The Construction of Masculinity Identities through Metaphors on the Kenyan Twitter Discourse: A Conceptual Metaphor Perspective

Stella Nyanjugu Gichohi
Post Graduate Scholar, Department of Linguistics,
Universitas Diponegoro (UNDIP), Indonesia
Dr. Deli Nirmala
Head, Department of Linguistics,
Universitas Diponegoro (UNDIP), Indonesia

Abstract:
Identities have been created in many ways. Identities such as masculinity have appeared in mainstream media such as newspapers, televisions, radio stations as well as magazines. With the global technological trend, social networking sites such as Twitter platforms have also allowed the construction of male and masculine identities. These identities on social networking sites have seen the rise of toxic masculinity in Kenya. This paper studies how these toxic masculinities are constructed through metaphorical expressions on the Kenyan Twitter discourse. The study comes from the recent heightened calls for gender equality and the advancement of feminism waves in Kenya. This has led to a weekly discussion on the Kenyan Twitter platform about the role and position of men and masculinity in general in comparison to women. The terms boy child and girl child have also been used commonly to refer to males and females respectively. The study is premised upon the Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Johnson (2003) and Hegemonic Masculinity by Connell (2005) Data was collected from #Masculinity Saturday and #Man Day Tweets and replies from selected users. The study provides evidence of toxic masculinity on the Twitter platform. It revealed men as the target domain have been conceptualised as stoic, dominant, entities, managers, savages, self-victimizers, and scarce commodities. The Kenyan twitter discourse also was seen to have diversity in regards to gender and age. However, men seem to be dominating weekly tweets in an attempt to promote toxic masculinity. This can only be seen as a way to regress to patriarchy and a world of male domination.

Keywords: Metaphors, masculinity, toxic masculinity, source domains, target domains, twitter

1. Introduction

Social media networking sites have allowed the construction of different identities. It is therefore agreeable to say that ''networks have enabled identity expressions, exploration, and experimentation; something natural for the human experience'' (Gunduz, 2017)

This article aims to identify how masculinity identities are constructed through metaphors in Kenya on Twitter discourse. Metaphors can be termed as not only a tool for expressing ideas through language but also as a tool for thinking of something (Nirmala, 2011), They can be used for identity construction (Vaara, Tienari, and Santti, 2003) and they are inscribed in discourse practices as well as the wider socio-cultural domains surrounding them (Zubair, 2007)

Lakoff and Johnson (2003) in their book, *Metaphors We Live By* explaining metaphors as concepts that govern our everyday functioning down to the mundane details.

This study comes from the recent heightened calls for gender equality and the advancement of feminism waves in Kenya. This has led to a weekly discussion on the Kenyan Twitter platform about the role and position of men and masculinity in general as compared to that of women. The terms boy child and girl child have also been commonly used to refer to males and females respectively.

Previous studies on the construction of male and masculinity identity have been done on Web-based Misogynist Movements (manosphere) in platforms such as Reddit (Farrell, Fernandez, Novotny, and Alani 2019) and Twitter (Hopton and Langer 2021). In Kenya, studies on the construction of male and masculinity identity have focused majorly on the mainstream media. These studies are as; in music (Nduku, 2020), In magazines (Yieke, Mugambi, and Ogola, 2020), radio stations (Kitetu, Tchai, and Omollo, 2015), and in Newspapers (Kamiri, 2017), And as Njura, Oloo, and Odera (2020) have noted about gender identities in Kenya, 'very little studies have been done on the social media platforms in Kenya'

The area of focus in this paper is the Twitter social networking site. The Twitter platform in Kenya is very dynamic in regard to age and gender diversity. This has seen a surge in the number of users of the Twitter networking site popularly referred to as Kenyans on Twitter (KOT)

Studies have shown that Kenyans on Twitter (KOT) provide a centralized space for discussion about and among Kenyans (Ekdale and Tully, 2014) Besides, 'this social networking site gives a unique communicative structure; one based on a follower-followee relationship and another on one shared interest through the use of a common hashtag' (Ogola, 2019)

2. Literature Review

In the need to explore pivotal studies that largely impacted this present study, this section aimed to foreground crucial literature as follows:

2.1. Gender in Kenyan Context

In Chapter 4 on Bill of Rights under the Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in The Kenyan Constitution (2010); 'women and men have the rights to equal treatment, including the right to opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres'

This has seen the country adapting a ⅔ gender rule to see toward gender equality. However, Berry, Bouka, and Kamuru (2021) noted 'Kenya is still struggling in the quota implementation process'. They argue that the country has performed poorly in gender parity.

Regardless, the Kenyan government has put efforts into empowering women to overcome poverty. The efforts are as in 'gender mainstreaming, affirmative action, and gender-responsive budgeting' (NGEC, 2017)

These undertakings on women's empowerment have brought about a raging debate on the role and position of men. All these can be seemingly seen to argue toward 'forgetting men' and the marginalization of men in Kenya.

2.2. Metaphor

Metaphor, according to Kovecses (2010) is the understanding of a conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain. Where one domain is the source domain and the other domain is the target domain.

Croft and Cruse (2004) define a metaphor as 'one involving a vehicle and a target. They further state a metaphor as an interaction between two domains construed from two regions of purport and the context of the vehicle domain is an ingredient of the construed target processes of correspondence and blending'

They argue that while Lakoff and Johnson (2003) give the inconsistency of a conceptual metaphor-like LOVE IS A JOURNEY since ''metaphorical concepts are defined not in terms of concrete images (flying, creeping, going down the road, etc.), but in terms of more general categories, like passing'' This may not be the same case with a conceptual metaphor such as PEOPLE ARE MACHINE which can be in asymmetry as MACHINES ARE PEOPLE since both people and machines have parts that function

2.3. Toxic Masculinity

Toxic masculinity according to Kuper (2005) is 'the need to aggressively compete and dominate others. He further explains it as a male trait that encourages domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence.'
Flood (2018) notes that the term toxic masculinity is not well defined in the academic domain. He mentions hegemonic masculinity as the term most used in academic scholarship.

In this study, I used hegemonic masculinity to illustrate male and masculinity tendencies to create identity. Consequently, hegemonic masculinity include: 'the denial of weakness or vulnerability, emotional and physical control, the appearance of being strong and robust, dismissal of any need for help, a ceaseless interest in sex, the display of aggressive behavior and physical dominance' (Courtenay, 2000)

2.4.Theoretical Framework

This study will use two key theoretical concepts. Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Johnson (2003) and Hegemonic Masculinity by R.W Connell (2005) as well as previous studies within the same framework. I will discuss each briefly:

2.4.1. The Conceptual Metaphor Theory

This is a theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (2003) in their book, Metaphors We Live By. They state that metaphors are pervasive in everyday life in language, thoughts, and action.

Like in the concept; ARGUMENT, the conceptual metaphor being ARGUMENT IS WAR could be evident in expressions such as I *demolished* his argument, His criticisms were *right on targe*t, I have never *won* an argument with him. From the expressions, the metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR structures the actions performed while people argue (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003: 5)

Conceptual Metaphor is therefore defined as 'a systematic set of correspondences between two domains of experience. Certain elements and the relations between them are said to be mapped from one domain 'the source domain' onto the other domain 'the target' (Kovecses, 2010)

In the conceptual metaphor; LOVE IS A JOURNEY, Kovecses (2010) explains a systematic correspondence between the source domain and target domain, a process he calls mapping. These mappings he illustrated as follows:
Source: JOURNEY Target: LOVE

thetravellers   ⇒   the lovers
the vehicle   ⇒   the love relationship itself
the journey   ⇒   events in the relationship
the distance covered   ⇒   the progress made
the obstacles encountered   ⇒   the difficulties experienced
decisions about which way to go   ⇒   choices about what to do
the destination of the journey   ⇒   the goal(s) of the relationship (Kovecses, 2010:9)

Likewise, in their studies on the construction of feminine identity by use of conceptual metaphors; Njura, Oloo, and Odera (2020) of the Conceptual Metaphor: WOMEN ARE PARASITES, illustrate the mapping below:

Source Domain (Parasites)   *Target Domain (Women)*
Insects   ⇒   Females
Hosts   ⇒   Males
Suck host's blood Host's ⇒   Dependency
deteriorating health   ⇒   Status of men in Kenya

From the mapping above, Njura, Oloo, and Odera (2020) explain the Kenyan females as insects that suck blood from Kenyan males and this has resulted in deteriorating health on the hosts which can be explained as the financial situation of men where they are drained by women.

2.4.2. Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity is a proposition by R.W Connell as part of her gender order theory in gender studies.

Connell defines masculinity as 'a place in gender relations and practices through which men and women engage that place in gender and the effects of those practices in bodily experience, personality, and culture' To distinguish gender relations, (Connell, 2005: 74) proposes a three-fold model as follows; 'Power relations' seen in the overall subordination of women and dominance of men; 'Production relations' like in the case of men and not women controlling major corporations and great private fortunes, and in 'Cathesis' in whether in a relationship, is it consensual or coercive and is pleasure equally given and received.

Hegemonic masculinity has then been defined as 'the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women' (Connell, 2005: 77)
The definition above circles in that 'it is a theory that involves the combination of a plurality of masculinities and the hierarchy of masculinities. Cultural consent, discursive centrality, institutionalization, and marginalisation or delegitimation of alternatives are features of socially dominant masculinities' (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005)

Masculinity identity in digital social networking sites should be studied in length. This is because this online discourse is thought of as a masculine field. According to Nicholas and Agius (2018: 48-50) since the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, the computer has remained a huge part of 'the masculine domains as maths, science, and masculine hacker culture.' Therefore, the mode of discourse has been trivialized and downplayed allowing it to be normalized and divorced from its reinforcement of gendered ideas.

Having that in mind, social networking sites have turned to platforms where men portray their masculinity. Social media outlets have then become the primary means through which individuals display the extent to which they keep real (Patton and Eschmann, 2013) Through this, new forms of masculinities have been seen to rise in 'victimhood and aggrieved entitlements on online domains' (Weiser and Miltner, 2016)

3. Methodology

This study used a descriptive qualitative research design to describe, analyze and explain how masculinity identity has been constructed on the Twitter platform in Kenya. The use of this method is justifiable since previous studies show that 'qualitative research is more holistic and often involves a rich collection of data from various sources to gain a deeper understanding of individual participants, including their opinions, perspectives, and attitudes' (Nassaji, 2015)

To collect data from the Twitter platform, Octoparse; a modern web data scraping software was used. The scraping tool has been described as; 'a user-friendly yet powerful tool developed by Octopus Data Inc. which can be used to scrape websites to get data in different formats like CSV, Excel' (Al Maqbali, 2019)
The following are steps that I took in accessing the data:
- Opened the Twitter web page on Octoparse
- Typed the hashtags Masculinity Saturday and ManDay on the search option
- Created a pagination loop
- Created a loop
- Run data through auto detect
- Saved and run the tasks
- Exported the data an Excel file
- Repeated the process until I had sufficient data.

The data was purposively collected from two weekly trending hashtags #Masculinity Saturday and #Man Day posts and replies on the Twitter platform.

The choice of these tweets was deliberate since they are regularly retweeted on the platform. These tweets are tenets of a Twitter user @Amerix who has termed '#Masculinity Saturday as being a space for men and in particular, a place where men gather to share their challenges and rediscover their gender roles' (Kinyanjui, 2020) 'The Twitter user

has a following of 449,400 followers, both men, and women; most of Amerix's followers are likely young fathers or men in their early 20s who desperately need guidance' (Teyie, 2021) A total of 690 tweets and replies were studied.

To identify metaphors in the selected tweets; Pragglejaz' Group (2007) Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) was used. The procedure is:

Read the entire text text-discourse to establish a general understanding of the meaning
Determine the lexical units in the text discourse.
- For each lexical unit in the text, establish its meaning in context, that is, how it applies to an entity, relation, or attribute in the situation evoked by the text (contextual meaning). Take into account what comes before and after the lexical unit.
- For each lexical unit, determine if it has a more basic contemporary meaning in other contexts than the one in the given context.
- If the lexical unit has a more basic current-contemporary meaning in other contexts than the given context, decide whether the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning but can be understood in comparison with it.
- If yes, mark the lexical unit as metaphorical. (Group, 2007)

4. Findings and Analysis

This section will show how men have been described as a way to create masculinity identity using metaphors. From the 690 tweets and replies expressions studied, 7 patterns of conceptualization about men were found.

Conceptual Metaphor	Frequency	Percentage
MEN AS STOIC	176	17.77%
MEN AS DOMINANT	150	15.09%
MEN ARE ENTITIES	146	14.69%
MEN ARE MANAGERS	141	14.18%
MEN ARE SAVAGE	137	13.78%
MEN AS SELF-VICTIMIZERS	131	13.18%
MEN AS SCARCE COMMODITY	113	11.37%
	994	100%

Table 1: Metaphorical Conceptualization about Men

The conceptual metaphors from the derived expressions will be presented in capital letters. To easily identify the conceptual metaphor reflected in the expressions, I have highlighted some words in bold. The examples given under each category were some of those selected from the data to help in analysis.

4.1. Men as Stoic

Stoicism can be defined as 'the lack of emotional involvement and expression or the exercising of emotional control and endurance' (Wagstaff and Rowledge, 1995) from the selected expressions it is evident that men are expected to be hardened and derived from all emotions. They are expected to behave as 'men' and not be emasculated or feminized like 'women'. The analysis realized that men are advised to practice masculinity on Twitter discourse. Selected expressions are as follows:
- Do what make you happy' is a feminine mindset, No man should embrace this kind of thinking. A man must do what must be done, whetherpainful, Hurtful, awful, woeful, or gainful because a man becomes a man by facing his discomfort.
- Men, Don't save her with 'my queen', 'my darling' That's being pacified. Save her pet name that doesn't trigger emotional attachment Rebecca - Baker Damaris - Drum, Sylvia - Sly or Liver, Margaret - Mug Or don't save, just master the phone number.
- Delete those messages to unplug yourself from oneitis and emotional attachment.
- When she texts 'I miss you' Respond with, 'Nice to know'Never plug yourself into her emotional domains.
- Do not apologize and if necessary, repeat the offense

The expressions in 1-5 conceptualize men as stoic. The construction of masculine identity here can be seen as men being emotionless, hardened, and expected to endure hardships. A man is presented as long-suffering; in (1) where he is made to face his discomfort regardless and avoid behaving in a feminine way. In examples 2, 3 and 4; a man is presented as impassive and should unplug from any emotional attachments. In the fifth expression, the man should be uncaring and inconsiderate. These expressions indicate how men should be perceived and how their identity is created.

4.2. Men as Dominant

The Collins Online Dictionary (1979) defines male dominance as 'when a society or an organization or an area of activity where men have a lot of power and influence.' The expressions 6-8 have been used to analyze how men are conceptualized as dominant:
- Men are: - at top of a precarious 10th-floor beam,- fixing that dangerous lift,- atop a dangerous electric pole The houses (including the feminist's) were all built by men
- Women look for happiness, Men look for freedom. Fun and mindless entertainment are feminine domains, Accomplishment and victory are masculine domains.

- No man should afford to be lazy & irresponsible. Women & children can afford to be careless but not a man.
- Examples 6 and 7 show the aspect of men taking over control over things. Men are presented as the only ones expected to make significant decisions in regards to developments. Men are supposed to pursue scales that bring attainment and success rather than focusing on unintelligent ventures. Example 8 constructs men as industrious and therefore expected to take control.

4.3. Men Are Entities

An entity can be termed as an individual unit. Merriam Webster dictionary defines an entity as 'something that has a separate and distinct existence and objective or conceptual reality.' The conceptualization of men here presents them as holding an independent existence. The expressions 9-12 are as:

- If you become successful or accomplish something, don't associate your success with your woman
- Men, Nowadays, Funerals are more colorful than weddings. Who will cry when you die? Think about it.
- Men, these are the character traits that make women call us trash- Simp - Beta males- Cucks- Pansies- Average Frustrated Chumps- Effeminate men. They are erroneous and weak men who abandon their goals to go worship women. TRASH NO MORE
- A man initiates a date, not the woman, 'Tomorrow at 3 PM, I will take you for lunch at Java, Mombasa Road. 'Straightforward and to the point. If she initiates it, then turn it down because she will pocket you.
- The identity created here is a man who is self-reliant and individualistic. The mans' accomplishments are his own glory and he wields authority over other beings like women and opinions.

4.4. Men Are Managers

Managers are people in authority, in charge of other people, and sometimes may give orders in a domineering manner. Men have been conceptualized as managers in the expressions as follows:

- If your business is struggling, - hire a man (not a simp or a mangina) you may hire a woman in the marketing department if the business is growing fast. She will attract simps and orbiters.
- Men, Run your business, don't let your woman run it. She will mess with your business.
- If your father died or dies, Do not allow your mother or sister to take charge of your dad's property. They will mislead you, mismanage, abandon it & leave you and your lineage in destitution. Be a responsible heir to your dad's throne. Lead them!
- Only a man can teach a man how to be a man

Examples 13-16, describe men as either business managers (13 and 14) or property managers (15) and teachers whose responsibility is in managing other mens' welfare. The expressions present women as followers and subordinates to the men.

4.5. Men Are Savages

The Collins Online Dictionary (1979) defines a savage person as 'someone extremely cruel, violent, and uncontrolled.' The expressions used to conceptualize this metaphor are as:

- Keep a stern eye on her, show her through your actions that you are a no-nonsense man who doesn't tolerate bulshit
- No woman should waste your time. Don't be a spineless punk begging for attention from a woman.Never take any woman seriously. She doesn't even know anything about herself. That's why she desperately needs you. 2. They are all the same. They will give you the same fantasy. None is special to you. 3. Remain the PRIZE.
- Be selfish with your money. Let women call you stingy and broke, that's their opinion.
- Men, Trust me, that stubborn woman giving you a headache is replaceable. There are 3,904,727,342 women in the world. She is replaceable. Trust me bro

The above expressions 17, 19, 20, and 21 describe men as brutal and cruel. The men are constructed as no-nonsense and are allowed to take action on women. This action could be inferred as violence, denying women freedom, or even mistreating women. Men are also described to be selfish with their money and not considering a woman's opinion. The expression number 18 presents men as inconsiderate of women's thoughts.

4.6. Men as Self-Victimizers

Self-victimizers are people who play victims. Wikipedia explains the reasons for victim playing as a way to manipulate others or to seek attention. In the following expressions, men have been presented as victims.

- Men, PRISONS are centers for dad-deprived males. Boys who grow without fathers or father figures fail to mature into men. If he commits a crime, he will receive a 63% longer sentence than a girl who committed the same crime.
- The modern standard of judgment is skewed to punish men. A boy in school will get 6 marks less compared to a girl in an exam where they both gave similar answers. In a court of law, a man is guilty until proven innocent.
- Since the school system is feminized, Boys begin adopting feminine characters to win favors from teachers. They speak, walk, talk, write, complain & cry like girls.
- Remember, The system is assaulting the man, The system is assaulting traditional families, The system is assaulting our boys.

These expressions 22-25 present men as being marginalized when it comes to justice in criminal courts, in schools, and the entire system to mean that society has completely pushed men to the corner. These claims are however

unjustifiable and therefore not true.

4.7. Men as Scarce Commodity

If a commodity is scarce, it means there is not enough of it. It could also mean that it is rare and therefore should be used sparingly. In the expressions 26-29; men are conceptualized as intentionally absent or precious.

- Men, A woman is her past. A man is his future.
- Men, she has the clock, You have the time, Don't rush. Don't be part of her biological race. Wait.
- Your other woman is more committed to you than your current woman. Do you know why? Because you are scarce. Learn to be scarce. Your woman will respect and value you more.
- Men, You are the PRIZE She is the price. Every woman wants to be a man Because a man is a tool of value

Men are constructed as important items since their value appreciates with time like a case of example 26 where the man's value is in the future. They are identified as having enough time, unlike women who race alongside their 'biological clocks' The men demand respect from women since they are scarce and can only be compared to as an award in a woman's life. The example in 29; makes men appear as distinct from women who are presented as commodities readily available. For a man, a woman has to 'compete' to get him.

5. Discussion

From the findings and analysis above, the following is evident: a conceptual mapping of two domains. The source domains are stoic, dominant, entities, managers, savages, self victimizers, and scarce commodities while men are the target domain.

Kovesces (2010) argues that 'metaphors can do more than just automatically and unconsciously constitute certain aspects of target domains in a static conceptual system (i.e., at the supra-individual level). And that once there is a source domain that conventionally constitutes a target, then any component of this source that fits elements of the target can be used.' Therefore, the choice of the source domains, as well as the target domain, is justifiable.

In the analysis, it is possible to identify the proclivities associated with toxic masculinity as Kupers (2005) gives in his study. These include: 'extreme competition and greed, insensitivity to or lack of consideration of the experiences and feelings of others, a strong need to dominate and control others, an incapacity to nurture, a dread of dependency, a readiness to resort to violence, and the stigmatization and subjugation of women, gays, and men who exhibit feminine characteristics' (Kupers 2005)

Men being stoic can be seen as insensitivity and a callous attitude exhibited by the men toward other people's feelings. A tweet such as '*Delete those messages to unplug yourself from oneitis and emotional attachment*' or '*Do not apologize and if necessary repeat the offense*' presents the toxicity being sermonized on the Kenyan Twitter platform. A man is not expected to save phone messages especially received from women as it shows he is emotionally hooked to her. In the same measure, if he does something wrong, he should not bother making an apology rather he should consider repeating the same mistake to emphasize he is always right.

The inviolable need to control and dominate can be seen in conceptualizations such as men as dominant, entities, and men as managers. Consider the expressions '*Accomplishment and victory are masculine domains',* '*If you become successful or accomplish something, Don't associate your success with your woman*', and '*Men, Run your business, don't let your woman run it. She will mess with your business*' This shows an identity of men as wielding power to own only the best in life in terms of accomplishment and victory as well as run organizations and businesses.

The incapacity to nurture and a readiness to resort to violence are evident in the conceptualization of men as savage. In the collected data, the expressions; '*Keep a stern eye on her, show her through your actions that you are a no-nonsense man who doesn't tolerate bulshit*' indicate a man who is ready to reiterate by violence once provoked while '*Men, Trust me, that stubborn woman giving you a headache is replaceable. There are 3,904,727,342 women in the world. She is replaceable. Trust me bro*' shows a man who cannot foster.

6. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to show the construction of masculine identities through metaphors by Twitter users in Kenya. As seen above, men as the target domain have been conceptualized as stoic, dominant, entities, managers, savages, self-victimizers and scarce commodities being source domains. The Kenyan twitter discourse as much as it holds diversity in terms of gender shows that masculinity is being promoted by men. This can only be seen as a way to regress to patriarchy and a world of male domination.

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