

Interrogating Baby-Mama Syndrome as the New Personality Identity in Mosunmola Abudu's *Chief Daddy*

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ABSTRACT

The spate at which women identify and revel in being baby-mamas in recent times has become quite alarming. The syndrome of women giving birth and raising the child as a single parent with no recourse to the father has become the new form of identity in Nigeria. Some Nigerian celebrities have become proponents of this ideology, and a lot of young ladies are so comfortable having babies without any form of commitment from the man. Consequently, the study aims to interrogate this baby-mama syndrome as a new personality identity in Nigeria. The objectives include scrutinizing some of the factors that propel women to subscribe to this personality identity and examining the dynamics of the characters in the selected video film. His study adopted the Structured observation research methodology and Mosunmola Abudu's *Chief Daddy* purposely selected as the primary film-text. George Gerbner's Cultivation theory also provides the theoretical framework for the interrogation and comprehension of this study.

Keywords: *Baby-Mama, Personality, Identity, Syndrome, Nigerian-Film*

Introduction

Research within the past decade has shown that there is evidence that being a baby-mama has become a new form of personality identity for young people across the globe. It presents a situation where graceful women with great potential are tagged with such personality identity because of having a child or children outside wedlock. Establishing the exact rate at which young Nigerian ladies embrace the baby-mama personality in recent times has been quite controversial and hard to determine correctly. Some scholars have argued that 4 in every 10 ladies within the ages of 25 – 45 wish to embrace this personality identity and

globally, around 17% of children under the age of 14 live with a single parent, and 80-88% of these single parent families are headed by a baby-mama (Maggio, 2019; Single Mother Statistics, 2021). Stephanie Kramer (2019) of Pew Research Center observes that, 'Almost a quarter of children under the age of 18 in the United States (23%) live with only one parent and no additional adults, which is more than three times the global average (7%). In China, 3% of children live in single-parent households, 4% in Nigeria, and 5% in India. The percentage in neighbouring Canada is 15%.' To support this claim, age was considered as one of the factors propelling would-be baby-mamas to embrace such personality identity (Adejoh *et al*, 2019). In the African worldview and as found in different cultures in Nigeria, marriage is an institution of elevation and accomplishment for both men and women in the sense that the success of a man or woman seems never complete without marriage. This is a strong ideology which forms part of the African belief system and values (Osahon, 2015). According to a 2019 Nigerian survey, economic and cultural issues are part of the key sources of stress for the majority of unmarried mothers (Adejoh *et al*, 2019). As a result of cultural barriers, the majority of the baby-mamas felt isolated, powerless, hopeless, loss of belonging, and lack of trust. In the social sphere, the majority of them avoided social activities and changed their clothing styles as a result of their depression, as well as developing bad diet and eating habits. As a result of the social constructs about being a baby-mama, the mothers who talked about isolation, trauma, and depression found it difficult to manage the burden of childcare and create a routine for the child.

The 21st century reality has embraced the new personality identity by naming the idea of having a child or children for a man or woman with no marital commitments (that is man or woman who is not legally married to you) as 'Baby-mama'. Nana Asabea (2016) points out that, 'The unfortunate civilization in the 21st century has made it a norm to have children out of wedlock. It has interestingly turned around the shame associated with having illegitimate children into some sort of achievement which deserves a badge of honour.' However, this study infers that this for a while has become the new normal for most young people especially celebrities in and outside Nigeria. This set of individuals in Nigeria today has been identified as a new personality identity and/or a form of business for most ladies in this choice-identity (Dodd, 2013). A baby mama according to Cindy Ezeugwu (2019, p.1) can be viewed as 'a mother or woman who is not married to the father of her child, that is, an unmarried young woman of childbearing age, who has a child or more outside wedlock for a man she is not legally married to.' The word "baby-mother," pronounced 'bebi-mada,' comes from Jamaican Creole. It is only used to describe mothers of illegitimate children; this implies that there is not a common law of marriage or any form of customary rite but now, it has become a general term for single mothers across the globe (Asabea, 2016). This syndrome has spread in Nigeria where young people tend to follow the trend not conscious of the effect on them or the generation yet to come. It conditions both parties with the circumstance of having a child together for maybe different selfish reasons or a mistake of sexual relationship of both unmarried entities. As Ezeugwu (2019, p.1) posits that:

The woman may or may not be in an intimate relationship with the man. She may decide to have the baby because of some sort of position of fame which is attributed to the man, who may either be wealthy, a celebrity or a powerful man who is connected in the society. Many times, many of these baby mamas try to use the children as a weapon to get the man and what he has to offer.

The above implies that most women in this baby mama situation have developed this new personality for the reason of escaping poverty and other negative experiences of life. These set of women are viewed as desperate and lazy who deliberately have these babies with the aim of trapping the men to overcome poverty, become popular or be identified with a personality associated with a group known for living an adored and self-praised life. Social media enthusiasts, who rely on social media as their primary source of views and values, are increasingly seeing this misshaped, yet repetitively represented 'reality' dominate their worldview (Mosharafa, 2015).

Structured observation (also known as systematic observation) is a data collection approach in which researchers collect data without having direct contact with the subjects (the researchers observe from afar) and the collection technique is structured in a well-defined and procedural manner. It enables researchers to gather data that would otherwise be impossible to obtain by traditional research approaches such as surveys and interviews. The data collection tool for structured observation is coding. Researchers using this approach are interested in a limited set of behaviours. This enables them to quantify the behaviours they're seeing. As a result, rather than documenting all that happens, the researcher concentrates on a few key behaviours. In what follows, a literature review of books and journals on baby-mama provided relevance and references to the study; contextualizing cultivation theory within the ambience of social media and advocacy of the baby-mama syndrome and synopsis of Abudu's *Chief Daddy*. Finally, we interrogate, contextualize, and synthesize all the data to theorize and therefore, establish evidence that being a baby-mama has become a new form of personality identity for young people in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Cultivation theoretical framework was employed by the study to establish baby-mama as the new form of personality identity among young people especially in Nigeria. Originally, cultivation theory as propounded by George Gerbner in 1969 was mainly for 'traditional media studies until recently in new research has focused on other media, this theory proposes that repeated exposure to media over time influence perceptions of social reality' (Vinney, 2019). It's not the same as the agenda-setting theory, according to which 'the media sets the national agenda, in the sense that they do not exactly tell you what to think, but they may tell you what to think about' (McCombs, 2003). Gerbner insists in this theory that exposure to media cultivates the belief and shapes the perceptions, attitudes, values and beliefs that media messages should be applied to real-life situations. Consequently, this is evident in today Nigeria where youths perceive that being a baby-mama or having a baby-mama is the new form of personality identity because all over the screens and social media platforms they see 'celebrities' or career successful youths who are 'role models' embrace such personality identity. Daily Times Nigeria online page points out that according to investigations, the baby mama syndrome is a new pattern of identity embraced worldwide, especially among youths in Nigeria, because everyone from movie stars to musicians, and the famous to the not-so-famous, are getting baby mamas, and observers claim it is now commonplace (**Ladelokun, 2017**). The media presentations of such people even in movies tell stories of a 'happy ever after' situation of such personalities often with no regrets from both parties especially the women. *Chief Daddy* represents such in the characters of Ekanem and Vanessa as satisfied baby-mamas with no regrets. However, this study identifies and examines the frequent

images, portrayals and ideals that are common to the majority of programmes in the same content of baby-mama.

This analysis of cultivation is based on the outcome of the thoughts produced by the repeated exposure to media over time which deals with the mind of individuals which by cultivation influence the individuals' thoughts in everyday life activities. Consequently, with the focus of this research on specific category of individuals, this set of people share a common, mainstream perspective about the baby-mama personality that they cultivated through consistent exposure to media messages (Vinney, 2019). This brings about the ambivalence disposition towards marriage and its commitments. The baby-mama identity as a new personality is prominent in within the ages of 18-40 as influenced by their conception of social reality based on age, gender, schooling, occupation, social and political orientation are all examples of demographic variables as evident in the film under study. The significance of this theory to the study is based on the role of media in the society as aforementioned.

Traditional and social media stories have the effect of cultivating common ideologies and fostering similar opinions among people who are typically culturally, socially, and politically diverse, regardless of geographical boundaries (Sawyer, 2011; Levine, 2012). In the issue of baby-mama personality in Nigeria, it is neither cultural nor tribe based, it is a trend acceptable to most young people of this century. It stems from the long-term effects of growing up and living with social and conventional media, which result in robust, resilient, and commonly circulated assumptions, photos, and conceptions that represent the media's underlying dimensions, structural characteristics, and interests (Signorielli, 1991).

That is to say, human development is socially situated and knowledge is constructed through interaction with others. Despite the fact that both genetically hereditary and social forces are at work at the same time, social constructionism does not dispute the impact of genetic inheritance, opting instead to focus on social effects on communal and individual life (Galbin, 2014). Every role in one's cultural development occurs twice: first on the social level and then on the individual level; first between people (inter-psychological) and then within the person (intra-psychological).

Advocacy

Under the African belief system, it is widely believed that children born out of wedlock face socio-cultural and socio-economic disadvantages during their lives (Brodolini, 2007). When compared to children born to married mothers, they have a three-fold chance of ending up in the lowest educational and occupational groups rather than the highest depending on the condition after birth these disadvantages are mostly associated with childhood occupational status, hence, loneliness and lack of socioeconomic support from the 'baby papa' in the cases of crashed expectation from the side of the 'baby-mama' as the more serious social consequences of the single-parent family status (J. M Smith, 1980; H. M. Mikkonen et al, 2019). Children born to single mothers who grew up without a male caregiver are more likely to fall into these groups. Other social variables, such as the mother's and potential male caregiver's occupational status, do not explain these correlations. This drawback, which begins early in life, is likely to have a significant impact on long-term health. Asabea (2016) opines that:

Now, it seems there is pride in being called 'a baby mama' than being 'a proud Mrs.' This situation mainly occurs when women force themselves on men who are

unwilling and not ready to be in any form of committed relationship with them. Young women of today proudly post pictures of themselves and their kids and caption them with #lifeofababymama #babymamabusiness; giiir!!! You need to wake up from your slumber and realize that being a baby mama isn't a pride or business; it means your life is a total mess. Stop making your life a circus by being and acting like a clown.

In the light of the above, this study uses Abudu's *Chief Daddy* to examine the new personality of baby-mama phenomenon in Nigeria, its causes and effects on the mother, father, and the child in particular and the society at large.

Synopsis of *Chief Daddy*

The movie has its setting in Nigeria. The movie is centred on the family and life of Chief Beecroft a.k.a Chief Daddy, a multi-Billionaire with one wife Kemi a.k.a Lady K Beecroft and Nike a baby-mama turned wife. He has five legitimate children and two illegitimate children by a baby-mama, Ekanem a.k.a Atarodo. The truth about Chief Daddy's legitimate and illegitimate children is made known to the immediate family after his death by his lawyer, Remi Castle. Immediately Chief Daddy passed on, the lawyer in accordance with the instruction he gave before his death, called every one of his children both legitimate and illegitimate. In the process of reading the codicil, the immediate family realized the number of children their father has. At the end every child was accepted as Chief Daddy's child and even the baby-mama, Ekanem, was accepted as a family as her baby's daddy instructed with some percentage of money and property allotted to her.

Discourse on *Chief Daddy*

This section of the study identifies and examines the actions, portrayals and allusions associated with baby-mama personalities inherent in the selected movie under study.

Remi Castle: My name is Remi Castle and I will be chairing this meeting. Good afternoon ladies and gent. I am not going to go into a condolence speech because we all know that chief... (*Enters an elegant lady with a young girl in her 20's*) As I was saying...

Lady K: No! No!! No Remi (*facing who just walked in*) What are you doing here? You don't even have the decency to keep away after his death? Get out of my house!

Aunty Ajoke: Eh! Eeh!! Eeeh!!! Kemi, Koyebeko!

Lady K: She is his Mistress!

Aunty Ajoke: Kemi, you have forgotten that you came in the same way when their mother (*pointing at TINU and TENI by her right hand*) was in her sick bed? So please.

Femi: Look Aunty Ajoke, obviously I am gonna disagree with your logic right now. Anyone who hasn't a child for my dad is illegitimate in my opinion. I am talking now as the one and only legitimate child of the family...

- Nike:** Excuse me! And who do you think she is (*pointing at the girl she walked in with*)?
- Femi:** She is my father's child?
- Teni:** Can't you see the resemblance?
- Lady K:** It is heartbreaking and beyond reason that I have just lost my husband and I am thrown into this circus, I will not take it! (*Stands up*) I will walk out of this meeting if this woman and her daughter do not leave here this minute... (*Enters EKANEM and two boys who walks straight to the table a secures a seat for herself*)
- Ekanem:** (*Moving in the direction of the boys*) Peter and Paul, come back here before I spank both of you
- Lady K:** And eeh... Who are you?
- Ekanem:** (*Turning towards the boys*) isn't that obvious?
- Aunty Ajoke:** Well, it is! You can see they look so much like my brother.

The response given above by Ekanem shows some level of baby-mama personality identity in Nigeria. The act of accepting Ekanem and her children into Chief Daddy's family in the conversation above by his Sister, Aunty Ajoke, gave birth to a new personality identity in the movie. In the first meeting of all members of the family, Nike presented the customary marriage certificate of herself and Chief Daddy before his death and this prompted everyone to tilt towards Ekanem who replies thus:

Ekanem: Okay o! In case anyone is about to ask me for my own legitimacy evidence... (*Turns towards her children*)

The gesture of her own legitimacy evidence are her two sons with Chief Daddy which brought no negative reactions and this action of hers reveals how the society views having a child for a man who is not legally married to you. This amoral act is presented by most people socially advocating that both parties are adults, forgetting the cultural decadence of some values as a result of Western influence to different worldview. The main aim is to have someone who takes care of their social, economic and political needs. Therefore, the researcher opines that there is an urgent need to re-educate by the means of sensitizing the younger generation that culture cannot be removed from the existence of man, that the importance attached to marriage in the African worldview is sacrosanct and one of the most important unit of any given people or society is upholding her rich cultural values. In the words of Ezeugwu (2019, p.4),

We need to search for the real value of self-worth and the need to always know the value of abstinence, mutual respect, restraint, self-control and a sense of direction which is fast being eroded by western ideas. The young ones must be made to understand that there is no more to manhood and motherhood than

sowing wild oats without feeling obligated to be permanent fixtures in the life of the children they beget. Our girls must know that being a woman is much more than big hips and breast enhancement or the easy money they at times receive from randy men and their boyfriends.

Therefore, in view of this, it is pertinent to state that children need to be loved and protected by their parents at all times without subjecting them to unnecessary rancor, bitterness and negative publicity and peer mockery. This devious and selfish attitudes of these set of people identified as baby-mamas are evident in the character of Ekanem when Justina asked her what she thinks about budget padding as regards to the individual responsibilities for the burial of her baby-daddy in the scene between Ekanem, Kemi and Justina as thus:

Justina: Hey! I suggest we make good use of this funeral responsibilities that we have been given. You know budget padding things. So we don't get loose in everything o. Since we are in the same boat...

Ekanem: Eeh! Wait! You and who?

Nike: You seriously have no manner.

Ekanem: You know honestly, I think you are in need of some home training. You little gold digger!

Nike: She really does!

Justina: (*laughing and pointing towards EKANEM*) coming from a 5k a-day red carpet hostess who steal her best friend's sugar daddy (*turns to KEMI*) and you, an apprentice fashion designer who was asked to deliver a dress to her Oga's client and ended up sharing her husband with her... at least for me, I work for Chief Daddy, designation-PA. (*She runs off*)

Ekanem: I don't blame you (*draws closer to KEMI*) but wait...em ..emm.. About that budget?

Nike: It is not such a bad idea.

Most 'wanna be' ladies (those who want to belong to the celebrity and popularity class) who give birth in Nigeria are those who are not married and apparently do not want to have babies but due to the incentives and other self-convincing reason such as the 'affluent pension plan'. Due to their little Africanness, several male Nigeria celebrities may not have outrightly denounced marriage in an interview or in the form of an essay, but their actions and various dispositions have intentionally or unconsciously supported the choice of baby-mama (Augoye, 2016; Abereoje, 2017). They have shown that marriage is like a prison in which one makes himself a captive to a particular male or female, and they are not ready to be locked in, since there is usually an opportunity to enjoy unlimited pleasure of promiscuity in their

different societies. This study maintains that there is need to curb this menace as Uchenna Azuka-Obiek (2013, p.117) rightly points out that:

The aggressive influence of Western culture has impacted so much on traditional family value in Nigeria. This coupled with increasing socio- economic demand on traditional family life and the attendant social complexities have worked to erode strong positive family values associated with traditional Nigerian families. Consequently, single parenting hitherto an aberration in the recent past is now gaining societal acceptance, but not without its negative tendencies.

This should be the fight for all for the restoration of the African culture that is gradually eroding. However, there is need for proper sensitization and awareness campaign for the younger generation on the disadvantages and menace that comes with being a baby-mama (Mugove, 2017). Men and women of the West may find it hard legalizing a relationship with a lover due to the huge alimony the woman is entitled to from the man's entire wealth and many 'gold-digging women' have used this opportunity to reap where they did not sow. However, that would not stimulate and motivate the spate at which a lot of our young people embrace the new identity of being a baby-mama or baby-daddy.

Conclusion

Beyond investigating, this study maintains that repeated exposure to media over time by cultivation has influenced the spate at which Nigerian youths embraced the baby-mama personality as a new form of identity. However, part of the negative effects of the baby-mama personality is the unfortunate fallout from a culture that no longer values marriage as a necessary commitment before baby making. The study presents to the teeming young generation that children begotten under the circumstance of baby-mama syndrome suffer one form of deficiency or another which they live with all through their lives, and it affects both the parent(s), child and invariably the society. Marriage is not a taboo and should not be treated with apathy as long as it is built on the foundations of understanding, financial discipline as well as the readiness of both parents to be responsible to their child or children. Therefore, the study recommends strengthening the marriage and family institutions to reduce warring factors and forestall the rate at which Nigerian youths embrace the baby-mama personality in recent times.

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