

Appraisal Resources in Nairaland Comments on the Narratives of a Nigerian Rape Survivor

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Abstract

Revelations of rape by survivors/victims have continued to generate heated debates among Nigerians online. This paper explores comments and reactions of Nigerians on two alleged rape narratives posted on Nairaland with regards to how they express specific inter-subjective opinions that project Nigerians' perception of rape. The data, which comprise one hundred and fifty purposively selected comments/reactions of Nairaland community members, were qualitatively analyzed using Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory. The study shows that the sub-systems of attitudinal meanings – affect, judgement and appreciation – are deployed as discursive strategies by netizens to tease out specific sociocultural leanings, such as rape myths, ideal victim/rapist and victim-blaming, which promote rape in Nigeria. It further shows that the comments and reactions serve as a thematic frame through which positive/negative attitudes are inscribed and invoked to reflect the netizens' positions on rape, its victims and perpetrators in Nigeria. The study concludes that the frequent negative evaluations of the behaviors of rape victims and construction of alleged perpetrators as innocent/accused on Nairaland have potential to strengthen rape culture, promote victimhood and hinder effective social justice on the crime in Nigeria.

Keywords: rape narrative, Nairaland comments, affect, judgment, appreciation

Introduction

Rape is a heinous act that is commonplace across the globe. Although there has been an increase in the campaign against it by NGOs and different governmental agencies evident in campaign initiatives such as Stand to End Rape (STER), #metoo, NewsFeed, #SpeakUp, #Arewametoo among others, statistics shows that there are still negative social reactions against victims/survivors of rape across many nations of the world (Fairbairn, 2020). People's reactions against rape as a crime are usually determined by the prevailing culture of the target society that structures their mindset. This means societal attitudes or behaviours towards gender and sexuality that normalize sexual violence, are constructed and reproduced in society through modelling and social learning (Stubbs-Richardson et al., 2018). As Fairstein (1995, p. 13) avers, "rape remains the only crime in which the victims, most often women, are stigmatized for their participation in an act committed *against their being* [emphasis mine] by forcible compulsion." Often times, instead of the perpetrators facing the consequences of their crime, the victims are the ones ostracized and punished by their society. "Culture indeed impacts gender relations and the revelation of rape cases in Nigeria like other African nations" (Kolawole & Obilade 2014, p. 146). In spite of its severe and devastating impact, victims/survivors of rape receive all kinds of attitudinal responses, often times negative, from members of the society more than the perpetrators. This has made them to prefer to keep the occurrence a secret resulting in a 'culture of silence.' The demographic group largely vulnerable to rape are the female gender, regardless

of their age (Koss & Harvey, 1991; Kolawole & Obilade 2014); and their position in many African societies does not really encourage effective defense of their fundamental human rights. In Nigeria, traditions and cultures put the female gender in the social periphery and as such impede their active involvement in vital issues that are central to their development and growth. Though the narrative is changing, as some women (rape victims) are bold enough to bring the rape crime committed against them to the front burner of discourse (Adegbeye, 2020; Kolawole & Obilade, 2014), there seem to still be so many societal issues that serve as roadblocks to these victims thereby, muting their voices.

In Nigeria, in spite of victims' efforts to break the culture of silence and publicly reveal the perpetrators, especially with the help of social media, victims of rape are on many occasions stigmatized, blamed, victimized and ostracized by their own people. Sometimes, their parents, because rape is seen as a disgrace to the victims and not the perpetrators. These negative reactions put victims in a dilemma and hinder them from seeking appropriate social support and justice. Usually, the fear of the impending assaults they might likely receive from the people who should empathize with them cripple many of these victims rendering them helpless. This is reiterated by Adegbeye (2020, p. 4)

It is excruciatingly unrewarding for most of us (rape survivors), to raise our voices against the crushing weight of Nigeria's culture of misogyny. This is because the more abuse a woman is able to meekly accept, the more virtue she is accorded by the people around her. And those who speak out against abuse are put back in their place.

Adegbeye is a rape survivor and she made the above assertion in her interview with 'The New York Times' (2020) in response to her post on her social media page in 2018 that she was raped. Expression of attitudinal reactions attendant of the revelations of rape by victims serves as one important factor responsible for its under reportage (Ashiru & Orifowomo, 2015; Fabmumng, 2017) and the prevalence of victim blaming in Nigeria. Victim blaming beliefs continue to be perpetrated today because of unusual subscription of the general populace to rape myths. Rape myths, according to Burt (1980, p. 217), are "prejudicial, stereotyped or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists that create a climate hostile to rape victims." They include, believing that a woman was asking to be raped or should have expected to be attacked because of her sexual history, alcohol consumption, actions, or because of how she was dressed. This results in shifting blame from the perpetrator to the victim (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010) and so the perpetrators continue to move freely waxing strong in their heinous deeds. This attitude has held the victims down for so long causing them to suffer in silence in order to maintain the status quo. Even when they decided to damn the consequences, volunteered to tell their story and reveal the identity of the perpetrators, people usually tend to disbelieve or doubt their stories. Often times they request for concrete evidence from the victim/survivors to support their claims before their stories could be believed. This usually leads to a phenomenon known as "secondary victimization" or "re-victimization of victims" (Ahrens, 2006, p. 264). These two phenomena describe the feelings of rape survivors when they are exposed to victim-blaming behaviors or attitudes, holding them responsible for the assault, doubting the veracity

of their stories, or minimizing the seriousness of the crime committed against them (Hayes & Abbot, 2016).

All these negative reactions from the societies and constituted authorities have over the years further traumatized rape survivors as they serve a silencing function. The negative social reactions, according to Ahrens (2006, p. 262), “such as being blamed, being denied help, or being told to stop talking about the assault may effectively quash rape survivors’ voices, rendering them silent and powerless.”

Many studies have been carried out on the matter of rape across different climes investigating different factors responsible for its prevalence in the society, (Kolawole & Obilade, 2014); victimhood (Katz & Bowen, 2015; Shen, 2011); myths about rape (O’ Hara, 2012; Thacker, 2017) and deconstruction of rape culture (Cahill, 2001; Mardorossian, 2014) using sociological and psychological perspectives. There is paucity of studies on the discursive significance of the use of appraisal resources in expressing intersubjective positionings about rape in online people’s comments in Nigeria using a linguistic perspective. Thus, this study examines how appraisal resources are used as discursive strategies in people’s comments on a rape survivor’s narratives – OluTimehin Adegbeye posted on Nairaland by members of the community to negotiate meanings and project specific intersubjective positionings on the issue of rape in Nigeria. Using the comments on the two posts as a thematic frame, the study explores people/societal perceptions of rape, its victims and perpetrators in Nigeria.

Nairaland Comments: Background and Context

Nairaland is one of the vibrant digital communities in Nigeria whereby interlocutors post topics on different issues that are germane to them as a state and people, make comments and express (inter)subjective positionings about those topics. It ranks 6th position among the websites most viewed in Nigeria in 2017 (alexa.com). Created in 2005 by a Nigerian Internet entrepreneur, Seun Osewa, Nairaland has been credited as the most popular and visited Nigerian online community and discussion portal by Nigerians (Chiluwa, 2010; Taiwo, 2016). It is an online community and public space that serves as a meeting place for Nigerians at home and in the Diaspora, who constantly follow-up on the events in Nigeria and participate in political debates about the country (Chiluwa & Odebunmi, 2016). It is a home where the Nigerian youth mobilise support, create awareness and inform the public about different socio-political occurrences in the country. According to Ajayi and Bamgbose (2019, p. 67), “the platform has gained much readership, especially among the youth, because it readily serves as a veritable source of job information for the teeming unemployed Nigerian youths.” One of the peculiar features of Nairaland is that most members of the community use anonymity/ pseudonyms. This gives them ample opportunities to fearlessly air their views about burning national issues without any fear of arrest or intimidation, (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010). Thus, netizens can easily participate in civic engagements by sharing similar and different views about an issue. Another important feature is that the online forum affords Nigerians myriads of opportunities to engage in topical issues of national interests using multiple languages. Though the English language seems to be the lingua franca on the platform, participants often inject other languages such as French, Arabic and some other indigenous languages especially Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa and Pidgin.

One of those issues is rape which is now rampant in Nigeria and many other nations of the world (see Kolawole & Obilade, 2014). The community members have brought the issue of rape to the front burner of discourse on the platform following the incredible revelations of the crime in recent times. Therefore, on May 6, 2018, Racylucy (a pseudonym) posted on Nairaland, the screenshot of Adegbeye's revelation of her alleged sexual abuse on her social media page for the online community members to comment on and react to. Similarly, goldcoinhub (another pseudonym) on July 20, 2019 put up a follow-up post on Nairaland from the survivor's page



to remind Nigerians of the alleged rape crime committed against her by the supposed perpetrator. These two posts are an example of what Iyeangar (1990) refers to as episodic frame as they reflect the isolated experience of an individual. However, the comments and reactions of the netizens place the incidents within a broader context (thematic frame) connecting rape to a larger systemic problem (Brossoi, Roberto, & Barrow, 2012). Thus, the two posts generated heated arguments among members of Nairaland community revealing Nigerians' opinions about rape. Adegbeye's narratives seemed to have caught the attention of the netizens perhaps, because of her incessant assertion of the traumatic experience across different online platforms (saharareporters.com; ripplesnigeria.com) and her determination to stand against repressive culture and reveal the identity of the alleged perpetrators.

Studies on Nairaland posts and comments have focused mainly on impoliteness strategies deployed by interactants on socio-political and ethno-religious issues (Ajiboye & Abioye, 2019; Oyebade, 2018; Taiwo, 2014), terrorist/ritual discourse (Chiluwa & Odebunmi, 2016; Akinwande, 2019) and political discourse (Taiwo, Akinwotu & Kpolugbo, 2021). Literature, however, shows that much work has not been done on Nairaland comments on rape crime in Nigeria. Consequently, this study examines the reactions and comments of the netizens to Racylucy and goldcoinhub's posts of Adegbeye's rape narratives on Nairaland using the linguistic framework of Martin and White's (2005) appraisal theory. The study explores how netizens through their comments and reactions to the posts, express inter-subjective opinions

of affect, judgement and appreciation and also create important narratives that reveal ideological meanings about rape culture in Nigeria. Thus, the study is significant as the comments and reactions of the netizens to the posts place the survivor's experience (an episodic frame) within a thematic frame (Iyengar 1990), to unveil specific socio-cultural values responsible for the perpetration of the heinous act in Nigeria.

Method and Theory

The comments on/ reactions of Nairaland community members to the post of two narratives of the alleged rape by Ms Adegbeye serve as the database for this study. The reason is that she was the only survivor among the few others contacted that enthusiastically granted us permission via email to use her rape narratives for research. Her narratives might have been reposted on Nairaland for comments and reactions because of her insistence on the revelations of her rape experience across different media both at home and abroad. They were gathered from the Nairaland archive (www.nairaland.com) between August 2021 and March 2022. The forum was chosen because it has a wide coverage across the country and information on topical issues discussed on it can be easily accessed long after they have been suspended. The data were purposively sampled to project positive and negative instantiations of appraisal resources of affect, judgement and appreciation, Nairaland users deploy in their comments to represent: (i) rape myths; (ii) ideal victim; (iv) ideal rapist and (iv) instantiations of victim-blaming. Thus, 5 excerpts each were selected for each of these themes and analysed qualitatively to properly tease out different attitudinal meanings Nigerians have about rape.

The Appraisal Theory of Martin and White's (2005) consists of three broad systems – attitude, engagement and graduation – through which interpersonal meanings in Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics is further developed to study how stance, opinion and attitude of language users are realized in discourses. Martin and White (2005, p. 1) posit that, "appraisal is concerned with how writers/speakers approve and disapprove, enthuse and abhor, applaud and criticise, and with how they position their readers/listeners to do likewise." "Attitude, which is concerned with feelings, emotional reaction, judgement of behaviours and evaluation of things, takes the central position among the three broad systems. Engagement deals with sourcing attitudes and the play of voices around opinions in discourse while graduation attends to grading phenomena whereby feelings are amplified and categories blurred (Martin & White, 2007, p. 35)". Each of the three broad systems has its own subsystems through which attitudinal meanings are expressed by interactants in discourse. The system of attitude has three subsystems which include: affect, judgement and appreciation. Engagement comprises dialogic expansion and contraction while graduation, which deals with the gradability of the degree of evaluation comprises the sub-categories of force and focus. All these three systems make up the appraisal theory in a language.

This present study, however, focuses on the appraisal system of attitude which is central to the theory. The system succinctly reveals the goal of the paper in alignment with Martin's (1995, p. 28) definition of appraisal when he posits that "appraisal is a system of semantic resources for reacting emotionally (affect), judging morally (judgement) and evaluating aesthetically (appreciation) as well as resources for amplifying and engaging with these evaluations." The system of affect focuses on the appraiser which is realised in three categories:

Happiness, Security and Satisfaction while judgement focuses on other individuals with whom the appraiser shares his/her social environment. It borders on evaluating human behavior with reference to a set of institutionalised norms which is realised in two major categories: Social Esteem and Social Sanction. While social esteem can be divided into three subcategories: *normality* (how unusual someone is?; how customary their behaviour is?), *capacity* (how capable someone is?) and *tenacity* (how resolute someone is?; how dependable someone is?; how well they are disposed emotionally?); social sanction borders on the evaluations of human behavior based on certain set of rules or regulations which are more or less explicitly codified by the culture. Thus, social sanction borders on questions of legality and morality which are divided into two subcategories: *veracity* (how truthful someone is?) and *propriety* (how ethical someone is?).

Appreciation, on the other hand, focuses on objects in the environment which the appraiser interacts with. This is further divided into: Reaction, Valuation and Composition. Generally, the system of attitude is operationalized by two important parameters vis-à-vis: whether the categories are realised as positive/negative instantiations and whether they are realised in terms of a disposition/behaviour (Oyebode & Adegaju, 2017). While scholars have adopted the theory to political/terrorist discourse (Ademilokun, 2016; Chilwa & Ifukor, 2015; Haq, Idrayani & Soemantri, 2020), there is paucity of literature on appraisal studies of rape/gender discourse. This study, therefore, focuses on the attitude component of the appraisal theory in order to highlight the attitudes of Nigerians to rape, victims and perpetrators. It investigates how the sub-systems of affect, judgement and appreciation are “inscribed and invoked” (Hart, 2014, p. 47) in the Nairaland comments as evaluative phenomena to project Nigerians’ perception to rape.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The analysis indicates that Nairaland netizens post comments and reactions to rape narratives that show attitudinal choices of affect, judgement and appreciation of things. Through these choices they create important narratives in their comments that place rape in a broader context and project socio-cultural viewpoints such as, rape myths, myths of ideal victim, ideal rapist, victim-blaming, and conspiracy of silence which are perceived to be responsible for the perpetuation of the crime in Nigeria. Each of these are the different categories under which the subsystems of attitudinal meanings are examined. We have decided to only copy the links to the two posts, <https://www.nairaland.com/4489320/olutimehin-adegbeye-pretty-mike-raped>, and <https://www.nairaland.com/5312298/olutimehin-adegbeye-aindre-blaze-bbnaija>.

This reason is that the images of the alleged perpetrator are shown in the posts and we would not want to display that here in this paper since our concern mainly is about the comments of the Nairaland users. Therefore, only the comments are analysed here.

1. Evaluation of rape myths in the comments

Rape myths are one of the issues hampering proper management of rape cases in Nigeria and other nations of the world. The appraisal choices deployed by Nairaland members in their reactions to the rape narratives vividly depict a high level of rape myths in Nigeria. This is exemplified in Excerpts (1) – (5).

(1)
I hope she is not lying (a). Some bitter women (b) would go to any length to slander a young man (c) who doesn't love (d) them back.

(2)
Example 1:
Boy and girl had the hots (a) for each other
Boy and girl had consensual sex (b)
Boy doesn't want a relationship (c) with girl 'cos she's crazy or something (d)
Girl hates (e) boy
Girl waits for years then screams rape (f).
Come on! (g) (48 Likes 3 Shares, Brugo (m), On May 06, 2018).

The commentator, Brugo, in Excerpts (1) and (2) deploys the attitudinal resources of affect and judgement to project inter-subjective opinion about rape myths in Nigeria. One of the issues that underlies rape myths is 'doubt'. It is difficult for some people to believe some revelations of rape due to false accusation by some victims (Adegbeye, 2020). Thus, the commentator uses the moral domain of honesty to invoke a negative judgement of veracity to evaluate the behavior of the survivor in the declarative statement, '*I hope she is not lying.*', in Excerpt (1a). This indicates untruthfulness, falsehood and doubt which serve as the premise for Brugo's further comment and reaction in the excerpt. Through the use of affectual system of unhappiness in Excerpt (1b), *bitter women*, a nominal group, he elucidates one of the factors responsible for rape myths in Nigeria as some kind of animosity, "see (1c) and (1d)" above, against one-time lover or someone the supposed victim desires to have erotic love for but who is not interested in her. This could make her take to blackmail and start slandering the personality of the supposed lover. Thus, the commentator uses verbal groups as affectual meanings in Excerpt (2a), *hots* and (2b), *had consensual sex*, respectively to positively inscribe the amorous relationship between lovers and the kind of satisfactions they both enjoyed when there is agreement. He, however, invokes the negative attitude that occurs between them through the use of tenacity and normality respectively, in Excerpt (2c), *doesn't want a relationship* and (2d), *crazy or something*. This, further degenerates to hatred, a negative affectual meaning of unhappiness represented through the use of another verb, *hates*, in Excerpt (2e), which could lead to invoking slanderous stories on the part of the dissatisfied partner – the girl. This is projected in Excerpt (2f), through the use of a declarative statement, '*Girl waits for years then screams rape*'. Excerpt (2f) is used to evaluate the behaviour of some of the victims and invoke negative judgement of veracity. Based on his past experience, the commentator opines that some supposed victims sometimes tell lies to malign some men who refuse to date or continue to date them. This is reiterated in Excerpt (2g), where he uses an exclamatory statement of affect of satisfaction, '*Come on!*' to express his displeasure and negatively invoke dishonesty, insincerity and false accusation on the part of some victims. This position is further supported by 48 other members on the platform as indicated in the comment, *48 likes*. This reflects the number of members of Nairaland who share the same opinion with

the commentator as at the time of the discussion. A similar position of doubt is expressed by notimeisnotime in Excerpt (3).

(3)

Sorry sis **but I ain't buying this** (notimeisnotime(m), On May 06, 2018
4 Likes)

Through the use of contrast '**but I ain't buying this**', in Excerpt (3), the commentator expresses affectual attitude of disbelief and doubt. These negative reactions put the issue of rape in a larger social context and explain why some Nigerians doubt the veracity of its revelation. Excerpts (4) and (5) below present another ideological sentiment responsible for rape myths in Nigeria.

(4)

But where is the **evidence** (a) that he sexually assaulted her? you just don't type this things without **evidence** (b). (10 Likes 1 Share, by Nobody: On **Jul 20, 2019**)

(5)

The worrying thing (a) now is when you talk about **evidence and investigation**, (b) they shut you up and say you support rape, that a woman won't just accuse you.(c) But the fact still remains, we can't just **convict** someone on the basis of **accusations**.(d) (1 Like, by wonder233: 5:08pm On Jul 20, 2019)

In Excerpts (4) and (5), the commentators, Nobody and wonder233, express their reservations and dissatisfaction about the rape matter which border on lack of evidence. Request for concrete evidence from the victim/survivors to support their claims also serves as another factor responsible for perpetuation of rape myths in Nigeria (Ahrens, 2006). Thus, using the interrogative statement '**But where is the evidence that he sexually assaulted her?**' in Excerpt (4a), Nobody negatively evaluates the behavior of the survivor. He uses the social sanction category of judgement, to query the veracity of the claim by emphasizing on 'evidence' (a noun) which could serve as a legal document to defend the truthfulness of the revelation. He further reiterates this position through the use of a declarative statement '***you just don't type this things without evidence***' in Excerpt (4 b) to condemn the survivor's failure to tender concrete evidence to support her claim. Thus, he deploys the subcategory of social action of judgement to negatively invoke the propriety of the survivor's behavior. A similar opinion is expressed in Excerpt (5). The commentator, wonder233, uses a verbal group, '***...worrying thing***', in Excerpt (5a) to express his dissatisfaction, a subcategory of affect, about the attitude of some Nigerians and even the survivors when asked for '**evidence**' before investigating into the crime. He uses the reaction subcategory of appreciation to negatively invoke his appreciation about the revelation of rape in Excerpt (5d) '**...we can't just convict someone on the basis of accusations.**' This shows that before an alleged rapist could be convicted, the presentation of concrete evidence plays an important role. This is evident in the choice of words, a verb, '**convict**' and a noun, '**accusations**' used respectively. The number of

likes **'10 likes and 1 like'** in Excerpts (4) and (5) respectively, validates the fact that the request for concrete evidence before believing and positively responding to rape matter is one of the factors that perpetuates rape myths in Nigeria. And unfortunately, often times, it is somehow a herculean task for survivors to supply the evidence as it concerns their private parts.

2. Evaluation of an ideal victim

Another major issue that perpetuates the culture of rape in Nigeria is the evaluation of ideal victim as depicted in Excerpts (6) – (10).

(6)

How can a nigga rape this **ugly girl** let alone 2 niggas? (29 Likes 1 Share, MrFuckallday: 6:39am On May 06, 2018).

The commentator, MrFuckallday, in Excerpt 6 deploys interrogative statement, **'How can a nigga rape this ugly girl let alone 2 niggas?'**, to negatively evaluate the physical appearance of the survivor. Using the normality subcategory of social esteem judgement, MrFukallday invokes that the survivor is not beautiful. Through the use of the nominal group, **'ugly girl'**, he invokes the frame of an ideal victim. The negative evaluation of the person of the survivor as being ugly subtly portrays the purported general belief in the society of an ideal victim of rape. This evaluation puts the issue of rape in a larger social context to reveal the mental image some Nigerians have about who an ideal rape victim is as indicated in the number of likes **'29 Likes'** in the comment. Considering the adjective **'ugly'** used in the excerpt, it is suggestive that MrFuckallday, and some Nigerians believe that an ideal rape victim should be a beautiful lady. This opinion is further corroborated by another Nairaland commentator, TrollKiller, in Excerpt (7).

(7)

Who the hell would rape this **matchstick**? (96 Likes 4 Shares, TrollKiller (m): 2:51pm, On Jul 20, 2019)

TrollKiller expresses a similar opinion about who an ideal rape victim should be by negatively evaluating the physical appearance of the victim. Like MrFuckallday in Excerpt (6), TroillKiller deploys an interrogative statement to assess and disqualifies the victim as ideal. Using the noun **'matchstick'**, which is a negative metaphor to represent a slim person as depicted in the image of the victim on the page, TrollKiller negatively evaluates the person of the victim and disqualifies her as abnormal for the societal image of an ideal victim. The noun **'matchstick'** invokes abnormality which is a negative judgement of the victim. With **'96 Likes'**, TroillKiller reveals that some Nigerians have a particular mental frame for an ideal rape victim. Therefore, any victim who does not fit into the frame may not receive the required empathy/social justice sought for.

However, other comments on the platform show a dissenting opinion about the frame of ideal victims. As a rebuttal, some Nairaland commentators expressed their dissatisfaction about MrFuckallday and TrollKiller's positions. Excerpts (8) – (10) vividly illustrate this.

(8)

Mad women are also getting raped so what your point? (8 Likes 5 Shares, Nobody: 4:56pm On Jul 20, 2019

(9)

So it's permissible to rape girls who aren't "matchsticks"
(Chilishbanjino(m): 5:08pm On Jul 2

(10)

Idiot, even little children and mentally deranged women get raped. (1 Like, Kindredspirit(m): 5:28pm On Jul 20, 2019

In Excerpts (8) and (10), Nobody and Kindredspirit negatively evaluate the position of MrFuckallday and TrollKiller about the ideal victim by giving the categories of other female folks that have fallen victim of rape who are: ‘**Mad women**’, ‘**little children**’ and ‘**mentally deranged women**’. The presentation of these categories of women folk as victims by the commentators invokes a negative judgement of social sanction of propriety of the behavior of rapists and evinces perpetuation of rape culture in Nigeria. Although the dissenting opinion seems unpopular among the Nairaland commentators, it gives us insights into the macrostructure of rape in the society and deconstructs the notion of an ideal victim as anybody (especially, female folk) could be a victim regardless of their social status (Chiazor et al. 2016). This notion is further reiterated in Excerpt (9) where Chilishbanjino uses a rhetorical question, So it's permissible to rape girls who aren't "matchsticks" to answer TrollKiller and negatively judge his opinion as unacceptable. The interrogative statement, ‘so it's permissible to rape girls who aren't matchsticks’ is deployed to evaluate the statement, ‘Who the hell would rape this matchstick?’ and invokes that it is morally unacceptable to rape any lady whether a matchstick or not. This position also touches on the social sanction subcategory of judgement. Thus, the subjective opinion shows that there are few people who believe the revelation of rape, take it as an unacceptable behavior regardless of the personality of the victim and are ready to castigate perpetrators. This is depicted in Excerpt (10) when Kindredspirit uses an abusive noun ‘**idiot**’ to castigate TrollKiller for his evaluation of an ideal victim.

3. Evaluation of an ‘ideal’ rapist

The notion of an ‘ideal’ rapist is another factor that has strengthened the perpetuation of rape culture in Nigeria. Some Nigerians purportedly believe that there is a particular category of people who engage in rape and as a result find it difficult to believe rape revelation when the alleged perpetrator does not fall within the set frame. This is exemplified in Excerpts (11) – (15).

(11)

what disrepute? (a) Why would she lie? Do both have reputable behavior?
(b) One of them drags girls with rope on their neck about. (c) ... There are

loads of stupid guys (d) out there... (162 Likes 15 Shares, Nobody: 3:34am On May 06, 2018).

(12)

hmm...rape is bad & must not be condoned... for instance, why would a lady go out with **a guy that lives a rough life?** (a) she knows **he smokes, drinks, talks anyhow, dresses childishly, always partying & lives life on the fast lane (b)... the only rape stories I believe are the ones where the rapist goes to the girl's place (c) or she is waylaid/set up (d).** & of course, **those beast in take perverse pleasure in raping underaged kids (e)**...(ivandragon: 7:05am On May 06, 2018)

Nobody and iyandragon, the commentators in Excerpts (11) and (12) express intersubjective opinions about an ideal rapist. Using an interrogative statement ‘what disrepute?’ in Excerpt (11a) as a response to another commentator’s opinion of the positive reputation of the alleged perpetrators, Nobody contests such positive opinion. Through the use of another interrogative statement ‘**Do both have reputable behavior?**’ in Excerpt (11b), he inscribes the social esteem subcategory of judgement to negatively evaluate the behavior of the two alleged rapists which invokes abnormality. Nobody evaluates the general behavior of the alleged rapists from the shared knowledge in the society as abnormal and unacceptable. Therefore, regardless of their affluence and social status, he will classify them as rapists because to him they do not measure up to the acceptable standard of a noble person. This contradicts the frame of an ideal rapist some people conjure in their minds as exemplified in Excerpt (12).

The commentator, iyandragon, in Excerpt (12) presents the categories of people who fit into the frame of an ideal rapist in (12a) and (12b). These are ‘**a guy that lives a rough life**’, ‘**smokes**’, ‘**drinks**’, ‘**talks anyhow**’, ‘**dresses childishly**’ ‘**always partying**’ and ‘**lives on the fast lane**’. Through the use of verbal groups, iyandragon morally judges the behaviours of who a rapist is and negatively invokes the behavioural attributes an ideal rapist should have before a person could pass as a rapist. He further strengthens his argument by asserting the instances of rape stories he would believe in Excerpt “(12c), (12d) and (12e)” respectively. This gives us more insights into the complexities of rape culture in Nigeria and further reiterates our submission in “Section 3.2” that anybody could be a victim of rape as the verbal group, ‘**raping underaged kids**’, in Excerpt (12e) suggests. The categories of an ideal rapist here run contrary to what is evinced in Excerpt (11) and this means it is not only rogues, hoodlums, louts, armed robbers, among others that engage in rape. There are supposedly people of noble characters, such as pastors, fathers, philanthropists, lecturers, rich people etc., who are also culprits. Thus, there seems not to be any frame of an ideal rapist.

The position that anybody is culpable of perpetrating rape is affirmed by some commentators in Excerpts (13) – (15).

(13)

I remember when i was raped by a **lady**, mehn that nunu was really something else. Story for another day (by MarieSucre(f): 8:34am On May 06)

(14)

A male friend of mine told me he was **raped by their maids (a)** at home cos his parents were barely at home and I was shocked too that guys can be raped too. Wonders and he was 5 years old wen it started. **Sexually frustrated maids (b)**..... (by Nobody: 9:54am On May 06, 2018)

(15)

How many women do you know of that openly admit that there are **female predators** among us? (a) How many NGO's, Hashtag campaigns have you seen calling for **Female Sexual predators to be named, shamed & locked away for the rest of their natural lives?** (b) (by filani(m): 10:02am On May 06, 2018)

The Nairaland commentators, MarieSucre, Nobody and filani, in Excerpts (13), (14) and (15) respectively, express their dissatisfaction about the purported general belief that only male folks are rapists. Therefore, using the satisfaction subsystem of affect through the use of nominal groups, 'a lady', 'their maids', 'Sexually frustrated maids', 'female predators' and 'Female Sexual predators', they negatively invoke that the female folks are also culprits of rape crime. Unfortunately, such cases are usually not brought to the front burner of discourse when discussing rape in Nigeria. This is subtly invoked in Excerpt (15a) and (15b) when Filani uses interrogative statements to negatively evaluate the sincerity of both the women folk who are rapists, different NGO's, and campaign initiatives against rape. With this positioning, the commentators in Excerpts (13), (14) and (15) evaluate the veracity of the ideal rapist and subtly invokes that it is negative. To them, even female folks are culpable.

3. Instantiation of victim-blaming

Another important factor that perpetuates rape culture in Nigeria is victim blaming. Often times the revelation of rape attracts all kinds of negative reactions from members of the society even parents, such that many a times, victims would rather be silent. Such negative attitudinal reactions of blaming are exemplified in Excerpts (16) – (20).

(16)

After how many years? Is she just remembering the incident? (a)
#metoocampaign copy copy....(b) by Lexusgs430, May 6, 2018: 6:42am.)

(17)

See what Busola has caused...(a) **Even Lizards now want to pull down a successful guy**...(b) (3 Likes, by Odinaka00(m): 4:54pm On Jul 20, 2019)

The Nairaland commentators, Lexusgs430 and Odinaka, in Excerpts (16) and (17) express intersubjective positionings about the rape revelation by castigating the survivor. Through the use of interrogative statements '**After how many years? Is she just remembering the**

incident?', in Excerpt (16a), Lexus430 delegitimizes the timing of the rape revelation as being too late and therefore invokes a negative propriety subcategory of social action to judge and condemn the survivor's behavior. Reiterating his disapproval of such behavior, he takes to labelling through the use of a nominal group, **'#metoocampaign copy copy'**, in (16b) to negatively invoke the veracity of the motif of the survivor. The nominal group gives us insight into the activity of the popular movement that is championing the campaign against rape today. The movement which originated from the US has spread across many nations of the world whereby ladies who had at one time been sexually abused were encouraged to speak up. Nigeria is one of the nations that felt the impact of the movement as some ladies trooped to the social media to disclose their past rape ordeals. One of them, **'Busola'**, is mentioned in (17a). Using a declarative statement, **'See what Busola has caused ...'**, Odinaka condemns the survivor and negatively invokes the capacity of her behavior. Like Lexus430, he also, takes to labelling in (17b) through the use of a nominal group, **'Lizards'** to express unhappiness about the way many ladies are claiming to be rape survivors. He therefore, contends the genuineness of some of the revelations and negatively invokes their veracity in (17b) through a declarative statement. As indicated in the second part of the statement, **'to pull down a successful guy'**, in (17b), Odinaka castigates victims and insinuates that some of their revelations are intended to malign some successful men.

Apart from using castigation to instantiate victim blaming and delegitimize their behaviours, other negative reactions meted out to rape victims include blame game, mockery and instantiation of silence. This is exemplified in Excerpts (18) – (20).

(18)

What is a 16 year old girl doing in a club? (by kponkedenge:7:02am On May 06, 2018)

(19)

Sorry exactly what did they rape? (by bejeria101(m): 4:38pm On May)

Kponkedege uses an interrogative statement, **What is a 16 year old girl doing in a club?**, in Excerpt (18) to express his dissatisfaction about the action and behavior of the victim. With the linguistic choices, **'16year old'**, **'doing'** and **'club'** strung together in the statement, he evaluates the behavior of the victim and negatively invokes that it is unethical and unacceptable. The reason is that as a teenager, the moral ethics dictate that she should still be under parental guidance. Therefore, the commentator insinuates that the lady is loose, lacks proper parental guidance and blames her for the abuse. In the same vein, bejeria in Excerpt (19), deploys another interrogative statement, **'Sorry exactly what did they rape?'**, to evaluate aesthetically the part of the body raped and invoke a negative reaction of appreciation. Through the use of the interrogative statement, bejeria objectifies the sexual body part raped. His opinion gives us insights into the insensitivity of some Nigerians at the revelation of rape. Instead of empathizing with the victim, they trivialize the crime and make a mockery of the whole issue. This is discouraging and traumatic as it has been one of the issues that has made many victims to prefer

non-disclosure of the crime. The reason is that such reactions negatively impact them, traumatize them and could lead to re-victimization (Nwabueze & Oduah, 2014).

The instantiation of silence is another issue that perpetuates victim blaming and rape culture in Nigeria. This is exemplified in Excerpt (20).

(20)

Aunty this table you're shaking is full of broken bottles oo (a)

Don't wounjure yourself (b) (by RichDad 1 (m): 6:48am On May 06, 2018)

The commentator, RichDad, through the use of a declarative statement, '**Aunty this table you're shaking is full of broken bottles oo**', in Excerpt (20a), aesthetically evaluates the whole issue and invokes a negative valuation of the authenticity of the rape revelation. The statement, '**this table you're shaking...**', which literally means 'the disclosure of rape experience and identity of the rapist', is a metaphor which is strategically deployed by the commentator to subtly warn the survivor of some negative consequences that may attend her revelation. The statement presupposes that the step being taken by the survivor is not safe and could be dangerous for her considering the social status of the personalities she alleges as her rapists. He therefore, invokes a negative affect of security and safety of the survivor. This is confirmed in the second declarative statement, '**Don't wounjure yourself**' in (20b), which means, 'don't injure yourself' through which he expresses his fear and subtly admonishes the survivor to keep silent about the whole issue. This attitude reveals another important aspect of victim blaming and perpetuation of rape culture in Nigeria. Often times, members of the society, even family members encourage victims to keep quiet about the crime and look away. The reason is that, the personality of the rapist usually poses a threat to the safety and security of the victim. Thus, through the linguistic choices, '**you're shaking**', '**full of broken bottles**', '**wounjure yourself**', Richdad puts the issue of rape in a broader social context and invokes the security problem that its revelation may pose to victims' lives in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This study has examined the comments and reactions of Nigerians to two alleged rape narratives re-posted on Nairaland by members. It explores how other Nairaland members have expressed specific inter-subjective opinions that project Nigerians' perception of rape, its victims, perpetrators and other stakeholders involved. Using the appraisal system of attitude of Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory, the study shows the four major themes such as, rape myths, ideal victim, ideal perpetrator and victim blaming responsible for the perpetuation of rape in Nigeria. The findings reveal that each of these themes is however driven by specific ideological sentiments of doubt, insincerity, false accusation, lack of concrete evidence among others through which Nairaland commentators evoke negative attitudes of dissatisfaction, unbelief, unhappiness, disapproval and insecurity. They also reveal that the commentators make use of the subsystem of judgement more than the two other subsystems, affect and appreciation, to evaluate the behavior of the survivor in her rape revelation. They focus more on the survivor by doubting, abusing, mocking, castigating, and attempting to silence her. Therefore, many of their evaluations are negative as they, often times, query the veracity,

propriety, capacity and normality of the alleged crime and her behaviour in their comments. This gives us insights into the usual reactions attendant of rape revelation in Nigeria and how many Nigerians still find it difficult to believe such stories.

Although many of the commentators focus more on the attitude and behaviours of the survivor and by extension other victims in Nigeria, some focus on the perpetrators, and different NGOs that champion rape campaign in Nigeria. While they evaluate the attitude and behavior of the perpetrators as unethical, immoral and unacceptable; they evaluate the attitude of the NGOs to interrogate other ideological issues that are not usually foregrounded in rape discourse. These are issues of womenfolk as rapists, men as victims and unequal treatment of such cases. Thus, the study demonstrates that the comments and reactions of the Nairaland commentators serve as a mirror which reflects different dynamics of rape discourse in Nigeria. The study concludes that the frequent negative evaluations of the behaviors of rape victims and unusual reservations in evaluating the behavior of the alleged perpetrators on Nairaland have potential to strengthen rape culture, promote victimhood and hinder effective social justice. Further studies should be carried out on the comments and reactions of netizens on the revelations of rape by other survivors on other online platforms in order to compare the findings with the present study. This will provide deeper understanding and give more insights into the social dynamics of rape in Nigeria.

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