"In FIN We Stand": Identity and Ideological Representation of the Female IN (FIN) Facebook Group

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Abstract
This study examines the macro and micro structures that characterise the Female IN Facebook group. The data for the study comprise visitor's posts and comments on the Female IN Facebook page, and they are subjected to a corpus-based critical discourse analysis. The study finds that Female IN's posts construct a socially-shared womanist ideology. The identity constructed in this discourse presents females (in-group) at the receiving end of violence, exclusion and asymmetrical power relations enacted by the society (out-group). Also, ideological discourse structures are used by FIN to navigate interactions at both the micro and macro levels. The study defines the intentions of FIN as a Nigerian female social group, exposes certain gender injustices in the country, and emphasises the role of the Nigerian government in addressing societal crises.

Keywords: identity construction, ideology, representation, Female IN.

Introduction
As the world continues to grow, so does identity. Humankind constructs for itself different personalities, ideologies, values, beliefs and dispositions especially through the use of social media. The social media/Internet is now a networking and coordinating site for individuals and groups who wish to communicate freely and build online communities (Aminu and Chiluwa 4; Shirky 39-40). In the last few years, Facebook has become a forum that houses different activist platforms, networking sites and socio-political and civil engagements (Aminu and Chiluwa 4; Magwaro et al. 35-37). The result of this situation is the categorisation of individuals and social communities in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, politics, interest, occupation, nationality, and status. Gendered discourse characterises some of these platforms on Facebook, and one of such groups is Female IN (FIN). Female IN is a private Facebook group for Nigerian women of all social classes (upper, middle and lower classes) and age grades (young, teen or adult). It is also verified, and was established to provide a safe space for women in Nigeria to discuss and seek support on a variety of issues, including relationship struggles, health issues, grief and loss. Thus, this study seeks to examine the representations of self and other in the Female IN

Facebook group, and the salient ideological structures that define this group. This is to establish the macro and micro structures of the Female IN discourse.

The Concept of Identity Construction

Identity is not a controversial concept, yet it presents individual and collective ideological standpoints. Identity refers to one's self representation. As individuals, we have unique representations of ourselves which are both cognitively mediated and socially shared. Scholars have attributed identity with the notion of self, the behavioural patterns displayed in interpersonal interactions, and the process enacted, negotiated and co-constructed in interaction (Carr-Chellman and Levitan 4; Culpeper 13; Da Fina 206). This implies that identity is captured in what we think of ourselves and what others think about us. Identity constructs the unique characteristics of social actors and their activities in discourse, all of which are both cognitively and socially shared. Social actors are an embodiment of unique characteristics such as age, gender, and status. These characteristics classify these social actors into various groups and ideologies. van Dijk affirms that since people are categorised in various ways, there is therefore a general strategy in the social categorisation that focuses on specific identities (*Society* 66). Thus, a socio-cognitive approach to identity construction focuses on a self and other-categorisation in the formulation of social identities and groups. This categorisation is developed from personal and socially shared representations of interests, evaluation, emotions and other elements peculiar to personal history or current subjective experience (van Dijk, *Society* 8).

Identity construction refers to the ideological stances of individuals and social groups as manifested in text and talk. It encompasses and transcends personal self to include social self as a member of various groups with inter and intra-group perceptions, interests and interactions. However, this depends on the socially shared identities of people who categorise themselves as group members (van Dijk, *Society* 71). Identity construction is both abstract and dynamic, thus building up people into numerous group memberships. In other words, one person may have many social identities which are either learnt or acquired through interaction and discourse.

Identity construction and the place of gender form an integral part of discourse such as personal mails, academics, conflict studies, religion, media discourse, political discourse and gender studies. The study of various identity variables, language features, and narratives constructs females as inferiors, freedom fighters, tricky, and oppressed, while males are constructed as domineering (Oseghale 122-124; Al Graawi and Al Glezzey 13846; Winn and Rubin 406-411; Lamidi and Aboh 46). Also, an individual can construct a complex identity for him/herself based on his/her participation in socio-political and religious events, activities and practices (Aminu and Chiluwa 9-20; Chiluwa and Chiluwa 601-602; Chiluwa np; Melefa et al. 179; Montiel-McCann 6-7). These studies assert that certain aspects of our identity are constructed from our use of language, social membership and religious attitudes.

Nevertheless, few or no works have considered the identity of Female IN. It is believed that this group has been misrepresented, criticised and debased. In view of this, this group has limited its visibility on Facebook in the past three years, and it has resorted to its sister Facebook platform, "Woman with Her Own Money." Thus, this study examines how Female IN, through its Facebook posts, constructs the representations of self and other, foregrounds its ideology, presents its arguments and champions its struggle for change. It also examines the roles of specific ideological discourse structures within micro and macro levels' interactions.

Socio-cognitive Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis and Corpus Analysis
A socio-cognitive approach to CDA examines the reproduction of social phenomena through language. It is characterised by the discourse–cognition–society triangle. This approach claims that the relationship between discourse and society is cognitively mediated. Thus, discourse structures and social structures are distinct and can only be related with through the mental representations of language users either as individuals or social members (van Dijk, *Society* vii). In view of this, social interactions, social situations, and social structures can only influence text and talk through people's interpretations of such social environments.

The influence of discourse on social interactions and social structures is mediated through the cognitive processes of mental models, knowledge, attitudes and ideologies. Thus, CDA emphasises the role of context within both micro (face-to-face interactions) and macro contexts (groups, organisations and other abstract social structures such as social inequality). As van Dijk puts it, the **cognitive component** presents the different kinds of subjective and socially shared mental representations which influence and control discourse structures; the **social component** focuses on the micro and macro structures of power abuse and resistance; and the **discourse component** describes and explains how discourse is involved in the (re)production of power abuse, or is against such domination in the society ("Critical" 66-70; *Society* 7). However, for a more specific analysis of discourse structures, focus is placed on the schematic structure (identity, activity, etc.) of ideology which identifies social groups and their relations (van Dijk, "Discourse Analysis" 28-30).

CDA has been criticised for its over-subjective analysis of texts and arbitrary evaluation of ideology, as well as assigning ideological significance to contextual relations based on scanty evidence (O'Halloran 564; Flowerdew 179). CDA analysts are perceived as being biased in text analysis, interpretation and evaluation, especially if these analysts are a part of the text target audience they analyse. Thus, Paul Baker argues that CDA analysts draw on corpus linguistic models such as concordance, wordlist, keywords and collocation to reduce researcher's bias, enhance the circulation and distribution of discourses, and foster triangulation in research (10-15). With reliance on both quantitative and qualitative methods, research findings become empirical, descriptive and explanatory.

Methodology
The data for the study is a mini-specialised corpus. It is built from the visitor's posts of the Female IN Facebook page. These posts are selected because they can be assessed by both members and non-members. The group has 136 visitor's posts, and from these, 38 posts are purposively selected for the study. Also, 7 comments to 2 selected posts are also sampled for the study. In other words, only posts and comments that are relevant to the focus of the study are selected. These posts and comments are labelled P1 to P38 and C1 to C7 respectively. They are also converted into text form and assessed with AntConc 3.5.7 in order to obtain the total word count and the frequency of words exemplifying actor representation in the discourse. The results are also subjected to the process of normalisation, keywords and collocation analysis. The data have a total word count of 884 word types and 3214 word tokens. Also, specific italicised words in the selected posts are used to illustrate the emphases of the researcher during analysis.

Furthermore, van Dijk's socio-cognitive model is used to examine actor description, argumentation, legitimation, authority and vagueness that characterise the Female IN discourse. This model is complemented with corpus analysis in order to unveil more assumptions about language and society, and to give credence to the study.

Wordlist Analysis and the Ideological Significance

A wordlist is a list of all the words in a corpus, and the frequency of each word. These words are usually significantly frequent or infrequent, and they are the starting point for most corpus analysis. While the former is termed positive words, the latter is termed negative words (Evison 127). Female IN posts are characterised by these two forms. Having assessed the data with Antconc 3.5.7, and considered the frequency of words in the corpus and their Mutual Information (MI), the summary of significant words in the FIN discourse is presented below:

Significant Frequent (Positive) Words	**Significant Infrequent (Negative) Words**
Nouns: women, fin, woman, support, life, actions, empathy, community, husbands, sisters, society, compassion, voices, finsters, friends, people, wife, gender, human	**Nouns:** victim, condemnation, trauma, rape, men, distress, demands, pains, equality, perpetrators, Nigeria, Nigerian(s), man
Verbs: did, love, stop	**Verbs:** blame, control, make, caught, chase, hold, cheated, cheating, charge, condemned, lose, dying, address
Adjectives: who, which	**Adjectives:** toxic, distraught, unfaithful, tragic, emotional, safer
Adverb: when	**Adverbs**: recklessly
Pronouns: you, we, her, our, she, your, us	**Pronouns**: they
Articles: the, a, an	

Table 1: Summary of Significant Words in the FIN Discourse

The above keywords construct the institutional settings, activities and goals of FIN. The significant frequent keywords emphasise the organisational structure of the group, and it is marked by such words as "*women,*" "*fin,*" "*voice,*" "*woman,*" "*sisters,*" and "*finsters.*" These words construct members of this group as mostly females. Also, both the significant frequent and infrequent words emphasise the group's activities and goals. The selected infrequent options construct this group as victims of power abuse and oppression. This act has however resulted in physical and mental breakdown on the group. Moreover, this group's goals are constructed through the frequent nominal and verbal options of *empathy*, *compassion*, *love*, and *stop*. These words construct the expectations of this group as finding security and acceptance. However, the source of power abuse and oppression against this group is framed by some selected significant frequent words such as *society*, *Nigeria* and *Nigerian(s)*.

Actor Description

This refers to how social actors are mostly constructed or framed individually, collectively, negatively or positively. It is mostly achieved through the ideological structures of polarisation and pronouns. These structures help in emphasising the *us* vs. *them* argument. The dividing strategy that constructs the separationists as *we* and *us* positively frames them as women finding their voices in a hurting and unfavourable society. There is also the use of "*our*" in indicating the voice of this group. This is exemplified below:

P1: …7 years of finding *our* own voices. 7 years of creating space for the voices of *our* fellow women regardless of whether *we* agree with them or not...

C2: In FIN *we* stand

P5: With this move, *we* are taking what *we* started here for the past 6 years – amplifying women's voices – TO THE NEXT LEVEL.

P9: So go ahead *Sisters*! Celebrate with *us* by saying thank you to Heart Radio and Seneca women…

The above posts and comment present the description of the in-group as the focus of the narrative. This group utilises different elegant variations in representing themselves:

Linguistic Item	Word Token Frequency	Normalised Frequency
We	47	15
Us	19	6
Our	29	9
Women	33	10
FINsters	11	3
Sisters	14	4
Friends	11	3
Victim(s)	10	3
Ladies	2	0.6
Females	0	0

Table 2: Linguistic Variations for the In-group in the FIN Discourse

From the above table, FIN adopts linguistic items that project their members as mainly females. More specifically, there is the preference for the lexical word, "women" (33 occurrences/10ptw), as against "females" (0 occurrence/0ptw). This indicates that the group perceives itself as womanist rather than feminist.[1] The opening of each post is mostly signalled by fellow *FINsters*, or *Sisters* and *Friends*. The repetition of either of these items reiterates that the group is dominated by women and ladies who share similar ideologies. Also, the word *victim(s)* is used to construct the social status of these women within the wider Nigerian society. In the corpus, this word clusters/collocates with terms such as "*blame,*" "*demanding,*" "*passing judgement,*" "*dead woman,*" "*tragic situation,*" and "*got cheated.*" These word clusters/collocates construct a state of social domination, deprivation and oppression with women at the receiving end of such treatment. They also construct the perceived societal prejudice that women are mostly blamed for the evils that befall them. Thus, the polarised "*we*" and "*us*" are mainly used to clamour and reaffirm solidarity and oneness among members of

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[1] African womanism focuses on the realities and injustices in society in relation to race, class and gender, while feminism focuses on gender-related issues such as inequality, patriarchy, and intersectionality (Hudson-Weems 137-39)

this group. These pronominals are mostly followed by the pidginised verb "*stan*" (meaning "stand"). This expression embodies solidarity, support and unity. It also conveys a sense of shared commitment and mutual empowerment especially in the face of challenges (see P.30 below). The purpose of this ideology is to enable the female folk believe in one another and in their strength.

Moreover, *friends* occur 3 times in a thousand words, and it is used to construct their supporters who are not necessarily members of this group. These include fellow women with different ideologies and men who support their wives, sisters or female friends who are all members of this group:

> **P25**: When we see a man displaying his support for FIN, we should say a kind word and thank him for his support.
> **P32**: Our new FINster frame is an incredible identifier AND it is also public which means it is available for people who support our movement and to publicly show their support. This includes our men**.**
> **P30**: I see you! We *stan* all incredible women and men who support you

The above posts construct this group as not fighters of the opposite gender, rather, they believe in establishing and building voices for women. Thus, while FIN posts function as disclaimers, they also frame the group's inclusive ideology and opposition to a gendered ideology which situates Black women against Black men. One of the basic shared social constructs people have about feminists is that they revolt against male headship. However, this group's ideological attitude implicitly declaims this position as some FIN posts emphasise respect and deference for men especially those who appreciate and protect the females in their lives such as their sisters, wives, and mothers, and those who have struggled and protested for a better Nigeria such as victims of the End SARS' protest in 2020. Rather than see men as their ideological enemies, they clamour for their support as the women seek power change. Thus, this group identifies itself as disciples of womanism. To further emphasise the good things about us and de-emphasise the bad thing about us, this in-group adopts the strategy of self-glorification:

> **C1**: Finsters are bold… are strong… are unique… are smart… are intelligent… are loving… are caring… are beautiful.
> **C4**: FIN love, FIN care, FIN fearless, FIN motivate, FIN connect, FIN courage, FIN educate, FIN hug (sic)
> **P2**: Great congratulations to you *our visionary* Lola
> **P3**: When next you feel ashamed you don't know something, remember you're a FINster, and we can coach you.

The in-group portrays itself as a voice of change (see P5). They clamour for a collective change by adopting the plural pronominals and nominals in Table 2. They also construct their courage, boldness, friendliness, strength, honour, and love in their posts (see above excerpts). Furthermore, this group is marketed as being reputable and open to giving support to women (see P3). This act has the ideological effect of emotional appeal and persuasion which breeds excitement in belonging to this family. It also frames women in an ideology of service. Service here connotes women believing in and offering their voices, positions and views for others' survival, and not being sidelined or directly criticised for the evils that befall them.

The out-group on the other hand refers to the Nigerian Society. This group is variously referred to by the following pronouns and noun:

Linguistic Item	Word Token Frequency	Normalised Frequency
They	7	2
Them	5	2
Society	14	4

Table 3: Linguistic Variations for the Out-group in the FIN Discourse

From the above table, the in-group's agitation is against the Nigerian society and not the opposite gender. The polarised terms, "*they*" and "*them,*" are mostly used to refer to the Nigerian government and perpetrators of oppressions against women. The Nigerian society is negatively constructed as being composed of unsupportive government and Nigerians, rapist apologists and toxic evil perpetrators.

> **P1**: On *society blaming women* no matter what
> **P20**: … friendship with people who put us down and *toxic groups where the culture encourages us to be mean to others.*
> **P17**: There is no class of people *a rapist* won't commit the awful crime against because (sic) the urge to OVERPOWER another person – not the urge to have sex – is what leads a person to rape another. Rape is about power, not sex!
> **P32**: why is it that so many of us continue to place the immediate entertainment we get in *toxic places* and with *toxic people* over our comfort and success?

In their posts, the in-group adopts nominals (such as *rapist, toxic places, toxic people, Nigerians, society blaming women, victims blamers*) and evaluative metaphorical source domains (such as "*damaging so many hearts," "tragically separating so many innocent victims from joy," "the elephant in the room*") to frame the Nigerian society as an unsafe haven which threatens the well-being of the womenfolk. It projects a society with a failed government and judicial system. It also emphasises a society guilty of the killing and murdering of innocent lives, with the perpetrators being left with insincere apologies (P27 "*after damaging so many hearts… they start penning an apology*"). The Nigerian society is also framed as having cultural beliefs which stereotype and relegate some class of women (the poor, the sick, widows, single parents and divorcees) or make the society hostile to them. However, these cultural beliefs are not attached to the opposite gender. The in-group through its posts emphasises that the Nigerian society, through various terrorist groups and violent political turn-out of events in the country, promotes hostility against this class of women as against their male counterpart.

Also, the pronoun "*you*" is worthy of note. "*You*" (48 occurrences/15ptw) is mostly used to direct specific posts to both women who are group members, and the society. Out of these 48 occurrences, 28 occurrences are directed at women. In such situations, they are used with lexical items that convey encouragement, appreciation, and request for support, such as making comments and signing petitions (see P29). This act has the ideological implication of inciting women to perform certain actions. It also manipulates their preconceived cognitive process, which does not align with the group's positions.

> **P29**: *You* must stand your group, when as a woman you know your life's purpose.

On the other hand, "*you*" is used to question the societal attitude towards handling issues regarding women, and to delegitimate the society to take certain actions as they relate to women (see P38). The ideological effect of this is to emphasise the weak points and failures of

the society. This may however result in manipulating the positions and dispositions the reader may have of the Nigerian society.

> **P38**: … if *you* as a society do not develop the capacity to listen to women, how would *you* teach her to develop emotional control?

Argumentation

Argumentation presents the positions, intentions and beliefs of participants as well as relations between participants that are contextually based and controlled. It also serves as a domain of expressing ideological points of view which has the effect of manipulating the audience's positions, beliefs and knowledge. In the corpus, and to the left, the word "*women*" clusters with specific phrases such as "*a safer world for,*" "*support system,*" "*has not listened to,*" "*have done to prepare,*" and *"society does not believe.*" To the right, this word clusters with "*voice represents,*" "*develop emotional control,*" "*are still systematically losing to men,*" "*she is to blame,*" "*being robbed of,*" "*voices to,*" and *"voice is.*" These collocation items present FIN's self-serving arguments and goals which serve as the basis for its existence. It argues for a society that upholds the rights of women, and ends silence and oppression against them. It contests domestic abuse, physical and emotional violence, child abuse, and rape. In emphasising their positions, the in-group submits to the signing of petitions, asking members to share salient posts, and asking questions, from which the members' responses are used in building up subsequent posts (see P11 "…we're calling for #Justice for Uwa… share this…," P.22 "FINsters are signing this petition… if you agree with this petition and you signed, please type 'signed' in the comments").

FIN posts are mostly geared towards contests against asymmetrical power relations. They emphasise gender and political equality:

> **P23**: Leadership not for men alone. Give us a chance! Yes, we can!
> **P21**: Basic fairness does not have to be a gender issue but the reality that women are still systematically losing out to men when greed is centered is just wrong.
> **P24**: Each woman's voice represents an opportunity to establish her existence
> **P14**: We know for a fact that women who spend their time among people who are kind to them and encourage them have higher self-esteem, better relationships, more options and these women make more money, have bigger networks and generally lead happier and more fulfilling lives

The above posts frame the Nigerian political structure as selfish and greedy, since it subjugates the involvement and empowerment of women in full or partial politics. To the in-group, this has promoted the silence against women. An emotional gender appeal is therefore foregrounded in the repetition of the word "*woman/women*." The use of "*woman/women*" in contrast with "*men*" in their posts constructs an epitome of change, virtue, excellence and accountability. In other words, the Nigerian society which is being characterised by greed, corruption, violence and toxicity is ideologically framed as a product of men's leadership. Thus, while most FIN posts are capable of manipulating the perceived ideologies of its members and supporters, they are ideologically used in achieving the strategy of self-glorification. However, the ideology of reverting to the signing of petitions is to achieve an emotional appeal which results in many Nigerians (men and women) canvassing votes for women, appealing for gender equality, and supporting women's active influences and participation in politics.

Another major argument of FIN is campaigning for women's mental health. Through its posts, FIN argues for the emotional, physical and sexual well-being of the woman. In P.14 for example, this group argues for a kind community where women can have better self-esteem, relationships and favourable options. This, according to them, will enable women to be financially independent; to build bigger networks with people (both men and women); and to have a happy and fulfilled life. This presupposes that women should not be blamed for every evil that befalls them such as death of their husbands, verbal violence and child abuse. Rather, every society should work towards having a free, fair and better nation (see P1, P14).

The in-group also maintains that the incessant cases of sexual, physical and emotional abuse are not products of depression, ignorance, weakness or appearance, but power abuse. The perpetrators of these crimes are obsessed with the power to oppress and malign the woman or girl child, rather than sexual urge (see P17). This obsession has however become a part of the society which has no stringent measures to check this act. Thus, the in-group constructs the Nigerian society as implementing the politics of accommodation, as perpetrators only submit to verbal defence or social media apologies (P27 "*after damaging so many hearts… they start penning an apology. Should "shebi I said I am sorry naw" be enough to absolve a predator*"). It is therefore safe to assert that the in-group's arguments emphasise the superstructures of the group. They express and emphasise the underlying social practices of womanism which are equality, inclusion and democratic ideology. They also construct the explicit and implicit cognitive structures of the Nigerian society as enacting the social practices of violence and ideological exclusion.

Delegitimation and Authority

One of the products of argumentation is beckoning to appropriate authorities or delegitimating certain actions. FIN posts are used to emphasise that the actions of specific personalities in the country are inappropriate i.e. they have no right to engage in what they say or do. This is the more reason this group resorts to petition signing and public revolt. These discursive strategies unveil the inhumane act of some Nigerians and sects, such as the perpetrators of Uwa's rape and murder, Bamise's kidnap and murder, and the death of the 2-year-old Cherish Omadike as a result of her teacher's floggings. To reinforce their public revolt, the in-group adopts hashtags as exemplified below:

P33: #charge them
P28: #Justice for Uwa.
        #victim blamer

The above posts emphasise the role of the Nigerian government in exposing and punishing illegality and crimes in the nation. Also, reference to these victims and their oppressors, while campaigning for a change in asymmetrical power relations and oppression against women, is used to achieve evidentiality as claims are supported with examples. Other examples include the Nigerian woman who died in the course of pursuing her husband who she found with a side chick, and a South-African man who had a similar experience. In both cases, the woman was blamed for either killing herself or for the death of her husband. Thus, this group speaks on behalf of female victims and in the process calls for solidarity from its members and readers. The in-group also emphasises the prejudicial negative representation of the out-group, and frames the in-group as a representational voice of women in the Nigerian society. The latter constructs a positive representation of the in-group by establishing and reaffirming the identity of this group as an anti-rape movement.

Conclusion

This study investigates the representations of self and other within the Female IN discourse, and establishes the ideological structure of this group. It underscores how language reflects identities and ideologies in gender discourse, particularly within Female IN group. It highlights the group's agency in shaping its members' lives and creating a collective voice, despite facing violence, exclusion and asymmetrical power relations. Also, other ideological discourse structures of argumentation, delegitimation, and authority are used by the group to control interactions at both micro and macro levels.

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