixture of 'horror, magic and melodrama' (p. 12). Opeyemi (2008) asserts that over the years, the industry has promoted certain identities and images which critics have frowned at. Among these are the image of a ritualistic society, the image of a violent society, the poor portrayal of certain sub-groups, and the display of a highly ostentatious and oligarchic society. These films project images and ideas that have to a great extent become a norm because profiteering has replaced art.

The way Nollywood films and the mass media, in general, have portrayed women has also been a source of concern to Nigerian women and feminists. There are concerns about the objectification of the female gender in films and the mainstream media (Ukozor et al., 2020).

According to SAGE Publications (21 August 2014), to sexually objectify a woman is to focus on her body in terms of how it can provide sexual pleasure rather than viewing her as a complete human being with thoughts and feelings. There are also serious concerns about the portrayal of the subjugation of women in the media. Okunna (2002) notes that in male-dominated societies, women's subordination and men's dominance are so pronounced that their subcultures are separated by a world of difference.

A growing number of Nigerian women and feminists have in the past expressed reservations about the portrayal of women in Nigerian video films (Okunna, 1996; Ezeigbo, 1996; Okunna, 2000; Ogunleye, 2003; Azeez, 2008; etc.). Various analyses of Nigerian films have mostly concluded that Nigerian films portray and position Nigerian women stereotypically and negatively. Okunna (2000, p. 24), for instance, concludes that Nollywood films are "facilitating the internalisation of the negative images of women by the large audience of local home video films." In line with a feminist ideological perspective, the films were also alleged to position women at the bottom of the power hierarchy in a way that reinforces their domination, suppression, and objectification. Those studies concluded that Nollywood films did not only limit representations of women to passive and subordinate housewives but also portrayed them as evil people, who are wicked, vindictive and unfaithful, wayward and of low morality, easily lured by material things, subservient to men, fit for domestic rather than professional and career roles, lazy and dependent on men, sex objects or weaker vessels, etc. (Agunloye, 2019; Ezeigbo, 1996; Okunna, 1996; Okunna, 2000; Ogunleye, 2003; Azeez, 2008).

In the first decade of Nollywood, Alao (2011) states that the industry was a male-dominated one. Therefore, the men set the agenda and framed the images. However, times have changed. The 21st Century has been marked by various landmarks in Nollywood, not only in a better quality of technical aspects of production, better quality of scripting, bigger budgets, international collaborations, richer storylines, and more global audiences but also in greater involvement of women in the nation's movie industry, particularly in the appointment of a woman as the (now former) DG of the NFVCB (Ms. Patricia Bala), increase in the number of female directors and producers; a lot of women in the industry have moved from just being actresses into the more technical areas of scripting, videography, directing and production among other things. With this greater involvement of women in Nollywood and other milestones, has the portrayal of women changed in films produced in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; and if so, how has the portrayal of subjugation and objectification of women changed over the years against the benchmarks of previous studies? Therefore, the objectives of this study were to:

1. Find out the extent of subjugation of women in Nollywood films in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.
2. Determine the extent of objectification of women in Nollywood films in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## **Literature Review**

### **Nollywood Films**

The word Nollywood is the generic name for the Nigerian film industry. It was coined following the style of Hollywood (the American film industry) and Bollywood (the Indian Film Industry). By definition, Nollywood is Nigeria's movie industry by Nigerian production teams for the Nigerian people (Haynes, 2018; Opeyemi, 2008). Talking about the strides of the film industry in Nigeria, Liston (10 April 2014) reports that Nollywood is Africa's largest movie industry in terms of value and the number of movies produced per year and The London Independent (May 15, 2010) ascribes Nollywood as the second largest film industry in the world in several annual film productions, placing it ahead of the United States and behind only India.

Nollywood films are produced mostly in the English language. They are also produced in Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa languages as well as in some of the minority languages such as Ijaw, Efik, Itsekiri, etc. But, according to Ojukwu and Ezenandu (2012), the use of the English Language as the main communication tool and the marketing strategies has facilitated the expansion of Nollywood films beyond the shores of the African continent. Nollywood has over the years become a world phenomenon, as its movies are being sold in Ghana, Togo, Kenya, Uganda, and South Africa as well as Jamaica, the USA, and the UK to name a few. The popularity of Nigerian films now stretches far beyond the country's borders.

Since the early 1990s, the Nollywood movie industry has churned out thousands of titles and has successfully brought to the limelight many talented Nigerian actors and actresses. According to the website of the Nigerian Films Video and Censors Board, some 300 producers churn out movies at an astonishing rate—somewhere between 500 and 1,000 a year. Talking about the major themes of Nollywood films, Ojukwu and Ezenandu (2012, p. 22) stress that "through an amalgam of Nigerian narrative techniques (African storylines) and Western technology, the industry documents and re-creates sociopolitical and cultural events that occurred within and beyond the country borders." Many Nollywood movies have themes that deal with the moral dilemmas facing modern Africans. Some movies promote the Christian or Islamic faiths, and some movies are overtly evangelical.

Similarly, Kunzler (2007, p. 1) explains that Nollywood is an industry that "developed out of a context related to domestic and international cultural, economic, and political environments." It is heterogeneous in nature and can roughly be divided into Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo video films which designate their production centers in the South-West, North, and South-East of Nigeria respectively.

Nigeria's Nollywood is counted among the major business centres of filmmaking in the world. Alamu (2010) remarks that Nigeria's Nollywood has been viewed as a cultural product of the Nation, and the global attention currently enjoyed by it is due to efforts by producers to create a distinct film tradition. The industry has advanced through the individual efforts of dominant producers and marketers despite its burgeoning challenges such as the problems of unabated piracy and the indifference of the government which has denied it the status of foreign exchange. The industry has also employed the teeming Nigerian population, especially the youth.

Even though the filmmakers make films essentially to make money, Akomfrah (2006, p. 282) argues that they are systematically being 'guided by the tenets of African nationalism and cultural identity which help them address local concerns.' Ogunleye (2003, p. 6) states that one of the major criticisms of this new industry is its thematic obsession with the occult world (juju, black magic, sorcery, ritual murder, witchcraft, etc.), obscenity, prostitution, and "money worship." Nigerian video films, along with their Ghana counterparts, have been described as a mixture of "horror, magic, and melodrama"

Ejinkoye (2009) highlights some of the challenges faced by Nollywood. First, the editing is poor. Then, techniques used to signal a transition from one location to another, such as the dissolve and superimposition, are blatantly abused, and the timing of the shots is wrong. The Nigerian industry lacks basic lighting equipment, and in many video films, very high or very low lighting affects the quality of the color. With no deliberate attempt to create a dramatic effect, a good number of the films contain shadows that could have been eliminated with proper lighting. In all these, it is important to conclude that Nollywood has grown in leaps and bounds over the years. It however has been criticized in terms of the techniques, prevalent themes, and certain portrayals.

## **Objectification of Women**

Objectification means treating a person as a thing. Stanford Encyclopedia (2010) explains that objectification is a notion central to feminist theory. It can be roughly defined as seeing and/or treating a person, usually a woman, as an object. Objectification is a term to describe seeing human beings as objects. Representations show people, not as individuals, but as things to be owned, sold, used, etc. The focus here is primarily on sexual objectification, objectification occurring in the sexual realm. Objectification, for Kant (1797) cited in McGregor (1996), involves the lowering of a person, a being with humanity, to the status of an object. In the light of objectification, Kant often speaks about the 'degradation', 'subordination', and 'dishonouring' of humanity.

According to SAGE Publications (21 August 2014), to sexually objectify a woman is to focus on her body in terms of how it can provide sexual pleasure rather than viewing her as a complete human being with thoughts and feelings. Sexual objectification is the objectification of persons generally based on their sexual attributes. Women are far more likely than men to be objectified and judged by perceived sexual attractiveness rather than values such as intellectual ability (Dawn, 2011). Sexual objectification of women is found in media, in advertising, and not surprisingly, even in news.

Objectification of women means the suggestion that women's value is tied to their looks and sexual appeal to men. When it concerns the reduction of women to physical objects of sexual desire, it is known as sexual objectification. This is also expressed by the dismemberment of women in the media (Kilbourne, 2002). A sexualised message about women is a typical example of objectification. Female objectification was once thought imponderable but, through a growing body of research, this belief has been proven wrong. The existence and implications of female objectification have been explored. Even though men are sometimes objectified, empirical studies have indicated that women are overwhelmingly targeted more for sexually objectifying treatment than men (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997). The most prominent means of transporting this sexualized female identity is through the mass media.

Saul (2003) explains that some feminist thinkers that women in our society are more identified and associated with their bodies than men, and, to a greater extent than men, they are valued for how they look. To gain social acceptability, women are under constant pressure to correct their bodies and appearance more generally and make them conform to the ideals of feminine appearance of their time, the so-called 'norms of feminine appearance' (the standards of appearance women feel they should be living up to).

Extensive research has demonstrated the negative results of female objectification in the media. The objectification of women has serious repercussions including, but not limited to, body shame, appearance anxiety, depression, sexual dysfunction, and eating disorders. Fareed (2012), the status of women in our society, especially in the cultural industry such as the media, has been very sympathetic for ages; they have never been given the importance they deserved. Our male chauvinistic society has always been eager to use women but never ready to give them the high pedestal that they justify. Since old age women are defined as a commodity or an instrument of luxury.

## **Subjugation of women**

Subjugation is like oppression or conquest: one group takes control over another and forces them to do as they are told. It is a state of being under control or secondary. Vocabulary.com (retrieved 10-11-2014) explains that subjugation is one of many types of injustice in the world. It has to do with one group of people dominating another group by taking

away their freedom. It has its Latin root as *subjugat*, which means 'brought under a yoke.' Silima (2013) explains that a subjugated individual means a lower-ranking or inferior individual. Subjugation is otherwise called subordination.

Okunna (2002) notes that in male-dominated societies, women's subordination and men's dominance are so pronounced that their subcultures are separated by a world of difference. One such society, she says, is Nigeria. The Nigerian woman is also characterized by low self-esteem because society has continued to regard her as unimportant and inferior to her male counterpart. Rodriguez (2007) asserts that women in most settled societies of the world and virtually all class societies have experienced low status, exploitation, oppression, and loss of self-determination. For example, most settled and class societies transmit names and property through the male line. Given the importance of paternity in patrilineal societies, it is scarcely surprising that many settled and class societies insist on female premarital chastity. The inherent uncertainty of paternity has often produced bizarre and barbarous attempts to secure the fidelity of married women as well.

Wollstonecraft (2009) describes women's subjugation as a situation where women are, in common with men, rendered weak and luxurious by the relaxing pleasures that wealth procures; but added to this they are made slaves to their persons, and must render them alluring that man may lend them his reason to guide their tottering steps aright. Ikokuwu (2002) draws attention not only to the gross discrimination against women under this legal system but also to the incongruity of such a system operating in a democratic society in the twenty-first century. Women are equally economically disadvantaged and impoverished in terms of ownership of the means of production such as land. Talking about the subjugation of women in Nigerian society, Ojiakor (1997) in Okunna (2002, p. 3) effectively captures the master-servant relationship between the sexes when she says, "the Nigerian men have always believed that Nigeria belongs to them and women are at best the rent-paying tenants. Over the centuries, women have struggled to say no to this misconception."

Speaking also about gender relations in Nigeria with relation to the subjugation of women, Okunna (2002) understands that gender relations in Nigeria are characterized by a lot of imbalance, to the disadvantage of women. This is the twenty-first century, yet tradition, culture, religion, and other factors have continued to widen the disparity between Nigerian men and women, by keeping women in a subordinate position to men. The larger society and the male subculture still see women and their aspirations as subordinate, resulting in a situation in which the marginalisation, trivialisation, and stereotyping of women are glaring aspects of Nigerian life. Ojiakor (1997) effectively captures the master-servant relationship between the sexes when she states, "the Nigerian men have always believed that Nigeria belongs to them and women are at best the rent-paying tenants. Over the centuries, women have struggled to say no to this misconception." This statement aptly explains the subjugation of women.

Subjugation also manifests in the economic disempowerment of women, Okoye (2000) shows how, in comparison to men, women are worse hit as a result of their very limited involvement in economic activities than their male counterparts. Abati (1996) notes that based on concerted research the conclusion has long been reached that women are a de-centred, de-natured sub-species of humanity; harassed by culture, intimidated by politics, and subsumed in helplessly patrilineal and patriarchal structures which pamper the male ego.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was anchored on the feminist muted group theory. Introduced by Shirley and Ardener (1968), the theory explains why certain groups in society are muted, silent, or not heard. It suggests that in every society a social hierarchy exists, that privileges some groups

over others. These groups that function at the top (men) of the social hierarchy determine to a great extent the communication system of the entire society and the "mutedness" occurs because of the lack of power that is given to another group (women) that occupies the low end of the pole. They assert that women are the ones that usually are at the lower rung of the social hierarchy; hence, they are usually undermined and silenced.

Kramarae (1981) made the following key assumptions about the feminist muted group theory to include:

1. Because men are the dominant group in society, women are perceived as less competent.
2. To become participating members of society women must transform their perceptions and models of perceiving into terms of the dominant group.

That is to say, in a male-dominated society, the assignment of roles in the cultural industries adversely affects women; to sustain supremacy men assign to themselves the more paying, more powerful, and prestigious roles while leaving the weaker and less prestigious ones to women. This theory explains why women could be misrepresented, stereotyped and underrepresented in films. Just as Alao (2011) said about the Nollywood industry which was a male-dominated one, the men set the agenda and framed the images. However, with the increased roles of women in the industry, the feminist muted group theory assumes that there should be improvements in the way women were muted and subjugated.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Research Design**

The design adopted for this study was a mixed-method approach that combined content analysis and in-depth interviews were also conducted. That is, a content analysis of films produced during the period 2000 – 2021 was carried out and in-depth interviews with identified film experts and scholars were conducted to supplement the content analysis in the data collection and they helped in filling some information gap. Using both designs was useful in validating the research findings.

### **The population of the Study**

The researchers focused on Nollywood films produced from 2000 to 2021 that have women playing leading or supporting roles. This specific period is chosen because this is when women began to take up serious technical and production roles in Nollywood. The Nigerian Film and Video Censor's Board ([www.nfvcb.gov.ng](http://www.nfvcb.gov.ng); accessed 19-09-2021) listed 23,054 films registered between 2000 and 2021.

### **Sample Size**

Based on a review of the synopsis of the films by the researchers, one film that has women playing leading or supporting roles was selected per year. Thus, a total of 22 films (selected based on the number of years in the study frame; 2000 – 2021). Eleven film experts and scholars were interviewed.

### **Sampling Technique**

The researcher used purposive and simple random sampling techniques. The sampled films were drawn from films produced in Nigeria and censored by the National Film and Video Censors Board between 2000 and 2021. The criterion for purposive sampling is including movies that only have women in leading and supporting roles during the period.

### Research Instruments

The code sheet was used to record the frequency of occurrences of various depictions of subjugation and objectification of women in the selected Nollywood films. The in-depth interviews were conducted using an interview schedule with six questions.

### Units of Analysis and Content Categories

The unit of analysis is the female character within the selected Nollywood movies. The content categories in this study are those things that the researcher considers markers of subjugation and objectification or sexualisation that relate to the female characters in the selected Nollywood films. They include: Character traits; Body parts; Clothing/nudity; Stance; Posture; and Language. Those are the content categories that were coded in the selected Nollywood films. They are the different kinds of content the researcher investigated, which helped in answering the research questions.

### Intercoder Reliability

Four of the sampled films were independently coded by two coders. The coefficient of the inter-coder reliability, calculated using the Holsti formula was 88.3%.

### Method of Data Analysis

Frequencies and percentages were used at the descriptive level to analyse the data collected and collated from the code sheets, using the SPSS. The responses from the interviewees were analyzed using constant comparison, and they were used to support the findings of the content analysis.

## RESULTS OF RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

### Presentation of Coded Data

**Table 1. Character Traits the Women Exhibited in the Selected Films**

	Traits Exhibited	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Weak	3	3.5	3.5	3.5
	Powerful	7	8.2	8.2	11.8
	Assertive	6	7.1	7.1	18.8
	Withdrawn	5	5.9	5.9	24.7
	Submissive	3	3.5	3.5	28.2
	Passive	4	4.7	4.7	32.9
	Self-Independent	9	10.6	10.6	43.5
	Limited Thinker	4	4.7	4.7	48.2
	Critical	6	7.1	7.1	55.3
	Follower	2	2.4	2.4	57.6
	Slave	3	3.5	3.5	61.2
	Active	14	16.5	16.5	77.6
	Cope With Difficulties	7	8.2	8.2	85.9
	Progressive	8	9.4	9.4	95.3
	Sex Object	2	2.4	2.4	97.6
	Regards Herself as Inferior to Man	2	2.4	2.4	100.0
	Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Various character traits were coded 85 times in the selected home videos as demonstrated by the women coded in the films. As indicated in the Table, the character traits include being weak, powerful, assertive, withdrawn, submissive, passive, self-independent,



limited thinker, critical, follower, slave, active, coping with difficulties, progressive, sex object and regards herself as inferior to man.

As shown in the Table, of the 85 character traits coded as demonstrated by the women in the films, 3(3.5%) demonstrated weakness, 7(8.2%) demonstrated power, 6(7.1%) demonstrated assertiveness, 5(5.9%) were withdrawn, 5(3.5%) were submissive, 4(4.7%) were passive, 9(10.6%) were self-independent, 4(4.7%) showed limited thinking, 6(7.1%) were critical, 2(2.4%) were followers, 3(3.5%) demonstrated slavery or servitude, 14(16.5%) were active, 7(8.2%) coped with difficulty, 8(9.4%) were progressive, 2(2.4%) were at some points seen as sex objects and 2(2.4%) were situations where a woman regards herself as inferior to man.

**Table 2. Body Parts of Females Emphasized in the Home Videos**

	Body Parts	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Breasts/Chest	17	32.1	32.1	32.1
	Buttocks	29	54.7	54.7	86.8
	Lips	7	13.2	13.2	100.0
	Genitals	0	0	0	100.0
	Total	53	100.0	100.0	

Various body parts that are suggestive of sexual objectification were coded in the selected home videos as exhibited by the women coded in the films. As indicated in the Table, the body parts include breasts/chest, genitals, buttocks, and lips. As shown in the Table, in the coded home videos and from the women who played lead and supporting roles in the films, on 17 (32.%) occasions, the females' breast/chest was emphasised; on 29(54.7%) occasions, the buttocks were emphasized; and on 7(13.2%) occasions, the lips were emphasised.

**Table 3. Clothing/Nudity Trends among Female Characters in the Films**

	Clothing Trend	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Slightly revealing	25	32.5	32.5	32.5
	Somewhat revealing	38	49.4	49.4	81.8
	Highly revealing	11	14.3	14.3	96.1
	Wearing apparel that is not generally considered "clothing"	3	3.9	3.9	100.0
	Wearing nothing at all	0	0	0	100.0
	Total	77	100.0	100.0	

Various clothing/nudity trends were coded in the selected home videos as exhibited by the women coded in the films. as indicated in the table, the clothing/nudity trends are categorised as: slightly revealing clothing, somewhat revealing clothing, highly revealing clothing, wearing apparel that is not generally considered "clothing" and wearing nothing at all. As shown in the Table, in the coded home videos and from the women who played lead and supporting roles in the films, on 25(32.5%) occasions, the women wore slightly revealing clothes; on 38(49.4%) occasions, the women wore somewhat revealing clothes; on 11(14.3%) occasions, the women wore highly revealing; and on 3(3.9%) occasions, the women wore apparel that is not generally considered "clothing".

**Table 4. Stance portrayed by the Women in the Home Videos**

	Stance	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	The stance that indicated subordination/subjugation	36	28.3	28.3	28.3

	Stance in which the character was dominant	68	53.5	53.5	81.9
	Stance not clearly determined	23	18.1	18.1	100.0
	Total	127	100.0	100.0	

The stance portrayed by the women was coded in the selected home videos as indicated in the table. The stance was indicative of the extent of their subjugation or otherwise, and the said stance was evaluated by their disposition and attitude towards things. As shown in the Table, in the coded home videos and from the women who played lead and supporting roles in the films, on 36(28.3%) occasions, the women's stance to issues indicated subordination/subjugation; on 68(53.5%) occasions, the women's stance was the one in which their character was dominant; and on 23(18.1%) occasions, the women's stance was not clearly determined by the researchers.

**Table 5. Social Class of Women in the Home Videos**

	Social Class	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Upper	17	34.7	34.7	34.7
	Upper-middle	14	28.6	28.6	63.3
	Middle	11	22.4	22.4	85.7
	Lower-middle	4	8.2	8.2	93.9
	Lower	2	4.1	4.1	98.0
	Undetermined	1	2.0	2.0	100.0
	Total	49	100.0	100.0	

The social class of the women was coded in the selected home videos as indicated in the table. The social class of the women was categorized as upper, upper-middle, middle, lower-middle, lower and undetermined. As shown in the Table, in the coded home videos and of the women who played lead and supporting roles in the films, 17(34.7%) belonged to the upper social class; 14(28.6%) belonged to the upper-middle social class; 11(22.4%) belonged to the middle social class; 4(8.2%) belonged to the lower-middle social class; 2(4.1%) belonged to the lower social class and 1(2%) belonged to a social class that the researchers could not classify.

**Table 6. Sexual Activities Engaged by Women in the Home Videos**

	Sexual Activities	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Intimate Touching	12	19.7	19.7	19.7
	Passionate Kissing	16	26.2	26.2	45.9
	Casual Touching	13	21.3	21.3	67.2
	Implied Intercourse	6	9.8	9.8	77.0
	Disrobing	6	9.8	9.8	86.9
	Approximate Nudity	1	1.6	1.6	88.5
	Sustained Romance	7	11.5	11.5	100.0
	Actual intercourse	0	0	0	100.0
Total	61	100.0	100.0		

The various sexual activities engaged by the women in the 15 selected home videos were coded as indicated in the table. The various identified sexual activities engaged by then women were intimate touching, passionate kissing, casual touching, implied intercourse, disrobing, nude and sustained romance; but there was no incidence of actual intercourse.

As shown in the Table, on 12(19.7%) occasions, some of the women who played lead and supporting roles in the selected films engaged in intimate touching; on 16(26.2%) occasions,

they engaged in passionate kissing; on 13(21.3%) occasions, they engaged in casual touching; on 6(9.8%) occasions, they engaged in implied intercourse; on 6(9.8%) occasions, they engaged in disrobing; on 1(1.6%) occasion, they engaged in approximate nudity; and on 7(11.5%) occasions, they engaged in sustained romance.

**Table 7. Initiators of the Sexual Activities in the Home Videos**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Men	53	86.9	86.9	86.9
	Women	8	13.1	13.1	100.0
	Total	61	100.0	100.0	

The initiators of the various sexual activities engaged by the women in the selected home videos were coded as indicated in the table. As shown in the Table, on 53(86.9%) occasions, the various sexual activities engaged by the women were initiated by the men; and on 8(13.1%) occasions, the various sexual activities engaged by the women were initiated by the women.

**Table 8. Body Postures of the Women in the Films**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Sexually provocative	23	47.9	47.9	47.9
	Physically subdued	9	18.8	18.8	66.7
	Physically imposing	16	33.3	33.3	100.0
	Total	48	100.0	100.0	

The Table shows the body positions that the females assume which are suggestive of either subjugation or objectification in the selected home videos. As shown in the table, there were 23(47.9%) incidences of sexually provocative postures in the selected films; there were 9(18.8%) incidences of physically subdued postures in the selected films, and there were 16(33.3%) incidences of physically imposing postures in the selected films.

**Table 9: Language Used by the Women in the Films**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Indecent	16	27.1	27.1	27.1
	Authoritative	32	54.2	54.2	81.3
	Contrite	11	18.7	18.7	100.0
	Total	59	100.0	100.0	

The Table shows the languages that the females used which are suggestive of either subjugation or objectification in the selected home videos. As shown in the table, there were 16(27.1%) instances where the indecent language was used in the selected films; there were 32(54.2%) instances where the authoritative language was used in the selected films, and there were 11(18.7%) instances where contrite languages were used in the selected films.

## Discussion of Findings

### To what extent are women subjugated in select Nollywood films?

It is obvious from the interview responses and data coded from the films, that women were not significantly subjugated in the select Nollywood films. The character traits identified in the selected home videos occasions where the women were portrayed as a weak, powerful, assertive, withdrawn, submissive, passive, self-independent, limited thinker, critical, follower, slave, active, cope with difficulties, progressive, and regards herself as inferior to man; but as the data demonstrates, majority of the times, the women were portrayed as active, self-

dependent, progressive; cope with difficulty, critical and assertive. It was found that there were 32 (54.2%) instances where authoritative languages were used in the selected films compared to other ways language was used to suggest subjugation or objectification, and there were 16(33.3%) incidences of the use of physically imposing postures in the selected films in such a way that they suggest the dominance of the female characters instead of subjugation.

Data analysis shows that 3.5% demonstrated weakness, 8.2% demonstrated power, 7.1% demonstrated assertiveness, 5.9% were withdrawn, 3.5% were submissive, 4.7% were passive, 10.6% were self-independent, 4.7% showed limited thinking, 7.1% were critical, 2.4% were followers, 3.5% demonstrated slavery or servitude, 14(16.5%) were active, 7(8.2%) coped with difficulty, 9.4% were progressive, 2.4% were at some points seen as sex objects and 2.4% were situations where a woman regards herself as inferior to man. More so, the stance of the women was indicated that on 28.3% of the occasions, the women's stance on issues indicated subordination/subjugation; on 53.5% of the occasions, the women's stance was the one in which their character was dominant; and on 18.1% of the occasions, the women's stance was not clearly determined by the researchers. That is to say, for the majority of the time, the women's stance was the one in which their character was dominant.

What the data analyses have proven is that, while scholars like Ojiakor (1997), Okunna (2002, p. 1), Ikokwu (2002, p. 13), etc., have all noted that women's subordination and men's dominance are so pronounced in all subcultures of the Nigerian society, this cannot exactly be said of Nollywood in the 21st Century. From the researchers' analysis of Nigerian films produced in the 21st Century, the majority of the time, the women were portrayed as active, self-dependent, progressive; coping with difficulty, critical and assertive. The women's stance was the one in which their character was dominant, and a majority of the female characters belonged to the upper-middle social class.

As participants in the in-depth interview revealed, the claim of female subjugation holds water only when the Nigerian film industry just started; when most of the themes of Nigerian films revolved around female maltreatment by in-laws, especially following her husband's death. However today, there seems to be a departure in the subjugation of women as women now take dominant roles in the films, and are no longer as muted as they were in the early days of Nollywood. Therefore, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, women are not significantly subjugated in Nollywood films.

### **To what extent are women objectified in select Nollywood films?**

Analysis of the various data and interview responses demonstrate that women are highly sexually objectified in the selected home videos. Data indicated a 32% emphasis on the females' breast/chest; 54.7% emphasis on the female's buttocks and 13.2% emphasis on the females' lips. Further analysis showed most of the time, women were portrayed as indecent dressers. 32.5% of the time when women wore sexually suggested clothes, they wore slightly revealing clothes; 49.4% of the time, they wore somewhat revealing clothes; 14.3% of the time, they wore highly revealing; and 3.9% of the time, they wore apparel that is not generally considered "clothing". Moreover, it was revealed that there were 23 occasions where there were sexually provocative postures by the females in the selected films, representing 47.9% of the times in which the body positions of the females suggested either subjugation or objectification; and Table 4.13 indicated that there were 16(27.1%) instances where indecent languages were used in the selected films.

The various identified sexual activities engaged by the women in the films included intimate touching, passionate kissing, casual touching, implied intercourse, disrobing, nude and

sustained romance; but there was no incidence of actual intercourse. 19.7% of the women engaged in intimate touching; 26.2% of them engaged in passionate kissing; 21.3% of them engaged in casual touching; 9.8% of them engaged in implied intercourse; 9.8% of them engaged in disrobing; 1.6% of them engaged in approximate nudity, and 11.5% of them engaged in sustained romance. Amid these sexual representations, 86.9% of the sexual activities engaged by the women were initiated by the men; whereas only 13.1% of the sexual activities engaged by the women were initiated by the women.

What this analysis confirms is Saul's (2003) explanation that some feminists think that women in our society are more identified and associated with their bodies than men, and this is so. This has lent credence to the objectification theory which assumes that all women and girls in our society live in a culture in which their bodies are looked at, evaluated, and potentially objectified. This situation was described by participants of the in-depth interview as an "appalling situation in most films where women dance about naked, wear skimpy clothes." The interviewees understood that most Nigerian movies do not end until a girl is seen wearing provocative cloth and is portrayed as a harlot or in a way a sex monger. In summary, the data and personal communication indicate that women are sexually objectified in Nollywood films and it is a concern to women and scholars of mass communication and theatre arts that women are projected in a way that objectifies them.

## **Summary of Findings and Conclusion**

### **Summary of the Findings**

Following the various analysis and interpretations of the quantitative and qualitative data, here is a summary of the findings:

1. Women were not significantly subjugated in Nigerian films produced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The women's stance was mostly one in which their character was dominant and challenging stereotypes. For instance, in 53.5% of the occasions, the women's stance was the one in which their character was dominant; and there were 54.2% instances where the authoritative language was used by the females to suggest that their character was dominant.
2. Women are highly sexually objectified in Nigerian films produced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Women were portrayed in a way that viewers can make judgments about them based on their physical appearance and their sex appeal. For instance, 54.7% of their body emphasis was on their buttocks; 47.9% of the times in which their body positions were examined, they were sexually provocative; and 86.9% of the sexual activities engaged by the women were initiated by the men.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study revisited the objectification and subjugation of women in Nollywood films, from the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The rationale is that with the greater involvement of women in Nollywood in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there was a need to gauge if the portrayal of women changed in films produced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; and find out how the portrayal of subjugation and objectification of women changed over the years against the benchmarks of previous studies. The findings concluded that women were not significantly subjugated in Nigerian films produced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but they were highly sexually objectified. While women have always been sexually objectified in Nigerian films, subjugation seems no longer an issue in Nigerian films in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Therefore, with greater involvement of women in Nollywood in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, particularly in terms of administration and the technical aspects of

production, there is less subjugation of women in Nollywood films but there is still a significant level of objectification in the films.

### **Recommendations**

In light of the various findings, the following recommendations were suggested:

1. Film writers should understand their role in shaping gender perception in society. They should try as much as possible to avoid presenting women as a sex objects. They can do that by paying more attention to the action and drama genres of films, which are less likely to have a lot of sexual roles.
2. Nigerian Film and Video Censors' Board must play its part in reducing the incidence of female objectification in Nigerian films, by putting Objectification (O) as a film classification element, in the same breath as Nudity, Strong Language, and Violence (NSL).

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