

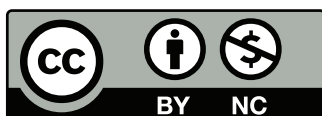
Performative masculinities in Basketmouth's stand-up comedy¹

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Abstract

Stand-up comedy is the performance of culture and identities. The aim of this paper is to explore the performance of gender identity in Nigerian stand-up comedy. Specifically, the analysis focuses on the discourse construction of manliness in the comedy material of Basketmouth, a leading Nigerian stand-up comedian. To reach this goal, a purposive sampling technique has been adopted to narrow down the analysis to a routine in which Basketmouth focuses on gender. My analysis reveals that discourse strategies like quip, self-denigration, repetition, use of the illocutionary act, and veiling constitute the linguistic resources through which Basketmouth appropriates cultural assumptions about being male. The comedian uses his representations of masculinities to portray the realism of gender mapping in a typical African society, rather than the alternative and imaginative idealizations that critics of his comedy would have him perform.

Keywords: gender, Nigerian stand-up comedy, discourse strategies, identity, subversive laughter, cultural critique



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1 Introduction

This paper looks at how men are represented in the humorous narratives of Bright Okpocha (Basketmouth), a leading Nigerian stand-up comedian, and the implications of such representations in contemporary Nigerian society. It focuses on the linguistic markers and strategies that the male comedian uses in instantiating humorous utterances that are replete with sociocultural perspectives on manliness in the Nigerian postcolonial context. Investigating masculinities in postcolonial African contexts like Nigeria is important because of the demands which such nations place on their citizens and which emanate from their sociocultural, economic, and political experiences. In general, such countries are faced with the challenges of high living standards, economic hardships, and high unemployment rates. There is also high migration from rural to urban areas within the countries (or even from Africa to Europe). This socioeconomic context creates a paradox for the emergence of masculine identity. While men are expected to be bread winners in their families, the onus is on women to play the traditional masculine role of providing for and leading the family in instances where a man earns less than his wife or where a man works far away from home. Given this context, the existence of the social and traditional indexes of manliness is being threatened. I do not intend to cover the whole of the sub-Saharan African context in this preliminary study; however, I will draw insights from Nigerian stand-up comedy performances as a basis for my comments on how popular media is being used to construct masculinities in sub-Saharan African countries. I have selected stand-up comedy as the locus of my investigation because of its role in the country's popular culture genres. In Nigeria, stand-up and other forms of humorous skits are fast becoming a highly popular source of entertainment.

My aim is to carry out a linguistic analysis that accounts for the construction of masculinities in Basketmouth's jokes. Previous studies on language and gender have primarily focused on femininity and the ways in which discourse is used in constructing female identities. For instance, Feasey (2008, 1) opines that the term "gender studies" has hitherto been synonymous with women's studies and that literature on the representations of gender in mass media tends to focus on the examination of femininity and the role of women in popular media. Furthermore, Feasey (2008) argues that while such studies provide insights into the depiction of femininity, feminism, and the role of women, they invariably assume that masculinity is understood as fixed, stable, unalterable, and therefore beyond enquiry. However, Feasey (2008) and Sunderland (2002) have shown that masculinity is socially constructed, just as much as femininity, and that its representations can be unpacked from social and discourse contexts. It is in the light of this finding that this study investigates the discourse construction of masculinities in Basketmouth's comedy.

This paper is divided into six parts. In this first section, I have presented the rationale for this study. Section 2 examines the concept of masculinity and its realisation in sub-Saharan African contexts, while Section 3 presents an overview of stand-up comedy. Research methodology is the focus of Section 4. Section 5 presents the findings. In the last part of the paper, I discuss the implications of the findings and present the conclusion.

2 Masculinities

Masculinity denotes “the socially constructed characteristics that society expects for the male sex” (Lemelle 2010, 3). Therefore, masculinities are created by the sociocultural environment rather than by biology and nature. Because they are sociologically created, Feasey (2008) argues that representations of men should be open to the same kinds of questioning that have been applied to women and femininities. Masculinities, unlike the singular counterpart (masculinity), which is monolithic, underscore the fluid, time-related, and variable nature of manliness in different cultural contexts and in the course of a person's life. Since they are dynamic, masculinities can be manifested in diverse ways.

Masculinities are culture specific. What is expected from being male varies from one culture to another. A repeated observation in studies on African masculinities is that they are defined and characterized by the pressure exerted by the political and economic instability of these postcolonial nations (Dery 2017; Diabah and Amfo 2018). Dery (2017) submits that African masculinity is constructed in terms of the survival of men in a rapidly changing socio-economic and political context. Diabah and Amfo (2018) list features like bravery, resilience to pain, expression of authority, phallic competence, and ability to offer protection as inherent in an African ideal of masculinity. There is also a consensus among these scholars that hegemonic masculinity, the complementary relationship between masculinity and femininity which ascertains that men continue to occupy a dominant position over women, constitutes the defining factor for African masculinities. The notion of hegemonic masculinity is introduced in Connell (1995). Feasey (2008, 2) defines the hegemonic male as a “strong, successful, capable and authoritative man who derives his reputation from the workplace and his self-esteem from the public place”. Hegemonic masculinity is the ideal image for men, by which all men are judged, tested, and qualified (Connell 1995; Feasey 2008). Hegemonic masculinity distinguishes itself by identifying and celebrating certain characteristics, like the exhibition of power and strength, virility, assertiveness, resilience to pain, and bravery, as true reflections of masculinity (Diabah and Amfo 2018).

3 Stand-up comedy

Stand-up comedy (SUC) is an integral part of popular culture. Mintz (1985) defines stand-up comedy as an encounter between an audience and a standing performer saying funny things. According to Double (2014, 19–20), the major features of SUC include “personality” (the comic character), “direct communication” between the comic and audience, and “present tense” (live performance). Many studies have characterised the genre, ranging from Attardo's (2001) description of SUC as a highly artificial and scripted genre in which successions of canned jokes are performed, to Scarpetta and Spagnolli's (2009) and Adetunji's (2013) analyses of interactional features of SUC. Such interactional features, like the strategic use of conversational devices, demonstrate that SUC is a context in which both the performer and audiences jointly produce and consume humour. Recent studies, like Adetunji (2016), have argued that comedians consciously consider the audience in the delivery of their materials and that their performances are based on improvisation. Therefore, SUC interaction is dialogic, creative, contextual, and spontaneous.

Linguistic markers and strategies constitute a major part of the discourse construction of identity within stand-up performance. Studies like Gilbert (2004), Ruiz-Gurillo and

Linares-Bernabéu (2019), and Ruiz-Gurillo (2019) have underscored how linguistic markers and strategies are deployed as pragmatic/discourse strategies for cuing humorous intentions. Ruiz-Gurillo and Linares-Bernabéu (2019) list topic, target, wordplay, character footing, self-anecdotes, taboo, and canned jokes, among others, as strategies female comedians use in shaping their gender identity. However, Gilbert (2004) conceptualises self-denigration as a strategy for subversive humour. These studies show that joke performance is a site for (de)constructing and performing gendered identities (Crawford 2003; Chiaro and Baccolini 2014). Other studies, like Coates (2014) and Kothhoff (2006), have also underscored how conversational humour indexes gender. These studies on gender construction in humour have focused on femininity.

Within the humanities, there are several studies on Nigerian stand-up comedy (NSC) (Adejunmobi 2013; Adetunji 2013; Filani 2015a and b, 2016, 2017; Ogoanah and Ojo 2018, etc.). These studies range from the analysis of cultural and performative aspects of NSC (e.g. Adejunmobi 2013; Nwankwo 2014) and conceptualisations of NSC as a social critique of post-colonial predicaments (e.g. Raheem 2018) to the analysis of linguistic features and pragmatic strategies (e.g. Adetunji 2013; Filani 2015a and b, 2016, 2017) and multimodality in NSC (Ogoanah and Ojo 2018). Although the performance of gender has been referenced in some studies on NSC, there have been no linguistic investigations of performativity of gender in NSC. Of particular interest is Nwankwo's (2014) observation that NSC has more jokes about women than men because females constitute a larger chunk of the gender demographics of the audience. However, I would argue that many gendered jokes about women and femininity in NSC are phallogentric. Stand-up comedians may not necessarily target women or perform jokes that denigrate femininity, but underlying those jokes are intentions which project manliness and patriarchal ideologies.

4 Methodology

This study analyses the comedy of Basketmouth, whose real name is Bright Okpocha. Basketmouth is targeted because he appropriates a wider range of comedy techniques than other artists and is one of the most consistent stand-up comedians in Nigeria (Nwankwo 2014). Besides, his materials are primarily based on male-female relationships involving dating/courtship, marriage, or parenthood, all of which are *discourse genres* in which gendered identities are constructed and perpetuated. On two different occasions, Basketmouth has been the subject of criticism for his jokes on social media involving dating relationships and rape (Filani 2018). His routines are based on men's behaviours in relationships and are usually constructed as personal anecdotes.

Using purposive sampling, I selected a fifteen-minute video from YouTube for analysis. Before narrowing down my analysis to the selected video, which was a routine performed in Ghana, I sampled over three hours YouTube videos of Basketmouth's performances. I realised that the comedian performed the same materials in different comedy venues across the world, in countries including Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, the UK, and Switzerland. By narrowing down my analysis to a single routine, therefore, I have avoided analysing the comedian's repeated materials. Excerpts from the selected video were transcribed and are presented in the analysis to illustrate the construction of masculinities. The selected routine was performed in English, with very minimal instances of code-switching with Nigerian Pidgin. This might be because the routine was performed in Ghana, where the audience might not be competent enough in the language usually used for comedy performances in Nigeria, Nigerian Pidgin. Translations of the code-switching are presented as footnotes.

5 Findings

5.1 Character footing

Character footing is a stand-up technique that entails using voice quality to create characters in routines (Rutter 2001). It is instantiated through mimicry, reported speech, accents, and other vocal attributes. Character footing is an identity construction strategy that emanates from the voice stylisation of the comedian. Stylisation is an act of linguistic appropriation. It produces non-referential meanings that are acknowledged by the participants because of their shared experience in the politics of language and culture (Hill 1998). To Coupland (2001), stylisation means constructing a social image or persona that interconnects with other facets of a speaker's communicative design (ideational, relational, pragmatic, non-verbal) in a speech event. When stylisation is situated in a socio-political, cultural, and historical context, one can uncover the cultural logic that motivates the practice and ideological basis of sounding like an "other".

In stand-up's character footing, there is a deliberate adoption of stigmatised linguistic code to construct a character's social identities (in the present study, gender identity). While the primary goal of humour performance is entertainment, humour conveys bona-fide meanings and sociocultural messages about its users (Attardo 1994). It is, therefore, not out of place to consider character footing as a strategy for conveying non-linguistic meanings in the context of stand-up performance. Here, I will discuss character footing techniques in the selected routine.

Excerpt 1

1 Yes, it's Fraud. Fraud. (p)

2 You are showing us[↑] what you don't have[↓] that's fraud (P)

3 It's a criminal act. You carry girl, oh this one is hurting my feeling.

4 My wife is here. Those days before I met her, (p) I carry one babe,

5 If you see her yansh², if you see bumbum[↑] South Africa is small now[↓] if you see bum,

6 I carry this girl to the house boom. Enter the room[↓] she was like

7 <Baby can you put the light off I want to be romantic you know?>

8 SO IN MY MIND I WAS LIKE THIS GIRL LOVES ROMANCE SO I PUT OFF THE LIGHT SO

9<Can I use the bathroom real quick?>

10 I say no problem. Light was off[↓]. She went to the bathroom[↓] came back.[↓]

11 I went to ease myself, I enter bathroom, as I dey pis³ you know when you are in the bathroom,

12 You start noticing things. Omo⁴, this thing is dirty I need to clean it up, (*gesticulates holding the penis and urinating*)

13 As I was looking, I just look at the cloth line, saw yansh

14 <**Philomena, did you spread yansh here?**>

15 (*more sonorous*) <Yes, it was wet, I want to dry it.>Fraud.

16 I enter the room, this girl did not have anything.

² *Yansh* is a Nigerian Pidgin term that translates as 'buttocks', 'bottom', or 'bum'.

³ *I dey Pis* is a code switch to Nigerian Pidgin. It translates as 'I was urinating'.

⁴ *Omo*, in this context, translates as 'oh boy'.

Although the excerpt has implications for the construction of femininity, my focus is on how Basketmouth uses the monologue to index masculinity. By foregrounding what is generally assumed to be female behaviour (the use of body enhancing accessories and cosmetics typified in the excerpt by the word *yansh*), Basketmouth cognitively invites the audience to contrast female behaviours with those of males, so that his mapping of masculinity is pragmatically foregrounded. Of particular interest is the way in which Basketmouth uses character footing to mark off the utterances of the characters in the joke, which include both him and the woman he took home on a date. As part of his story-telling props, Basketmouth uses code alternation by mimicking a foreign female accent in line 7 (indexing a female identity); a faster speech rate in line 8 (suggesting a man's eagerness for sexual intercourse); a slower speech rate in line 9 to index the woman's voice; and then, in line 14, he increases the loudness of his voice to indicate anger at what he discovered in his bathroom. Lastly, in line 15, he makes his voice sound more sonorous to indicate a female character's voice. It is important to note that this joke is woven around a man who asked a woman out on a date because he thought that the woman had excessive buttocks, who then discovered that the woman wore underwear with a padded butt section. More important is the fact that the comedian performed the joke as his real experience by making himself the individual who was deceived by the woman. The routine therefore constitutes a self-anecdote. To a great extent, this has an implication for the type of masculinity being projected by the comic. Here, there is a construction of the masculinity that is based on men's fixation on women's bodies. Specifically, the masculine self being constructed by the comic here is a heterosexual male who is attracted to a female with a voluptuous figure. The social construction of women with low waist-hip ratios as attractive to men is grounded in the patriarchal notion that such women have enhanced health and fertility (Lassek and Gaulin 2019). Such a perception of women by men is stereotypical and it objectifies feminine features as sexual and reproductive entities that should satisfy the masculine sexual drive. Basketmouth's representation of himself as lecherous here is premised on the assumption that "a man who does not show any interest in sex is often branded as impotent, afraid of women and, thus, less of a man" (Diabah and Amfo 2018, 190–191).

Excerpt 1 also includes instances of the rhetorical use of self-anecdotes and stereotyping to enhance the believability of stand-up narratives. Since stereotyping entails foregrounding background cultural assumptions, it will be discussed in Section 5.3.1. Rhetorically, the act of character footing distances Basketmouth from the actions of the woman in the narrative. By so doing, it constructs the woman as an "other" gender who manipulates and victimises males. As a self-anecdote, the excerpt engages the audience, and because it is interspersed with character footing, the narrative becomes more personal for the comedian. As Ruiz-Gurillo and Linares-Bernabéu (2019) have shown, these instances of character footing strategically frame the characters in the narrative with gender and sex based identities.

5.2 Linguistic choices

Comedians make linguistic–stylistic choices while communicating with the audience. The comedian's paradigmatic choices at different linguistic levels have implications that extend beyond the performance. The stylistic choices of comedians are not random; they are discourse motivated choices that aim to enhance the comedians' immediate and comedic mediated intentions. In other words, these choices are not just made by the comedian to make the audience laugh, they are also made to communicate non-referential and sociocultural meanings. There-

fore, as a critique of culture, stand-up performance can “generate heightened consciousness of the social and political environment” of their macro contexts (Aarons and Mierowsky 2017, 159; see also Waisanen 2011).

The notion of intention is significant for uncovering why stand-up comedians make specific linguistic choices (Aarons and Mierowsky 2017). The investigation of linguistic choices uncovers how the comedic intention is used to express different contextual meanings which could be immediate (creating humorous effect) or extended (generating social and non-referential meanings which amount to social critiques). The extended meaning underscores how comedian's linguistic choices mark off social identities. In the following paragraphs, I will examine how Basketmouth uses linguistic choices to reference masculinities.

Excerpt 2

- 1 You know the funny thing↑ I have a beautiful daughter↓
- 2 If you follow me on Instagram you will know.↓ MY DAUGHTER IS BEAUTIFUL.
- 3 And I'm so protective. I love my... Even my wife, I dey⁵ protect everybody↓
- 4 If I see a guy talking to my wife, I fit vex⁶. (AL)
- 5 My daughter↑ I'm so protective. ↓
- 6 It's a problem to the point that *I don't even let my daughter eat banana*↓(AL)(P)
- 7 <**Daddy I want banana**>
- 8 She just hold the banana (demonstrate holding banana) (AL)
- 9 <Ah No. No. Bring it let me cut it into small pieces. (AL)
- 10 If you eat it like that, it's not nutritious if you eat it like this
- 11 let me cut it to small pieces for you> (AL)

In both Excerpts 1 and 2, Basketmouth makes a couple of linguistic choices that are significant for the construction of masculinities. First, there is the use of personal deictic references, the first and second person pronouns. Of particular interest here is the first-person pronoun in Excerpt 2, with which he maps his identity as a father. By using the first-person pronoun, he exploits the contrast between being a father (a social persona) and being a comedian who is making a point about masculine identity (a father must be protective) – a very serious point! Likewise, in the first excerpt, he oscillates between being a lover boy and being a comedian who critiques feminine appearance acts through the use of the first-person pronoun. It should be noted that the use of the first-person pronoun in constructing the masculine identity significantly influences another linguistic strategy in his routine: the use of lexical reiteration.

Reiteration can be viewed in the grammatical or stylistic/rhetorical sense. In the grammatical sense, it is a lexical cohesive device which entails the repetition of a lexical item, its synonym, near-synonym or a superordinate term. In the second sense, it is a device that can be used for placing emphasis on a word and what it stands for in the text. Norrick (2003) discusses different aspects of the use of repetition as a strategy in conversational joking, for instance, using it to determine the rhythm of jokes and to plan/gain time. According to Schwarz (2009), repetition serves to dramatise situations and create humour. In Basketmouth's use, repetition

⁵ Nigerian pidgin verb. It indicates continuous action or can be used for emphasis. Here, it translates as the 'do' auxiliary verb in English, as in 'I do protect everybody'.

⁶ *I fit vex* is in Nigerian Pidgin. It translates to 'I can get angry'.

enhances the humorousness of the narrative and at the same time, because of the propositional content of the repeated expression, foregrounds the kind of identity being performed and emphasised. For example, in the first excerpt, there is reiteration of the word *fraud*, with which the comedian generates a pragmatic coherence with the idea that men are being cheated and deceived by women who wear body enhancing dresses and cosmetics. In Excerpt 2, there is the reiteration of the notion of being protective (lines 3 and 5). Here again, the comedian is using reiteration as a strategy to focus on the notion of being a caring father, who must protect the ladies in his family (his wife and daughter) from preying men. The repetition of *I'm so protective* creates a pragmatic coherence with the image of a caring husband and father which the comedian is performing.

It is necessary to comment on how these repetitions amount to humour. They serve to create a contradiction between what the comedian is actually saying on the stage and real life outside the world of the performance. For instance, Basketmouth's flagging of the use of beauty enhancing cosmetics and attires as fraudulent is contradictory to the expectations in the culture of both the comedian and the audience in which it is normal for both men and women to use such cosmetics and attires. Technically, this amounts to what Ruiz-Gurillo and Linares-Bernabéu (2019, 5) describe as a *quip*, which is a "comment about an ongoing action or the topic under discussion." Basketmouth's quip can be seen as gender identity mapping because it is exclusively used to denote the actions of a person of a particular gender

The second linguistic strategy found in the monologue is the use of veiling strategies such as innuendo for referring to sexual intercourse and the terms relating to it. Generally, there is the use of metaphors to refer to a range of things. A typical example in Excerpt 2 is *banana*, which is a metaphor and euphemism for phallus. Here, Basketmouth does not necessarily mean *banana* but is referring to the male sex organ. The use of *banana* as a metaphor for a phallus is borrowed from the lyrics of Nigerian hip-hop artists, who used and still use it in a similar way in their music. I must note here that the reference to a phallus is motivated by his intention to project an image of a protective father. While, literally, the comic seems to be saying that he is protecting his kid from choking on bananas, metaphorically he is implying that he is protecting his daughter from having sexual relationships as a minor. Another similar use of metaphor in constructing masculine identity is presented in Excerpt 3 below.

Excerpt 3

- 1 And you know the funny thing? Guys don't know.
- 2 But you think that when you use your ATM⁷,
- 3 You are using your ATM at the ATM machine and you cover like
- 4 You want to withdraw maybe like 10 Ghana Cedis (AL)
- 5 Who does that? You want to withdraw 10 Ghana Cedis and you now cover the screen (AL)
- 6 So the girls behind you can't see it (AL)
- 7 Girls can tell by the sound (AL) of what you are withdrawing↓ (AL)
- 8 Girls↑ don't try girls↓ (AL)
- 9 The day wei I just punch 10 Ghana Cedis⁸
- 10 Let me make it 50 Ghana Cedis (Makes a puff sound to indicate ATM ejecting just a note) (AL)

⁷ Abbreviation for Automated Teller Machine.

⁸ Translation: 'The day that I punched just 10 Ghanaian Cedis'

- 11 They don't even say hi to you (AL) PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE (AL)
12 IN A HURRY PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE (AL)
13 But if you go you go to withdraw 1000 Ghana Cedis, they know, they can hear it.

At this point in the monologue, Basketmouth refers to how people behave when using automated teller machines (ATMs). In Nigeria (and perhaps in other parts of Africa), users of ATMs are advised to be discreet in their use of the machines so that people will not spy on them and get their pin codes, which could then be used to criminally access the users' accounts. Here, Basketmouth uses this warning as a premise for his joke and, at the same time, uses the sound that the ATM makes while a withdrawal is being made as an index for the wealth of the user of the machine. It is interesting to note that the comedian uses the sound being made by a machine to index the socio-economic status of an individual, rather than the immediate financial need of the individual. That a person withdraws a small amount of money does not mean that the person is poor; it could be that the person withdraws only what s/he needs at that point in time. However, in the routine, the amount withdrawn is an index for the person's wealth. It is even more interesting to note the kind of cognitive perception that the comic uses in his metaphor, that people, by *hearing* (Lines 10 and 13), are able to guess the amount being withdrawn. More important is how the symbol becomes gendered in his routine: girls get to know the amount of the withdrawal and, depending on what this tells them about the person's wealth, may choose to socialise or interact with the man.

The last of the linguistic choices that we will consider is Basketmouth's illocutionary acts, one of the three-fold distinctions of speech act theory. The others are locutionary and perlocutionary acts. Austin's (1962) speech act theory is based on the idea that participants perform actions when they speak. Illocutionary acts are the intentional acts performed through utterances. For instance, *I will buy a dog tomorrow* could mean that the speaker is making a promise or a threat, depending on the context of interaction. As Aarons and Mierowsky (2017) argue, comedians' choices of speech acts are significant for realising their comedic intentions. Using Excerpts 1 and 2, I shall show how Basketmouth's illocutionary acts index masculinities.

Excerpt 1 begins with the comedian instantiating a speech act through which he condemns the woman in his narrative and decries her action. In the Austinian terminology, he instantiates a verdictive illocutionary act. This amounts to criticising women who use clothing and cosmetics to enhance their body image. His immediate intention underlying this speech act can be read as being to malign and humiliate women for their dress choices. However, inherently in this speech act is the stereotyping of men, as beings who are controlled by what they see and who are incapable of exercising physical and mental restraint so as to be able to decipher the genuineness of any woman's appearance. It is in this sense that Basketmouth's joke in Excerpt 1 explicates the construction of masculinities. Likewise, in line 3 of Excerpt 2 there is a commissive illocutionary act, with which he portrays an identity of a caring parent. The first two lines of Excerpt 2 constitute constative assertive illocutionary acts and they are direct speech acts. However, given the premise of the gender identity he is performing in the routine, they carry an undertone of an indirect speech act, implying that the daughter would be attractive to males. Furthermore, through character footing, Basketmouth assigns an exercitive illocutionary act to himself by insisting that he must cut the banana into pieces for his daughter to eat. In the Austinian tradition, exercitives are acts that are used for exercising influence or power. Here, we see Basketmouth projecting a protective masculine identity for himself by exercising control on how his daughter should eat the banana.

5.3 Cognitive strategies

Following Yus (2004, 2016), I adopt Sperber and Wilson's (1995) relevance theory (RT) in analysing the cognitive strategies in the selected routine. RT is adopted because of the interpretive steps proffered by its principles. In RT, inferencing is the primary interpretive step for deriving explicature and implicature from ostensive stimuli. Utterances are processed based on how relevant they are to the recipients. Humourists design their jokes based on the cognitive and communicative principles of relevance: the extent to which the joke will yield cognitive effects, the assumptions that will be entertained in interpreting the joke, and the inferential pattern of the audience (Yus 2004). Yus (2016) posits that the audience's enjoyment in stand-up venues emanates from how the recipients are made to realise that their individually held assumptions are collective.

5.3.1 Foregrounding cultural assumptions from the macro context

Yus (2004) notes that when cultural representations are foregrounded in a joke performance, especially when they are challenged or reinforced in a joke, the representations may become humorous. A primary strategy found in Basketmouth's routine is the reinforcement of gendered stereotypes about men. As social imageries, stereotypes function as a framework for the construction of jokes. They also constitute aspects of pragmatic phenomena that determine what should be presupposed in joke-telling. According to Adetunji (2013), stereotypes are significant for humour because comedians use them to position self and the other; such positioning could be used in highlighting the target of humour before disparaging him or her. In this view, jokes legitimise and perpetuate negative stereotypes and the culture of prejudice. However, stereotyping in jokes need not be negative, since comedians can use it for correcting social vices. Basketmouth uses gendered stereotypes in foregrounding his cultural bias about being male, in both positive and negative dimensions.

In Excerpt 1, Basketmouth stereotyped himself, the character in the joke, which typifies men as sexual beings who are easily carried away by women's physical appearance, body shape or physique. He foregrounds men as lecherous and as being sexually aroused by women's physical appearances, especially by women with wide hips and buttocks. Here, we see the comic playing on objectifying women: dividing a woman's body into parts to be enjoyed by men and judging a woman's beauty or attractiveness based on a selected part. There is a foregrounding of the general perspective on what the size of a woman's body should be. This perspective is grounded in the patrilineal and patriarchal orientation existing in the macro context and it sets up Basketmouth's depiction of the female character in his joke. Women are projected in this manner because they are viewed through masculine lenses and are expected to conform to the dictates of the domineering male leadership (Onanuga 2017). Therefore, it is "normal" for the comic to talk of a woman's "presupposed attractiveness" and then give a condemning verdict on women's appearance enhancing practices.

In Excerpt 2, Basketmouth moves to a different cultural presupposition so as to portray a more positive form of masculine identity. He moves from a young man in a dating relationship to the social role of a father and husband. As is typical of a patriarchal African society, men are the heads of the family and they are expected to play the dominant role of providing security for the family, which could be in terms of leadership or material, emotional, physical, and social protection. In Excerpt 2, Basketmouth constructs the "responsible" male who protects his family from preying males and sexual predators.

5.3.2 Instantiating ad hoc and corresponding concepts

Basketmouth instantiates ad hoc concepts as seen in the metaphors in the routine; he compares corresponding concepts, as seen in the male and female categories in the routine. Metaphors like the *banana* (Excerpt 2) and the *sound of the ATM* (Excerpt 3) constitute gendered ad hoc concepts. In interpreting them, the audience have to pragmatically adjust the coded word through lexical broadening. Such conceptual adjustments are guided by the search for relevance within the frame of already mutually manifested assumptions (Yus 2016). The interpretive steps involve generating explicatures from the concepts, which then serve as premises for deriving the comedian's intended implicatures. For instance, the use of *banana* and *sound* in the excerpts would generate the following stages of interpretation:

Banana:

Explicature: *A good father protects his daughter from choking while eating fruits like banana.*

Implicature: *A good father protects his daughter from sexual predators.*

Sound:

Explicature: *The sound the ATM makes is indicative of money being withdrawn.
The sound the ATM makes while a man is withdrawing money indicates how wealthy the man is.*

Implicature: *Ladies can tell if a man is a good catch for a date from the sound the ATM makes while the man is making a withdrawal.*

In these instances of ad hoc concept formation, the fact that the implicatures contradict the explicit contents of the metaphorical expressions generates incongruous content which enhances the humorousness of the routine.

The second strategy, comparing corresponding concepts, focuses on how Basketmouth intentionally compares gender-based concepts in male versus female categories. In Excerpt 4 below, the comparison is realised as *husband* versus *wife*. The comedian, through character footing, assigns propositions and actions to the referents of the concepts.

Excerpt 4

- 1 My wife is smart. My wife one day, I pissed her off,↓ Actually she pissed me off↑
- 2 and I now shouted at her.↓ Did you know she slapped me↑ and started crying↓(p) (AL)
- 3 <look at what you made me do> Baby I'm so sorry and she was wrong.
- 4 Women are smart and I tell guys most time never ever think you are smarter than a woman,
- 5 never in your life. And women, they know how to just pounce on you and surprise you
- 6 and guys you don't know.
- 7 You know when you are chatting with another girl in your house
- 8 Whether your wife or girlfriend you are chatting, there's a smile on your face
- 9 You don't know but your wife or girlfriend with you they know, you don't know.
- 10 <Baby I miss you too.> A smile. And women when they come at you,

- 11 men, we're not as fast as they are
12 Women go just waka come⁹<BABY WHO ARE YOU CHATTING WITH>
13 our guys will just <en> (pointing) (P)(AL)
14 That's a lie↓ coming↓ <You heard me who are you chatting with>
15 You have to be fast. BUT IF YOU DO THE SAME THING TO A WOMAN, *a woman will change it* ↓
16 change the scenario and you will now be the one that is the victim (AL)
17 Try it, go and meet a woman <Baby who are you chatting with?>
18 <You think I'm like you that will be chatting with all those stupid girls> (AL)

Excerpt 4 contains instances where character footing (lines 3, 10, 12, 13, 14 etc.) and linguistic choices (like *pounce*, *smart*, *victim*, *personal deixis* etc.) which index gender are instantiated. However, the excerpt is used here to illustrate how the comedian compares and contrasts how differently men and women behave when their spouses accuse them of infidelity. Comparing gender categories, typified by *wife*, *girlfriend*, *women*, *men*, and *guys*, amounts to comparing two corresponding concepts. I must note here that these gender-based terms are used in the traditional essentialist frame, and this underlies how they are socially constructed in the macro context. In Basketmouth's material, the traditional biology-based notion of gender serves as the basis for his discourse construction of masculinities. He describes women in physical terms and uses banana as a metaphor for phallus to represent masculinity. His discourse constructions and humorous representations of masculinities, therefore, emanate from the notion that manliness is fixed, stable, and unalterable. In Excerpt 4, the comedian not only instantiates the linguistic strategies that have been analysed above, he also invites the audience to examine how a man reacts to an accusation of infidelity and then compares this reaction to that of a female.

Two humorous motifs are deployed by Basketmouth here: the first is irony and the second is self-deprecation. Basketmouth employs irony by describing *women* as smart. RT views irony as communicating a dissociative attitude towards the target (Yus 2016). Basketmouth uses irony as a performance strategy for communicating a negative value while expressing a positive and less threatening proposition about women. The non-propositional effect of his deployment of irony includes his outright rejection and criticism of female attitudes, which is contrasted with male behaviour. Such a non-propositional effect is intentionally generated to evaluate women's relational behaviour to their spouses or significant others within the context of the performance. I must mention that Basketmouth does not allude to a negative evaluation of men in the excerpt; rather, he employs self-deprecation by representing men as victims in interactions that involve allegations of infidelity. Here, self-deprecation is used as a form of identity politics since it is used to project the non-propositional meaning of men as "victims" of infidelity in relationships. There is an indirect comparison between the effects of infidelity on men and women, with the men occupying the victimhood position and the women occupying the agency role. This brings up a number of non-propositional culture-based implications for the participants in the comedy venue: men also suffer in sexual relationships, especially in cases of infidelity, and they are not necessarily the cause of such acts. In a way, this is consistent with the representation of women as the reason for sex or gender-based violence. What is important for the present analysis is the portraiture of men as marginalised and inferior in this excerpt. Here, the comedian represents men as subordinate and this contradicts the valued attributes of hegemonic masculinity.

⁹ 'Women would just suddenly walk in on you.'

6 Discussion and conclusion

Gender-based humour is universal although it may have different realisations and functions in the contexts where it is found. Nevertheless, the socio-politics of gender-based humour cannot be denied. Rappoport (2005) argues that gendered jokes are universal because they are about social power and social control. As Basketmouth's jokes indicate, men enjoy telling disparaging jokes about women and jokes that portray masculinities. Rappoport (2005) contends that such jokes are meant to justify the dominance of men in the society. Nwankwo's (2014) point that there are more females than males in the audience in NSC venues suggests that there may be more females than men laughing at jokes deriding women. In my view, this begs a question about these women's taste for humour and understanding of what constitutes good humour. Kuipers (2006) reveals that good humour is driven by bad taste and notes that gender differences in the appreciation of jokes might have more to do with emphatic masculinity. She asserts that "men demonstrate their masculinity with humour and women show their femininity by laughing at men's jokes" (Kuipers 2006, 236). On the other hand, given that joking contexts demand two participants for the joke-telling to be successful, the recipient of a joke who laughs at the joke might be complicit in the bias projected through the joke. However, such jokes might have therapeutic effects for the women in the audience as performing them could be an invitation to laugh at their subjectivity. Therefore, the laughter of the female members of the audience may be a performative laughter indicating their alignment with their interactional role and a subversive laughter that indirectly mocks the dimensions of masculinity performed by the male comedians. The perspective of subversive laughter suggests that these women do not necessarily agree with the social roles and identity assigned to them in the macro context. As Waisanen (2011) points out, stand-up performances are not just light-hearted entertainment, they are also invitations to view the world in different ways.

In this paper, I have focused on a routine performed by Basketmouth to track how the comic projects a masculine-based worldview. My analysis has uncovered how the comedian uses linguistic cues and discourse strategies like self-anecdotes, stereotyping, quip, veiling, irony, self-deprecation, character-footing, repetition, illocutionary acts, and other cognitive based strategies in performing (and perhaps constructing) gendered categories. There are several social implications that could be derived from what Basketmouth humorously represents as masculinities. First, the critical look of his portraiture of manliness suggests that masculinity is primarily based on the biologically assigned sex, which in turn informs gender identity and expression and sexual orientation. Most importantly, Basketmouth's humorous perspective on manliness is enshrined in the hegemonic masculinity, which is dominant, suppressive, and which establishes a hierarchical relationship over femininity through the subordination of women. This is seen in the way he indexes biological sex through voicing, exteriorising women's bodies as objects of men's sexual pleasure, and intentionally selecting words and speech acts with gendered propositional contents. Basketmouth uses his humorous representations of masculinities to portray the realism of gender mapping in a typical African society. He rejects the imaginative idealisations which his critics would have him project. And as a professional comic, whenever he is criticised for negative aspects of his jokes, he is quick to offer an apology, noting that he is only drawing attention to the negativities of his sociocultural context so as to effect positive changes. If there is no form of positive gender social constructivism that is identified in the criticism, at least Basketmouth uses his jokes to set up debates on gender equality in popular media.

The performance of the comic's perspective on manliness is one of the political acts in his

comedy material. What the analysis has shown is that Basketmouth's performance of manliness is very much connected with sociocultural perspectives on women and men in the macro context. Most importantly, both the propositional content and the non-propositional attitude indexed by Basketmouth's strategies and utterances show that he uses his comedy to reinforce hegemonic masculinities: the traditional African views on manliness. It seems that the "social critique" in his comedies does not project alternative perspectives that will engender gender neutrality or motivate the emancipation of women in Nigeria or Africa more generally. Jokes which project the continued dominance of men and hegemonic masculinities might indicate that both the joke teller and the recipients who enjoy the telling are participating in the culture of gender dehumanisation. In the Nigerian context and in Basketmouth's case, such jokes show that gender dehumanisation is ingrained in the culture and is seen as the status quo. Critics of Basketmouth have viewed several of his gender-biased jokes as "not funny", but the fact that audience members continue to meet such jokes with affiliative responses and not disaffiliation shows that the jokes represent a collective perspective.

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Transcription convention

<u>Underline</u>	Emphasis
↓	Prominent falling intonation
↑	Prominent rising intonation
?	Question intonation
.	Falling intonation
(p)	Lengthened pause
,	Short pause, a second or less.
AL	Audience laugh
<word>	Marks off character footing
WORD	Faster than the previous utterance
<i>Word</i>	Slower than the previous utterance
Word	Louder than the previous utterance