

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Emotional women and promiscuous men: Language use as discursive stances of wives on cheating husbands

God'sgift Ogban Uwen^{1,*}, Bassey Asukwo Ekpenyong¹, Gregory Ajima Onah², Ekpenyong Nyong Akpanika²

¹ Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar 540242, Nigeria

² Department of Religious and Cultural Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar 540242, Nigeria

* Corresponding author: God'sgift Ogban Uwen, godsgiftuwen18@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the dimensions of emotive language used by women to situate their stances on cheating husbands in Calabar, Southern Nigeria. The data for the study were generated by means of non-participant observation and semi-structured interviews, aided by audiotape recording and field notes. One hundred married women constitute the representative sample from whom the data were elicited. Findings show that the participants used emotional language to establish different stances in discourses on adulterous acts of their husbands. The participants' stances are construed to be nuanced in religious, punitive, revengeful, sociobiological, reconciliatory and legal considerations. Participants' choices were influenced by the women's religious, gendered and sociocultural orientations, educational background and level of exposure, family and social pressure, personal safety and psychological state. These differentials connect the appraisal patterns with the consequences of each stance which should also serve as expository guide on the rationale for such decisions by women on cheating spouses. The emotive outbursts by the participants stress the need for men to be faithful to their wives to sustain mutual happiness and peaceful marriages.

Keywords: emotional women; discursive stances; emotional language; appraisal patterns; cheating husbands

1. Introduction

Despite the fact that married couples across cultures are obligatorily expected to show mutual love and practice sexual exclusivity in marriage, there seems to be an increasingly trending rate of infidelity induced by multidimensional claims. Amada and Amadi^[1], Crosby^[2], and Tolorunke^[3] view marriage as a legalized and consented relationship between a man and woman which places the partners on moral, legal and social obligations in the society. This conception makes marriage a sociocultural defined and approved lifelong relationship, and a moral endorsement for sexual commitment and intercourse which involves the expectation of children. Nigeria practices three types of marriage that are legally recognizable: Islamic, Christian and customary with binding and individualized obligations for the partners. Apart from Christian marriage which practices the tenets of monogamy, Islamic and customary marriages are polygamous in nature. Christian marriages are constituted on the philosophy that a man is entitled to one wife, while the dictates of Islamic and customary marriages allow the man to marry more than one wife. Nadir^[4] and Melgosa^[5] argue that couples in successful marriages show mutual love and trust, they manage and tolerate differences, communicate and

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 25 June 2023 | Accepted: 21 August 2023 | Available online: 13 October 2023

CITATION

Uwen GO, Ekpenyong BA, Onah GA, Akpanika EN. Emotional women and promiscuous men: Language use as discursive stances of wives on cheating husbands. *Environment and Social Psychology* 2023; 8(3): 1848. doi: 10.54517/esp.v8i3.1848

COPYRIGHT

Copyright © 2023 by author(s). *Environment and Social Psychology* is published by Asia Pacific Academy of Science Pte. Ltd. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

respect feelings, prioritize practices that would sustain unity and harmony, and contain external pressure from friends and relatives. On the contrary, Wood^[6] ascertains that lack of mutual love in marriages results in unpleasant circumstances which could have multiple negative effects on the society. The society, in such circumstances, becomes the receptacle for cheating-induced marital confrontations, struggles, assaults and other vices displayed among couples in private and public places that create condemnable scenes.

According to Waite and Joyner^[7], cheating or infidelity is a breach of the expectation of sexual exclusivity and unfaithfulness by virtue of being unreliable in a relationship despite the commitment to exclusiveness. Cheating in marriage is synonymous with adultery, philander, an affair and infidelity that define uncommitted extramarital relationship. Blow and Harnett^[8], and Buss^[9] agree that there is no doubt that cheating among couples exists, and but it has become a global extramarital practice that is destroying marriages. However, Brunk^[10] posits that the trend varies according to orientations, cultures and social pressure. Studies on the sexual behaviors' among Americans and European couples show striking revelations on practices of extramarital affairs. Fife and Weeks^[11], and Shackelford, Buss and Bennett^[12] demonstrate that in Africa, it has been widely argued that cheating is a common practice across gender. This, according to Nwoye^[13], Zare^[14], and Akinkuotu^[15], is particularly harnessed by the entrenched sociocultural principles that eulogize patriarchy and male dominion across some countries in Africa. Obi and Aduma^[16] corroborate that married couples in Nigeria are also reported to have often sought for sexual pleasures outside marriage. Blumstein and Schwartz^[17], and Thompson^[18] exemplify that couples engaged in this behavior do so for individual reasons, ranging from sociocultural, habitual to economic factors. Irrespective of the reasons, such affairs breach the commitment to exclusivity and mutual trust among partners with negative consequences often communicated in tensed emotions.

Emotion in humans is a complex phenomenon that its activation, utilization and control is individualistic and therefore produces different outcomes. Moors^[19] argues that emotions are based on a structural, causal and mechanistic dimensions. The structural dimension of emotion specifies the components of emotion itself, the causal category describes the observable cause of the emotion while the mechanistic typology activates the mechanism. The mechanism is the mental device that interpretatively interfaces between the cause and the particular emotion to actualize an action which may be spoken or demonstrated. This categorization suggests multiple channels that interface in the expression and interpretation of emotions. The common ones across cultures are expressed through spoken language and facial expressions. Beside facial expression, language as an instrument for emotion recognition, is often instantiated by the emotional content of the language itself. Izard^[20], and Paulmann and Pell^[21] add that emotional action and language used to express feelings involve certain universal principles often expressed in behavioral signals and spoken discourse. On the nonlinguistic signals, Perlovsky^[22,23], and Zhu^[24] affirm that such signals often provide the link between emotions and the stance they establish by discourse participants in certain circumstances. In such contexts, the meaning of the emotional expressions and the stance they insinuate are context-dependent, and construed in the differences in appraisal patterns. Uwen^[25,26], and Uwen and Ellah^[27] argue that this conception helps to convey situated meanings that define the social context which are only comprehensible to the interlocutors. Meaning here, according to Ukam and Uwen^[28] is emphasized in the tone, stress and choice of words by participants. Tone, therefore, is contributory to meaning orientation in spoken language. Cheating experiences by spouses are bound in this context, to generate emotional language and emotion in language expressed using emotion-bearing linguistic and paralinguistic cues.

The thrust of the study is stance taking by wives in the sites and/or discourse on their cheating husbands in Calabar, an urban city in Southern Nigeria. The city has residents with different sexual orientations which manifest in adulterous sexual behaviors among married couples with opposite sex. Such events often resulted

in emotion-laden quarrels, fights, confrontations, assaults and other altercations between couples. In such scenarios, wives have shown emotions expressed through emotional language that instantiated deepened feelings and stances. Lack of studies on the trending cases of cheating husbands caught by their wives and the discourses, particularly among married women is what informed this research. The study is therefore aimed to examine the different stances married women take in the sites and discourse on sexual infidelity of husbands. This would ascertain how language is employed to establish feelings induced by men's adulterous practices. It is believed that the outcome would be a guide for emotional control and for policy makers to adopt acceptable tenets of marriage in Nigeria.

2. Theoretical framework

The theories considered relevant to this study are the Conceptual Act Theory (CAT) and Appraisal Theory (ApT). Barrett^[29,30], and Clore and Ortony^[31] propose that CAT is conceived on the predictions that language plays a vital role in the construction and communication of emotions. According to Lindquist^[32,33], language, as conceived here, becomes tool for communication partners to acquire the concept knowledge that situates meanings of their perceptions, experiences and emotions. Emotions, aside from being verbally expressed, also transmit other psychological components that instantiate pride, anger, sadness, disgust, excitement, awe, fear and aggression, stimulated by visual and auditory sensations. In the psychological perspective, emotion is induced where concept knowledge on psychological components such as anger interfaces with exteroceptive sensations such as what is seen or heard. Language here, is deployed for the interpretation of the concept knowledge into meaningful sensations that transmit emotions. Language in this form, helps to communicate emotional experiences which could also be expressed through paralinguistic cues such as frowns, wrinkled nose, wide eyes and scowls, to indicate unpleasant situations. Clore and Ortony^[34] further assert that emotional language is often associated with adults, and is more expressed in the spoken medium through language sounds, especially indicated in intonation. It is particularly with adults because they peculiarly develop nuanced responses to bodily, situational and behavioral strands of emotions using language.

Martin and Rose^[35], and Martin and White^[36] also present ApT as a framework that interrogates how human beings manipulate evaluative, attitudinal and emotional resources to negotiate their social relationships by telling listeners or readers how people feel about things and other people, by showing how they express attitudes towards events. Roseman and Smith^[37], and Ortony et al.^[38] demonstrate that the theory is anchored on the thrust that emotions are elicited by evaluating appraisals of events and situations, and differentiated by individual appraisals. White^[39] emphasizes how speakers or writers express their feelings and take stance in every event around them negotiate stance. Stance, whether individually or collectively conceived, represents a resolute position. Stance taking is context-dependent, and may occur differently in different situations, depending on the appraisal pattern of the individuals^[40]. Stance taking also varies, and is regulated by several factors, and anchored on practicable components. The theory incorporates three basic components: attitude, graduation and engagement. Attitude explains the situated feelings which include: emotional reactions, judgments of behavior and evaluation of things. For Pascual and Unger^[41], it evokes affect, judgment and appreciation of situations. Graduation weighs the combined resources which strengthen or weaken attitude in certain contexts. Engagement on the other hand, interfaces with, and manipulates affect and graduation to produce self-opinions in discursive events. The self-opinions help to instantiate how individuals differ in maintaining stances on the same situation. On this, Roseman^[42] asserts that different individuals who appraise the same situation in significantly different ways, would produce different stance. Attitude and engagement as components of the theory are interfaced to produce the differentials in people's opinions that instantiate alternative positions that define stances on social occurrences and discourses. The two theories (CAT and ApT) provide insightful knowledge needed for the discourse on how appraisal patterns are utilized in the initiation,

construction and deployment of emotions based on the visual (what they see), auditory (what they hear) and other sensations. The emotional responses to these sensations are communicated using language to situate differentials in stance taking. The theories are relevant in the identification and coding of participants' stances using their emotional outbursts in cheating scenes and discourse on cheating husbands.

3. Materials and methods

The study adopts a qualitative research approach. Data for the study were generated by means of nonparticipant observations and semi-structured interviews using digital audio recordings and field notes as research tools in a one-year fieldwork (June 2022 to May 2023). The focus group was married women who were randomly selected as participants in Calabar, Southern Nigeria. Calabar is a thickly populated urban city where there exists the complexity of different sexual behaviors known to the researchers who have been residents for over two decades. The study is motivated by the increasing cases of married men's engagement in extramarital affairs. Several times, married women have caught their husbands in the act or in suspicious romantic behaviors in private residences and public places such as shopping malls, car parks, eateries, recreational centers and social events where such discourses also took place. Married women's knowledge of, and the discourse on their husbands' illicit relationships generated the deployment of different appraisal patterns to communicate their emotions. In generating the data, the researchers set criteria for selection and participation to include: admittance to have been married for five years and above, being a resident in Calabar for a minimum of five years and willingness to give consent to participate in the exercise. The minimum of five years in marriage is believed to be enough period for a partner to unconsciously stimulate the exhibition of habitual characters such as infidelity by husband. Restriction of participants to residents who had lived in Calabar for a minimum of five years was to capture women who were aware of the spouses' sexual behaviors in the city. The request for consent from participants also helped to address ethical concerns and adherence to local regulations.

On the whole, 152 married women were randomly consulted for the exercise, but only 100 who formed the representative population consented to participate. The participants were familiar with the topic and were adequately informed of the essence of the research. The 52 married women who declined participation did so based on personal principles which included the privacy of their family lives. Among the 100 sampled participants, 45 percent have caught their husbands cheating in different places, 35 percent were aware that their husbands cheat, while 20 percent made anticipatory opinions on what they could do should their husbands cheat on them. Also, based on the ethnolinguistic backgrounds of the participants, 25 percent of them were Efiks, 20 percent were Igbos, 17 percent were Yorubas, 7 percent were Hausas and 31 percent were from other ethnic groups. The participants' religious affiliations also showed that 72 percent were Christians, 17 percent were Muslims and 11 percent were orientated in traditional beliefs. The educational qualifications of the participants ranged from Senior Secondary Certificate to University degrees. This demographic information: the women who had caught their husbands cheating, those who were aware and others who anticipated that their husbands could cheat, and the women's religious, ethnolinguistic and educational backgrounds are bound to have impact on their stances on the discourse on their cheating husbands.

On the methods, non-participant observation enabled the researchers and the participants to take an eye-witness evaluation of emotional outbursts in cheating scenes and the discourses on that. The semi-structured interviews were complementary; they provided information on the situational contexts that stimulated the emotive responses and other possible reactions. The questions asked the participants include: if they had caught, aware or anticipated that their husbands could cheat on them, and what action(s) could they take in such circumstance. The digital audio recording served as a storage facility where the recorded data were saved in

smart phones and later transcribed. Also, the field notes were used to document transcripts of semi-structured interviews and metadata of participants including places and time of interviews. Upon completion of the research, the researchers met with the participants for the harmonization of relevant data and to discard errors. During the period, five meetings were held in subgroups of 20 participants. The data were extracted from the corpora, collated and transcribed. The data were then coded based on the thematic considerations for a qualitative analysis. The exemplars in the thematic categorization and discussion represent the emotive language individuation in stance taking on cheating husbands by their wives indicating where the findings interface with previous knowledge on the subject.

4. Results and discussion

The coding of the analysis based on participants' dissimilar positions on promiscuous husbands derived from interactions among married women and responses from the semi-structured interviews. Based on this, the analysis is thematically coded and categorized into religious, punitive, revengeful, sociobiological, reconciliatory and legal stances to account for the different positions of the participants. Based on the themes, the exchanges are labelled A–F while 1, 2, 3 and so on, are used as tags for the married women who participated in the discourse. The quoted opinions derived from the interviews are meant to complement and deepen comprehension of the interactions. The themes were chosen and coded after the data were collated, reviewed and harmonized. The stances taken by the married women are coded in different emotive cues as discussed below.

4.1. Stance based religious beliefs

Nigerians are known to be religious people which often show in their discourse and conceptualization of religious and secular events. According to Uwen^[43], Nigerian English usage in several domains of discourse contain semantic modifications purposively to express religiosity and communicate the religious consciousness of interlocutors. On this basis, some married women in the discourse on cheating husbands were observed to have instantiated their stance to align with their religious affiliations and beliefs. The religious indoctrinations are on three legally recognized and contracted marriages in Nigeria: Islamic, Christian and Customary marriages. It is argued that in a Muslim marriage, the man is entitled to four wives and above while Christian marriage is monogamous, it is the union between one man and one woman to the exclusion of others till death do them part and that customary marriage is potentially polygamous and the man is allowed as many wives as he desires. When this happens, the woman is expected to condone all the emotional, psychological and health hazards inherent in polygamy.

This clarification is nuanced in the participants' stance as captured in the Excerpt A below:

A1: Husbands cheat a lot these days. We appear helpless.

A1: Tradition permits them to be polygamous. My husband can marry as many wives as he wants but he should just spare my heart.

A2: Islamic religion permits him to marry more maybe that's why he is cheating on me.

A3: God forbids him to cheat.

The above emotional exchanges collectively instantiate the religious beliefs of the participants. One of the participants who was a female Christian married for five years argued that "although the *Holy bible* forbids infidelity from either spouse, but I had once caught my husband with his side chick cheating on me in a hotel. It was the worst moment but the *Holy bible* says we should forgive. I'll keep praying for him to change". The side chicks in Nigerian context is a segment of young women who engage in transactional sex with married

men for various rewards which may be in kind or monetary terms. Another married woman who is also a Muslim affirmed her religious beliefs this way: “in my ten-year marriage, I am sure my husband cheats irregularly. I am not bothered because our religion allows him to even marry more wives”. A woman married within the customary laws argued that “it is customary that men could cheat. In our tradition, it is a near taboo for a married woman to be caught cheating. Why kill myself for my cheating husband who is covered by these discriminatory sociocultural beliefs?” This belief established Nigeria’s celebration of patriarchal values and practices that superior the male. Fisher^[44], and Wroblewska-Skrzek^[45] aver that many other traditional societies, the concept of adultery and the moral evaluation is socioculturally conditioned to favor the married man, and such cultures also create the framework to express them. The women in this subordinated situation, are made to bear the emotional pains expressed in emotive language within the context of imbalanced religious beliefs and sociocultural precepts. Such patriarchal hegemonic tendencies that undermine the concerns of women are being gradually eroded by the increasing global clamor for gender equality and unbiased cultural practices that protect the rights of women.

4.2. Stance on imposition of punitive measures

Married women were also observed to maintain punitive stance where they have caught, or in the anticipation of catching their husbands in adulterous scenes. On punitive actions, Herrmann et al.^[46] argue that punitive reactions are often perceived to be pervasive among individuals, and human beings often exhibit strong desire to punish for justice to show some sort of deterrence. Rand et al.^[47] recall that this category of punishment tends to free the mind and stabilize the emotions of the betrayed. In the context of the study, some married women who once caught their husbands cheating, opted different punitive strategies as the appraisal pattern in calming their emotions.

This is captured in Excerpt B below:

B1: What do you suggest is best I could to stop my husband from cheating on me?

B2: Desert the home, he won’t see you for a long time! I did that and mine got crazy looking for me.

B2: In my case, I’ll be acting strangely. I’ll give him a silent treatment.

B3: I won’t give him food then.

B4: He must buy me an expensive gift to remind him of his adulterous behavior.

B5: I starved him of sex.

The responses above were emotionally induced and collectively maintain a punitive stance. When also asked, a middle-aged woman who reported to have been married for 15 years took her stance this way: “I once caught my husband red handed. I was boiling inside me but I had to control my emotion. I decided to wait for him at home where I’ll deny him marital comfort for him to learn in a hard way”. Another woman aged 45 and married for 10 years admitted that: “yes, my husband cheats, it’s a very disgusting act. It’s so painful and not good to remember. I once caught him, but I didn’t fight. I only packed a few of my belongings, abandoned our two children for him and ran to stay with my parents. He came begging for so long before I returned home”. Another 40-year-old woman whose marriage is eight years old adopted the punitive stance this way: “I caught him once, unable to match him physically, I simply withdrew my sexual services. I know he loves me, so I starved him of sex which I knew he painfully missed”. On sex denial as a punitive option, Ojoye^[48] argues that many women often adopt the option of denying their husbands sex as punishment. Katehakis^[49] also emphasizes that withholding sex as a punitive stance sets appropriate boundaries and shows how deeply pained the betrayed is. However, adopting punitive strategy as an appraisal pattern in resolving extramarital conflicts has been adjudged to be dangerous. Nikiforakis^[50], Adeyemo and Bamidele^[51], and Cleck and Pearson^[52] have

cautioned that punitive responses to infidelity is harmful to marital relationships and could cause family breakdown. As unpleasant as the outcomes may appear, married women who adopt the punitive stance do so for emotional reasons to substantiate the pains they bear in such circumstances. They also derive some sort of justice and emotional satisfaction if their cheating husbands were punished in one way or the other.

4.3. The choice of revenge for a balanced action

Revenge takes many dimensions in justifying the emotions of the offended. Those who revenge do often consider the nature and gravity of the offence and strategy and action for justice that could lead to emotional liberation. In marital circles, Loggins^[53] contends that revenge in cheating in romantic relationships occurs where one partner tries to get back at another partner, specifically as a reaction to the other partner's infidelity. Gray et al.^[54], and Pereira and van Prooijen^[55] reveal that prior to revenge of this nature, there must be some emotional feelings of injustice arising from cheating experience that leads to emotionally associated anger that calls for retaliation. Some participants in this study agreed that they could adopt revenge as an appraisal pattern and stance in the event that their husbands are caught cheating.

See Excerpt C below:

C1: It's difficult to deal with cheating husbands.

C1: Not really! I don't mind having sex with another man to show him how painful it is, then I will be forced to prove to him that I am also admired by other men.

C2: Men do not have the exclusive right to cheat, I can do that too.

C3: I'll cheat to appease my emotions.

Cheating, as the above set of participants upheld, is a traditionally common reason for married couples to engage in revengeful marital relationships outside marriage. Elaborating on this stance, a 28 years old woman who was married for three years reported that: "I once had sex with my ex-boyfriend as soon as I caught my husband cheating. Since he couldn't respect our young marriage, I remembered I was also admired. I did it to free my mind from engaging in a more dangerous evil". Revengeful sexual relationship in this description makes one emotionally empowered, self-liberated and construes a psychological healing for the illicit action of a spouse. This instantiation, according to Sackelford et al.^[56], and Clemente and Espinosa^[57] shows that revenge is more emotional than rational, and people who often adopt this appraisal pattern do not usually anticipate the consequences. It is on the basis of the consequences that it is cautions that, in engaging in revengeful sex, the offended should consider the cultural, religious, social and moral implications. By this caution, women are rather advised to consider how the level of anger correlates with the emotional reaction, the cost of the action for both partners, and the external justice the betrayed may have to face after the revengeful sex.

4.4. Sociobiological induced stance

Another identified stance maintained by married women is the belief that the phenomenon is an uncontrollable sociobiological problem. This position suggests that social and biological genetic connections prove that men are naturally promiscuous and the married ones among them will continue to cheat on their wives. McNulty and Widman^[58], and Uwen^[59] corroborate the claim that cheating habit of men is rather a sociobiological, hereditary, genetic issue and men have the ability to sustain erection. Viegas^[60] also claims that the genetic urge for sex is doubled in the offspring, stressing that sons of promiscuous fathers are two times more likely to cheat than others. Nordqvist^[61] associates such urge with men who have certain variant of Dopamine Receptor D4 that controls neural signals that modulates behavior (DRD4 gene). Men with this gene are more likely to have and maintain a history of uncommitted sex and infidelity. It is on this basis Dawkins^[62]

concludes that a male can never get enough copulations with as many females as possible, and could desire more. The common emotion among married women who adopt this appraisal pattern is that they feel less worried where their husbands engage in extramarital sexual relationships.

Participants' stance that suggests cheating men is a genetic and sociological issue were captured in Excerpt D.

D1: I know my husband cheating habit seems natural, but I can't kill myself.

D2: Cheating is in hubby's DNA, I am told also that the father cheated on his mother.

D3: That's not strange. It appears my husband won't stop cheating.

D4: I am just getting used to the cheating lifestyle of my husband.

Also, a 43-year-old woman who has been married for 20 years stated that: "men have the burning urge for extramarital sex. This is the reason they often want freedom to go out and return late after having sex with their side chicks. My husband was like a prisoner during the Coronavirus where government imposed movement restrictions and enforced the stay-at-home order." There is no doubt that some Nigerian married men like freedom and hate being confined at home to their wives and would usually resist circumstances that could keep them at home. This position captures the disposition of some married men during the restriction of movement and stay-at-home order by the government at the peak of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Uwen and Ushie^[63] claim that husbands were sad and humble because their freedom has been curtailed by government's restriction orders just as their wives were happy, in charge and doing *shakara* because the pandemic has eased the reclamation of their beloved husbands from strange women. Another married woman aged 38 who has been in marriage for 12 years reported that: "cheating is in my husband's blood. He does it especially when I am nursing a baby. I do not think he has any emotional attachment to them anyway. My only worry is in the event of contracting Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), but for extramarital affairs, our tradition even permits him to marry more". As the participant noted, Scott and Buchbinder^[64], and Eisinger et al.^[65] posit that the fear of STDs is a conscious one as such transmittable infections could be reproductively destructive. On emotional attachment, it is observed that outside marital relationships, men look, first and foremost, for sex without having any emotional attachment to such sexual partners and men sometimes cheat to measure their reproductive competence. Wilson^[66] also affirmed that the cheating habit of men is often activated by the beliefs across cultures that attach a superior status to patriarchy. The genetically induced position is non-punitive and a less confrontational stance. Married women in this belief system used emotive language to instantiate their appraisal patterns and conceptual knowledge that men are natural cheats and wives should not bother much about the sexual behavior.

4.5. Choice of a reconciliatory approach

Some other married women were of the opinion that it is rather better to take a reconciliatory stance with their cheating husbands to save their marriage than adopt a punitive approach that could destroy their marital relationships. Darley and Pittman^[67] reiterate that reconciliatory approaches to resolving marital conflicts have been adjudged to be more powerful motivators for restoring trust, cooperation and stability of relationships. Also, Carroll and Prickett^[68], and Wenzel et al.^[69] corroborate that non-compensatory reactions offer solutions to broken trust, sustain cordiality and strengthen relationships. In the fieldwork, the researchers also identified a category of married women who felt that the better approach was to reconcile with their cheating husbands rather than act in a way that could bring their marriage to public ridicule.

This segment of participants represented the stance in these expressions in Excerpt E below.

E1: I have caught my husband once but I forgave him to allow peace to reign.

E2: It's better we reconcile than doing anything stupid, I'll forgive him and we move on.

E3: Is there any point choosing any option other than reconciliation?

Expatriating on this resolution, a newly married woman aged 26 presented it rhetorically with peaceful options: "why fight? Can that solve anything? I gave him a good treat after the incidence, sat him down and told him the consequences of his action to the family including the possibility of contracting STDs. I also made him know how painful it was to see him cheat. What else? After all, it is within the tenets of Christianity to forgive". Relating with the participants' opinion, studies show that although some Nigerian spouses engage their partners in physical assault in cheating sites, but it is often counter production in the sustenance of marital relationships. On contracting STDs, Newton and McCabe^[70], and Ogunbanjo^[71] assert that management of STDs by married couple often generates psychological and emotional burden which affects the family. Forgiveness also is a Biblical injunction. It is recorded in the book of Matthew 6: 14–15 that: "for if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly father will also forgive your sins". This position is conceived to be more rewarding in sustaining relationship than punitive measures. Another 47-year-old woman married for 20 years took same stance: "I can do anything to save my marriage. I often take a reconciliatory approach when my husband cheats. It is not because he is right in any sense of it, but just to save us from being stigmatized by neighbors. I do that also for the sake of my children who will suffer in the event of any family crisis". Peaceful family is sacrosanct, partners forgive the offence of infidelity to save and protect the marriage. It is observed that the consequences of loose emotions that could lead to unresolvable conflicts often force partners to reconcile their differences. Reconciliation in family conflict is a better strategy to save marital union and re-establish trust. Generally, the option of reconciliation is often adopted to maintain peace that would enhance the joint upbringing of the children, cooperation and progress, protection of the marriage, and to save the marriage from public ridicule.

4.6. Stance on legal divorce for psychological stability

The final category of married women who showed differentials in their appraisal pattern were those who reported that they would choose the option of legal divorce should their husbands be caught cheating. This stance is connected to the fact that many women have no staminal capacity to contain the emotional and psychological burden associated with cheating spouses. This segment of women opted for legal option to effect the dissolution of their marriages where their husbands become habitual cheats. They chose legal separation for reasons which include their psychological stability.

The emotive language this set of participants used to instantiate their legal position include:

F1: Legal divorce will be my option if he is caught.

F2: I will follow him up legally once I catch him cheating

F3: Why are the courts created?

The divorce option, depending on the grounds for its actualization, is an aspect of human right to liberty, dignity and safety, irrespective of the gender. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights^[72] drafted and adopted in 1948 and the Nigerian constitution^[73] recognize the inherent dignity, equality and inalienable rights of members of the human family. Instantiating this stance, a 40-year married woman, in the exercise of these rights stated thus: "May be my husband cheats, but I pray not to catch him. If I do, I won't stress my emotions, I will sue for divorce in consonance with the relevant laws. I am too schooled and economically independent to suffer psychological trauma in the hands of a man." The participant's opinion corroborates the position that social status and educational background influence illicit behaviors and the corresponding reactions from the betrayed in relationships. Another woman in a 10-year-old marriage, who is also in her forties cautioned this

way: “aside from bringing in STDs which could destroy my life, what about the emotional trauma I have to bear seeing the site of my husband sleeping with another woman? No way! Instead of confronting him which may result in physical harm, I’ll explore the legal provisions to dissolve the marriage so that we both could go our ways.” Umbu^[74] reports that infidelity is one of the grounds for divorce in Nigeria especially where the Court is convinced that the marriage is broken irretrievably as a result of extramarital affairs. It is a fact also that STDs have heavily infected Nigerian urban dwellers caused predominantly by risky sexual behaviors. Mukherjee^[75], and Fawole and Blair^[76] agree that this could destroy marriages and cause couples to often engage in serial physical confrontations before realizing that there are provisions for legal separation. The legal provisions for divorce cut across the three recognized marriages in Nigeria. The practice in Nigeria is that Christian marriages conducted under the marriage act can be dissolved in the high court of any state, customary marriages are dissolved at the customary court, while Islamic marriages could be dissolved in several ways including using the Sharia Court. Uwen^[77] ascertains that the dissolution is effected in patterned linguistic peculiarities that instantiate legal discourse. It is observed that women who deploy the appraisal pattern associated with the divorce stance, are predominantly, and often highly educated, economically independent, outspoken and well connected with the powers that call the shots in the society. They have no time and the associated patience to control and contain emotions resulting from the adulterous actions of their husbands.

5. Conclusion

Drawing on insights from the CAT and ApT, the study has demonstrated how married women appraise husbands’ infidelity in different ways. The paper investigated the dimensions of emotive language used by women to situate their stance on their cheating husbands in Calabar, Southern Nigeria. The domineering positions were in this descending order: religious, reconciliatory, sociobiological, punitive, legal and revengeful. This order shows that a smaller number of women were willing to cheat in return, sue for divorce or punish their cheating husbands, while a larger number was willing to forgive in line with their religious tenets, reconcile or live with the belief that men are naturally bound to cheat. Also, from the emotionally nuanced expressions by the participants, it is evident that the differentials in terms of wives’ reactions towards cheating husbands have no absolute commonality. The differences are significations showing that the verbal actions were informed and influenced beyond individual perceptions of the illicit relationships maintained by their husbands. A particular category of appraisal pattern is therefore unconsciously adopted to construct a stance expressed in emotional linguistic forms arising from different factors. It was observed that the variations in stance taking among the married women were significantly influenced by their family and sociocultural backgrounds, gendered orientations, religious affiliations, and their educational qualification and level of exposure. The other influences were connected with pressure from family and friends, prevention of public ridicule and stigma, personal safety and independence, exhaustion of coping strategies and psychological stability. The factors, relating with other demographic information, stimulated the appraisal patterns of the participants. These resulted in their use of emotive language based on what they saw and heard that are described within the tenets of CAT and ApT.

The study corroborated the global increasing trend of infidelity among couples and the diversified responses and reactions by married women in adulterous discourse. The similarities established the commonality of the trend in Calabar and other urban settings with marked differences in reactions that are influenced by the women’s diverse backgrounds. The patterned verbal actions of the participants showed consideration for the positive and negative consequences which have implications on the individual, family and the society. The study is limited by the individual, sociocultural and ethnoreligious beliefs of the participants which provided restraints to divulging certain information. Also, the social distance and gender difference between the researchers (males) and participants (females) somehow hindered the free elicitation of

unbiased data. However, this does not, in any meaningful extent, have any negative impact on the validity of the study.

The study has further broadened the horizon on researches on sex and sexuality among married men and women to examine the orientations and implications on marital relationships. It has provided insights that could aid couples in making rational decisions and the framework for government and policy makers to regulate couples especially to restrict men's sexual satisfaction to their wives in order to engender societal peace. The government could do this by enacting laws that impose punishments for promiscuous partners engaged in legal marriage. Such laws would not only tame philandering men, they would elongate the lifespan of marriages, instill love, peace and happiness in families who would live for the peace and development of the society. To provide a balanced and logical argument, it is recommended that a similar study be carried out on the category of emotive or any form of language used by men to describe incidences of their cheating wives.

Author contributions

Conceptualization, GOU and GAO; methodology, GOU; software, BAE; validation, GOU, BAE and ENA; formal analysis, GOU; investigation, GAO; resources, GOU; data curation, ENA; writing—original draft preparation, GOU; writing—review and editing, BAE; visualization, GAO; supervision, GOU; project administration, BAE. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

1. Amadi UPN, Amadi FNC. Marital crisis in the Nigerian society: Causes, consequences and management strategies. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 2014; 5(26): 16–27. doi: 10.5901/MJSS.2014.V5N26P133
2. Crosby MA. Communication and conflict in marriage and family happiness: A study of selected married women in Ilorin and Ibadan. *International Journal of Guidance and Counselling* 1985; 3(1–2): 132–139.
3. Tolorunke CA. Causes of marital conflicts amongst couples in Nigeria: Implications for counselling psychologists. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 2014; 140: 21–26. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.04.381
4. Nadir A. Marriage preparation education. *A Journal of Sound Islamic Thoughts* 2003; 1(1): 46–51.
5. Melgosa J. *To Couples (Enjoying a Stable, Lifelong Relationship)*. Editorial Safeliz; 2004.
6. Wood JT. Understanding the woman's communication style: Promoting positive Muslim marital relationship. *A Journal of Sound Islamic Thoughts* 2010; 1(1): 46–51.
7. Waite LJ, Joyner K. Emotional satisfaction and physical pleasure in sexual unions: Time horizons, sexual behaviour, and sexual exclusivity. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 2001; 63(1): 247–264. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-3737.2001.00247.x
8. Blow AJ, Harnett K. Infidelity in committed relationships I: A methodological review. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 2005; 3(2): 183–216. doi: 10.1111/j.1752-0606.2005.tb01555.x
9. Buss DM. *The Evolution of Desire: Strategies of Human Mating*. Basic Books; 2003.
10. Brunk B. Extramarital sex in the Netherlands: Motivations in social and marital contexts. *Alternative Lifestyles* 1980; 3: 11–39.
11. Fife ST, Weeks GR, Stellberg-Filbert J. Facilitating forgiveness in the treatment of infidelity: An interpersonal model. *Journal of Family Therapy* 2013; 35(4): 343–367. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-6427.2011.00561.x
12. Shackelford TK, Buss DM, Bennett K. Forgiveness or breakup: Sex differences in responses to a partner's infidelity. *Cognition and Emotion* 2002; 16(2): 299–307. doi: 10.1080/02699930143000202
13. Nwoye A. *Marriage and Family Counselling*. Fab Anieh Nigeria Limited; 1991.
14. Zare B. Review of studies in infidelity. In: Proceedings of the 2011 3rd international conference on advanced management science (ICAMS 2011); 4–6 November 2011; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
15. Akinkuotu E. Why I forgave my husband when he cheated twice—Ajimobi's wife. Available online: <https://punchng.com/why-i-forgave-my-husband-when-he-cheated-twice-ajimobis-wife/> (accessed on 2 August 2022).

16. Obi H, Aduma OC. An examination of marriage and the constitutional rights of women in Nigeria. *The Nnamdi Azikiwe University Journal of Commercial and Property Law* 2020; 7(1): 131–137.
17. Blumstein P, Schwartz P. *American Couples: Money, Work, Sex*. William Morrow & Co; 1983.
18. Thompson AP. Emotional and sexual components of extramarital relations. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 1984; 46(1): 35–42. doi: 10.2307/351861
19. Moors A. Appraisal theory of emotion. In: Zeigler-Hill V, Shakelford TK (editors). *Encyclopedia of Personality, and Individual Differences*. Springer; 2020. pp. 1–10.
20. Izard CE. Innate and universal facial expressions: Evidence from development and cross-cultural research. *Psychological Bulletin* 1994; 115(2): 288–299. doi: 10.1037/0033-2909.115.2.288
21. Paulmann S, Pell MD. Is there an advantage for recognizing multi-modal emotional stimuli? *Motivation and Emotion* 2011; 35(2): 192–201. doi: 10.1007/s11031-011-9206-0
22. Perlovsky LI. Integrating language and cognition. *IEEE Connections* 2004; 2(2): 8–12.
23. Perlovsky L. Language and cognition. *Neural Networks* 2009; 22(3): 247–257. doi: 10.1016/j.neunet.2009.03.007
24. Zhu L. Language, emotion and metapragmatics: A theory based on typological evidence. *International Journal of Society, Culture and Language* 2016; 4(2): 119–134.
25. Uwen GO. Collocational choices in the discourse activities of select paramilitary agencies. *NDUNODE: Calabar Journal of the Humanities* 2020; 17(1): 132–148.
26. Uwen GO. Every corona is not a virus: A semiotic analysis of coronavirus memetic humour. *The European Journal of Humour Research* 2023; 11(1): 111–142.
27. Uwen GO, Ellah SM. “Plandemic” and “Hunger Virus”: A morpho-pragmatic study of coronavirus related neologisms. *Journal of Language, Linguistics and Literary Studies* 2022; 11(1): 63–73.
28. Ukam EI, Uwen GO. Rhythmic alternation and stress clash: A phonological study of Erei-English speakers. *UNIUYO: Journal of Humanities* 2019; 23(1–2): 33–54.
29. Barrett LF. Solving the emotion paradox: Categorization and the experience of emotion. *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 2006; 10(1): 20–46. doi: 10.1207/s15327957pspr1001_2
30. Barrett LF. Psychological construction: A Darwinian approach to the science of emotion. *Emotion Review* 2013; 5(4): 379–389. doi: 10.1177/1754073913489753
31. Clore GL, Ortony A. Appraisal theories: How cognition shapes affect into emotion. In: Barrett LF, Lewis M, Haviland-Jones JM (editors). *Handbook of Emotions*. The Guilford Press; 2016. pp. 628–642.
32. Lindquist KA. Emotions emerge from more basic psychological ingredients: A modern psychological constructionist model. *Emotion Review* 2013; 5(4): 356–368. doi: 10.1177/1754073913489750
33. Lindquist KA, MacCormack JK, Shablack H. The role of language in emotions: Predictions from psychological constructionism. *Frontiers in Psychology* 2015; 6: 444. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00444
34. Clore GL, Ortony A. Phonological construction in the OCC model of emotion. *Emotion Review* 2013; 5(4): 335–343. doi: 10.1177/1754073913489751
35. Martin JR, Rose D. *Working with Discourse: Meaning beyond the Clause*, 2nd ed. Continuum; 2007.
36. Martin JR, White PRR. *Language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English*. Palgrave Macmillian; 2005.
37. Roseman IJ, Smith CA. Appraisal theory: Overview, assumptions, varieties and controversies. In: Scherer KR, Schorr A, Johnstone T (editors). *Appraisal Processes in Emotion: Theory, Methods and Research*. Oxford University Press; 2001. pp. 3–19.
38. Ortony A, Clore GL, Collins A. *The Cognitive Structure of Emotions*. Cambridge University Press; 1988.
39. White PR. Appraisal. In: Zienkowski J, Ostman J, Verschueren J (editors). *Discursive Pragmatics*. John Benjamins; 2011.
40. Smith CA. Dimensions of appraisal and physiological response in emotion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 1989; 56(3): 339–353. doi: 10.1037//0022-3514.56.3.339
41. Pascual M, Unger L. Appraisal in the research genres: An analysis of grant proposals by argentinean researchers. *Revista Signos* 2010; 43(73): 261–280. doi: 10.4067/S0718-09342010000200004
42. Rosemann IJ. Appraisal in the emotion system: Coherence in strategies for coping. *Emotion Review* 2013; 5(2): 141–149. doi: 10.1177/1754073912469591
43. Uwen GO. Pentecostalism and Nigeria’s English usage: A pragmatic analysis of select expressions. *LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research* 2020; 17(4): 107–127.
44. Fisher H. *Anatomy of Love: A Natural History of Mating, Marriage, and Why We Stray*. W. W. Norton & Company; 2016.
45. Wroblewska-Skrzek J. Infidelity in relation to sex and gender: The perspective of sociobiology versus the perspective of sociology of emotions. *Sexuality & Culture* 2021; 25: 1885–1894. doi: 10.1007/s12119-021-09845-6.
46. Herrmann B, Thoni C, Gachter S. Antisocial punishment across societies. *Science* 2008; 319: 1362–1367. doi: 10.1126/science.1153808

47. Rand DG, Drober A, Ellingsen T, et al. Positive interactions promote public cooperation. *Science* 2009; 325(5945): 1272–1275. doi: 10.1126/science.1177418
48. Ojoye T. Dangers of using sex as punishment. Available online: <https://punchng.com/dangers-of-using-sex-as-punishment/> (accessed on 2 October 2022).
49. Katehakis A. Withholding sex is a form of psychological abuse. Available online: <https://gentlepathmeadows.com/withholding-sex-is-a-form-of-psychological-abuse/> (accessed on 30 September 2022).
50. Nordqvist C. Promiscuity and infidelity could be a genetic trait in some human. Available online: <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/210277#1> (accessed on 2 October 2022).
51. Adeyemo OO, Bamidele I. The menace of domestic violence: Improving the lives of women in Nigeria. *African Journal of Legal Studies* 2016; 9: 177–198. doi: 10.1163/17087384-12340007
52. Cleek MG, Pearson TA. Perceived causes of divorce: An analysis of interrelationships. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 1985; 47(1): 179–189. doi: 10.2307/352080
53. Loggins B. What is revenge cheating? Available online: <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-revenge-cheating-5205010> (accessed on 20 August 2022).
54. Gray HM, Gray K, Wegner DM. Dimensions of mind perception. *Science* 2007; 315: 619–629. doi: 10.1126/science.1134475
55. Pereira A, van Prooijen JW. Why we sometimes punish the innocent: The role of group entitativity in collective punishment. *PLoS One* 2018; 13(5): e0196852. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0196852
56. Shackelford TK, Besser A, Goetz AT. Personality, marital satisfaction, and probability of marital infidelity. *Individual Differences Research* 2008; 6(1): 13–25.
57. Clemente M, Espinosa P. Revenge in couple relationship and their relation to the dark triad. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 2021; 18(14): 54–76.
58. McNulty JK, Widman L. Sexual narcissism and infidelity in early marriage. *Archives of Sex Behavior* 2014; 43(7): 1315–1325. doi: 10.1007/s10508-014-0282-6
59. Uwen, GO. Mbari and uncle Nicodemus: Male representations in the heterosexual discourse among female undergraduates in Nigeria. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 2023. doi: 10.1080/14681994.2023.2258079
60. Viegas J. The playboy gene: Promiscuity can be inherited. Available online: <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna43384659> (accessed on 1 October 2022).
61. Nordqvist C. Promiscuity and infidelity could be a genetic trait in some human. Available online: <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/210277#1> (accessed on 2 October 2022).
62. Dawkins R. *The Selfish Gene* (Polish), 2nd ed. Oxford University Press; 1990.
63. Uwen GO, Ushie GO. “Happy wives” and “sad husbands”: A decrypting analysis of COVID-19 humorous expressions. *European Journal of Humour Research* 2022; 10(1): 147–167.
64. Scott HM, Buchbinder SP. STIs: An unintended consequences of improved sexual health? *The Lancet HIV* 2019; 6(7): e415–e426. doi: 10.1016/S2352-3018(19)30140-7
65. Eisinger RW, Erbeling E, Fauci AS. Refocusing research on sexually transmitted infections. *The Journal of Infectious Diseases* 2020; 222(9): 1432–1434. doi: 10.1093/infdis/jiz442
66. Wilson OE. *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*. Harvard University Press; 2000.
67. Darley JM, Pittman TS. The psychology of compensatory and retributive justice. *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 2003; 7(4): 324–336. doi: 10.1207/S15327957PSPR0704_05
68. Carroll R, Prickett S. *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*. Oxford University Press; 2008.
69. Wenzel M, Okimoto TG, Feather NT, Platow MJ. Retributive and restorative justice. *Law and Human Behavior* 2008; 32(5): 375–389. doi: 10.1007/s10979-007-9116-6
70. Newton DC, McCabe MP. The impact of stigma on couples managing a sexually transmitted infection. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 2005; 20(1): 51–63. doi: 10.1080/14681990500058341
71. Ogunbanjo BO. Sexually transmitted diseases in Nigeria: A review of the present situation. *West African Journal of Medicine* 1989; 8(1): 42–49.
72. Preamble to the United Nations declaration on human rights. Available online: https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/socstud/foundation_gr9/blms/9-1-2b.pdf (accessed on 2 October 2022).
73. FGN. *The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, as Amended to 2018*. Federal Government Press; 1999.
74. Umbu EI. Divorce procedures in Nigeria: A petitioner’s guide. Available online: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4181726 (accessed on 2 October 2022).
75. Mukherjee C. On fights and break-ups between couples. *Studies in Microeconomics* 2019; 7(2): 16–27. doi: 10.1177/23210222188212
76. Fawole OA, Blair SL. *Families in Nigeria: Understanding Their Diversity, Adaptability and Strengths*. Emerald Publishing Limited; 2022. pp. 123–138.

77. Uwen GO. Objection overruled: Language dynamics and power relations in courtroom interactions. *Language Matters* 2023; 54(2): 21–41. doi: 10.1080/10228195.2023.2229533