

Benevolent sexist valuation of lobola in contemporary Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Extant literature on the association between benevolent sexism and women's identity reconfiguration in the context of lobola or bride price valuations has continued to attract fervent interest among scholars and practitioners in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular. Although there has not been consensus on both the socio-cultural and economic constructs of the nature and significance of lobola, the study on which this paper is based extends previous scholarly works particularly by Chisango et al. (2022) and Vengesayi (2018) in terms of how lobola (i.e. bride price) is being determined and practised in modern African cultures. The study acknowledges that apart from the predicted association between benevolent sexism and bride price, there was also a link between perceptions of a woman's morality and physical attractiveness (operationalised as morality-physical attractiveness), and scale of lobola pricing. The hypotheses were tested with a Zimbabwean sample ($n = 405$; mean age = 42.20, $SD = 11.15$). Results provided support for the hypotheses, with the effect of main importance being that benevolent sexism mediated the relationship between morality-physical attractiveness and lobola pricing. Results are further discussed in line with ambivalent sexism theory and their wider implications. The study conclusion reinforces other studies that found that valuation of lobola was not only driven by economic imperatives but could be a form of heteronormative discourse signalling symbolic violence that undermines gender equality and ultimately, women's emancipation.