Journal of Gender and Power

Journal of Gender and Power is aimed at providing an international forum for discussing various issues and processes of gender construction. It is a scholarly, interdisciplinary journal, which features articles in all fields of gender studies, drawing on various paradigms and approaches. We invite scholars to submit articles and reviews reporting on theoretical considerations and empirical research.

Journal of Gender and Power is published by Faculty of Educational Studies,
Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan (Poland).

Wersja pierwotna czasopisma: drukowana

Opracowanie komputerowe okładki: K. & S. Szurpit

Zdjęcie na okładce: DeltaWorks/Kohji Asakawa/Pixabay

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BOOK AND JOURNAL REVIEWS

Editor's Preface

I was certain that the Journal of Gender and Power's next issue would be free of pandemic reality. Unfortunately, I was wrong. There has been a growing number of coronavirus cases and more deaths among women and men. It seems that the world is in medical and cultural trauma. Millions of people have moved their lives into digital reality. We have experienced online work, education, conferences, medical advice and an increasing number of online relationships. Empty football stadiums, beaches and restaurants. More violence, including gender violence in crowded flats, more fear and depression. On the other, we have seen the enormous efforts and dedication of doctors and nurses to help ill or dying patients. I do not have an optimism bias when assessing the present state of affairs and the pandemic's nearest future. I just feel enthusiastic about the next year of humankind existence. I truly believe that it will get better—not worse. Thus, I chose perhaps surprising cover picture for this Journal of Gender and Power's issue.

I wanted the cover to be full of bright colours and optimism. I wanted it to feel like spring. With this cover I wanted to express the hope of imminent end to the pandemic. Thousands of research have been conducted and thousands of articles have been published, also in the context of gender, since the last issue. Therefore, we do not concentrate on that subject in this one. Instead, we continue our interest in more classic phenomena and difficulties.

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ARTICLES

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Exploring the Overrepresentation of Black Male Students in Special Education: Causes and Recommendations

ABSTRACT. An overrepresentation of Black male students identified as having disabilities is pervasive in American schools. This troubling reality may be the result of disconnects between Black males and their White teachers. Racial differences likely contribute to the high number of Black males referred for programs for students with disabilities. This paper explores the overrepresentation of Black male students identified as having disabilities and recommendations for supporting their success.

KEYWORDS: overrepresentation, special education, disability

An overrepresentation of Black male students identified as having disabilities has been pervasive in American schools for decades (Skiba et al., 2016). Compounding this problem is that the majority of American teachers, including teachers for students with disabilities, are White (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). Overrepresentation as having disabilities occurs when any specific group of students is identified as having disabilities at rates that are disproportionally larger than their representation in the total school population. (Artiles et al., 2010). One reason behind this troubling reality may be disconnects between Black males and their White teachers. Racial differences, cultural differences, and differing behavioral norms likely contribute to the high number of Black males referred for placement in programs for students with disabilities (Gatlin & Wilson, 2016; Obiakor, Beachum & Harris, 2010). This paper explores the overrepresentation of Black male students identified as having disabilities and recommendations for supporting their academic success.

Risks of Inappropriate Identification of Disabilities

In the United States "special education" refers to specialized instruction utilized to educate students with disabilities. While special education encompasses services to provide academic and emotional supports to students with disabilities, there are risks when students are placed in segregated, restrictive settings away from their peers without disabilities (Artiles et al., 2010; Bean, 2013; Linton, 2015). Artiles et al. (2010) ask if the promises of, and benefits from, special education are actually delivered. For students who are referred for special education, success is measured when supports are in place and when general education inclusion is provided with the appropriate amount of special education support (Gatlin & Wilson, 2016; Morgan et al., 2017; Obiakor, Beachum & Harris, 2010). While access to the general education curriculum varies from student to student, the amount of time a student is restricted to segregated special education settings is a hindrance to the student's academic and emotional well-being (Morgan et al., 2017).

Blanchett (2009) puts forth the hypothesis that Black students in the United States are being re-segregated because of their disproportionate placement in special education programs. She contends that students who have little to no exposure to general education curriculum are being placed at a disadvantage compared to their peers without disabilities. Students who spend the majority of their day in special education classrooms miss academic instruction and social interaction in contrast with students who spend their days general education classrooms and are therefore placed at an academic and social-emotional disadvantage (Artiles et al., 2010). Additionally, students placed in segregated special education settings may experience the negative stigma of being in special education and losing the opportunity to experience general education. Special education, for students who are not truly in need of special education services, are at a risk of leaving high school without sufficient skills needed to be successful as an adult and are also at risk of not achieving their potential because of the differences in academic rigor between special education and general education classrooms. Special education is society's response of an individual being different, yet the individual's self-image may begin to reflect this imposed label (Golds & Richards, 2012; Bean, 2013; Linton, 2015).

Overrepresentation of Black Male Students

Educational scholars and stakeholders question whether the overrepresentation of Black males as having disabilities is an issue of misjudging culture, or an issue of racism and a violation of the students' civil rights (Artiles et al., 2010). Racism is theorized to occur in schools when teachers and administrators use special education services to place students into highly restricted settings instead of engaging in targeted attempts to remediate students' academic achievement and/or behaviors that do not conform with behaviors considered acceptable by the school—schools that are staffed by majority White teachers and administrators (Gatlin & Wilson, 2016; Obiakor, Beachum & Harris, 2010). Instead of providing effective interventions while the students remain in the general education setting, some teachers may believe that placing students into a restrictive setting will benefit students who are struggling.

Students who look differently, speak differently, and behave differently in comparison with the White, middle-class norms of most schools throughout the United States, are at risk of misidentification as having disabilities and this is especially true for Black males (Ford & Russo, 2016). Black males are also at risk of inappropriate placement into classes for remedial instruction, and grade level retention may also occur (Talbert-Johnson, 2001; Mandell et al., 2008). Black male students are left disenfranchised, due to a lack of being included in general education practices and may also be disempowered due to limited educational opportunities.

Subjective Referral Processes

The biases and subjectivity of special education referral assessments are theorized to be linked to factors of misplacement for students of color in special education programs. According to Harry & Anderson (1994), assessments that are normed on the White majority and that include test items chosen from the cultural experience of this majority are inevitably biased in favor of that majority and therefore biased against minorities, whose cultural experiences are distinctly different (Obiakor, Beachum & Harris, 2010). Harry & Anderson (1994) explain that the special education referral process is biased because it places students whose cultural

and social experiences do not include the kinds of knowledge and skills tested by these instruments at a disadvantage. If special education screenings and referral processes are skewed in favor of the majority—White individuals—being properly assessed for special education services, then students of color are at risk for being misplaced in special education. In simple terms, Black male students may be misplaced in special education because they do not fit White cultural norms. Special education services must reflect a student's need and abilities and if they do not, then the student is not being properly served and the public school system is not meeting the student's needs per federal legislation (Linton, 2015; Gatlin & Wilson, 2016).

Biases related to clinical judgement may be a factor of inappropriate disability designation. Gatlin and Wilson (2016) explain that the categories in which Black males are more likely to be diagnosed—specific learning disability, mild intellectual disability, and emotional disturbance—depend on clinical judgement which consists of opinions informed by those conducting the assessments. The aforementioned disability categories are determined by the observations of school personnel, clinical judgement, and other standardized and formal measures. However, this is problematic as it is difficult to measure behavioral differences in a truly objective manner. These categories of disability are referred to as socially constructed disabilities because of the subjective nature of their diagnosis as opposed to categories such as visual or hearing impairment whose diagnosis is objective and easily discernable to others. Contrasting the categories visual or hearing impairments, disabilities such as specific learning disability, mild intellectual disability, and emotional disturbance are significantly more dependent on judgement and biases (Obiakor, Beachum & Harris, 2010). Assessments developed by White individuals may contribute to the risk of Black male students' placement in special education programs (Harry & Anderson, 1994; Obiakor, Beachum & Harris, 2010). Likewise, the teacher referring the student for special education services is subject to biases, prejudices, and stereotypes reflective of the school culture—typically White middle-class. In making a referral, teachers who belong to the majority group in society may be influenced by what is considered "normal" based on standards set by White culture. Questions and concerns have understandably been raised regarding possible misidentification of Black males for special education resulting from discriminatory practices, prejudices, or implicit biases (Artiles et al., 2010).

Cultural differences. Norms in White, middle-class American culture can differ from those from Black culture **(**Harry & Anderson, 1994; Talbert-Johnson, 2001). However, it is a larger issue than a cultural difference or a cultural disconnect. Features of Black males' behavioral profile may aggravate White female teachers' negative view of that student population (Harry & Anderson, 1994). Subsequently, racial prejudice and classification for students with disabilities begins at the initial stage of classroom referral (Woodson & Harris, 2018).

Black male students may be more frequently referred if general education teachers—again, predominately White and middle class—lack experience and training working with Black students. According to United States federal legislation, prior to making the special education referrals, teachers must attempt other forms of interventions; however, the interventions employed are often punitive: detention, expulsion, or suspension (Obiakor, Beachum & Harris, 2010). Teachers often prefer students who demonstrate a narrow repertoire of socially acceptable behaviors, academic performance, language, etc. without considering differences of culture, race, or ethnicity (Harry & Anderson, 1994; Neal et al., 2003). While differences of culture should be celebrated and viewed as opportunities to enhance learning for all, behavior and cultural differences may be viewed as being abnormal, and may lead to students from diverse cultures being inappropriately placed special education programs (Robinson & Norton, 2019).

The public school system has not functioned as an unbiased system for students of color or cultural backgrounds that differ from White Americans (Irvine, 2012; Bean, 2013), and cultural biases may play an unintentional role in the special education referral process (Mandell et al., 2008; Obiakor, Beachum & Harris, 2010). To reverse this trend, tools for assessing and diagnosing behavioral disorders such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder should be screened for cultural bias prior to finalizing the diagnosis (Mandell et al., 2008; Obiakor, Beachum & Harris, 2010). Educators and administrators must understand and reflect on their own implicit biases, understanding the critical role they play in the special education referral process and the potential detriments on students.

Linton (2015) describes the behaviors of Black male students, how the behaviors differ from White, middle-class norms, and how the behaviors could lead incorrectly to the identification of behavioral disorders. Linton studied behavioral reported from Black male students and parents and how the ratings contrasted the teachers' ratings of the students. While the

teachers rated Black male students' behavior as being very challenging, the students rated their own behavior as not challenging. This could be interpreted as the students being lenient in their perceptions of their own behavior; however, the parents' behavioral rating scales matched those of their children. These inconsistencies signal that teachers will benefit from an increased awareness of differences in behavioral expectations.

White teachers may, without knowing, may also have a negative predisposed outlook on Black students based on the way they talk and (Obiakor, Beachum & Harris, 2010). Many Black individuals in America speak a dialect of English—African American Language—that is different than "standard" English typically spoken by White Americans, and patterns of language learning and usage of Black students is often undervalued in schools (Obiakor, Beachum & Harris, 2010; Robinson & Norton, 2019). For Black males, their native dialect can be perceived as hostile and threatening according to White school culture. This perception of aggressive language can have a powerful influence on a teacher's opinion: it may lead to a special education referral from the general education teacher. It is imperative that general education teachers, along with special education teachers understand that African American Language has differing semantics and accents, and when large numbers of students are referred to special education for differences in dialect, then that group of students is at risk for experiencing negative outcomes as a result of an inappropriate public education (Irvine, 2012). Differences in dialect may be partnered with differing norms related to externalizing behavior between White and Black individuals. White teachers may not be knowledgeable about cultural norms related to behavior and may misinterpret behavior from black students as aggression, hyperactivity, or defiance, leading to high numbers of referrals to special education (Bean, 2013).

Differences in behavior may be linked to the family income. In the United States, a disproportionate number of Black individuals and families have significantly lower incomes in comparison with White individuals and families, and larger percentage of Black families live in poverty in comparison with White families (Poverty USA, 2020). Living in poverty is associated with decreased neighborhood safety (United States Housing and Urban Development, 2016), which has been linked to externalizing behavior among students (Kim et al., 2019). Additionally, Black students who experience trauma at an early age are more likely to demonstrate challenging externalizing behaviors in comparison with their white peers (Artiles et al., 2010; Bean, 2013; Linton, 2015). Teachers may perceive be-

havior as challenging from their Black male students and determine that a special education referral is the best course of action rather than seeking other sources of support and or interventions for the student. The cultural differences between Black male students and their White teachers, in combination with the subjectivity of assessments, may result in special education misplacement (Obiakor, Beachum & Harris, 2010).

Families of Black male students. The parents of Black male students in special education often feel like that they are not aware of the special education processes or the positive impact of special education. Irvine (2012) describes a large set of parents from one school who reported thinking that their children were placed in special education because their students were low achieving. They also reported the belief that their children's teachers were more concerned with the class's over test average rather than with individual student performance. The parents reporting holding a belief that once their students were placed into special education, they were not allowed to leave the program.

Special education teachers as well as general education teachers may have misconceptions about Black parents and the support they provide their children (Irvine, 2012). Teachers who admit to believing in racial stereotypes, especially the belief that academic underachievement is inherently associated with Black males. Such deficit-oriented thinking can make it quite challenging for the parents of Black male students to advocate for their children who are disproportionately represented in special education (Mandell et al., 2008).

Recommendation 1: Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices

Teachers, typically the individuals to initiate the special education referral process, must become experienced and given specific training regarding culturally responsive academic and behavioral supports and interventions for students from diverse cultures (Linton, 2015; Gatlin & Wilson, 2016; Woodson & Harris, 2018). Teachers who are culturally responsive interact frequently with the families about their students' progress (Irvine, 2012). Instead of the teacher independently trying to plan instruction for each student, a culturally responsive teacher learns about the student's culture and environment, then uses that knowledge as one tool to guide their instruction. Group work and group activities support a culturally responsive teaching method. Research suggests that Black male students

work well during group work activities with carefully constructed learning targets, modeled behavioral expectations, and high expectations. Racial segregation and ethnically homogenous groupings should always be avoided and teachers should allow flexibility and cooperation when developing groups (Irvine, 2012; Morgan et al., 2017).

Teachers must be provided with targeted training in working with diverse students (Irvine, 2012; Alter, Walker & Landers, 2013). New teachers in particular feel inadequately trained to teach culturally diverse students and to deliver culturally responsive pedagogy. General education teachers play a significant role in the special education referral process; therefore, it is imperative to have teachers who are culturally sensitive and have proper training. White female teachers, who are a majority of America's teaching population, may be unfamiliar with or insensitive toward Black male student experiences (Harry & Anderson, 1994). Not only should more teachers be properly trained to effectively teach students who are culturally diverse, but they should also receive training on the detrimental effects students experience when they are inappropriately placed in special education (Bean, 2013).

Teachers must familiarize themselves with cultural differences and the understanding that assessment and referral processes are often biased. Patton (1998) explains that inherent in the processes of observing, identifying, and interpreting worth and behavior and reaching a determination of deviance is a culturally bound frame of reference on the part of the observer. Historically, these processes have not displayed an adequate amount of empathetic understanding of, and respect for, 'other.' It must be understood that special education is not always a support system, and according to Blanchett (2009), general education teachers must be provided with targeted training in the use of culturally responsive academic and behavioral interventions prior to requesting special education referrals. Doing so may prevent special education programs being utilized as placement for students who do not truly have disabilities. Likewise, as teachers often report behavioral challenges from Black male students, there is an urgent need for schools to provide adequate training with ongoing in-class modeling and corrective feedback when necessary. Teachers need a plethora of different skills to adequately meet the academic and behavioral needs of students from culturally diverse backgrounds (Talbert-Johnson, 2001).

Communication, collaboration, and reflecting on academic and behavioral supports provided to Black males students in special education are

all effective support strategies. Positive relationships between teachers and students is important for the success of Black male students (Irvine, 2012). Gatlin and Wilson (2016) found that promoting success paired with collaboration and communication between student, teacher, and parents is one of the most effective ways to help Black students student to succeed. Teacher communication with families and observation of students in their communities and home settings can enhance teachers' understanding of processes that will support diverse students' learning (Irvine, 2012; Gatlin & Wilson, 2016). Not only does communicating with the student's family help the teacher gain a better understanding of cultural backgrounds, but it also strengthens the relationship between student and teacher, and creating positive relationships is imperative.

Recommendation 2: Recruit Black Teachers

Recruiting more in higher numbers of Black teachers would effectively support Black male students. Researchers and advocates have frequently noted the imbalance of White female teachers in contrast with diverse student populations (Fish, 2019; Scott, Trainor & Bettini, 2019). Teachers of color can advocate for students of color and they also have a greater understanding of the culture of diverse students. Schools that have high percentages of teachers of color have lower rates of disciplinary referrals for students of color, and teachers of color perceive unexpected behavior as less problematic than White teachers (Fish, 2019). Black male students who are taught by a teacher of color have higher grades test scores and overall grades. Scott, Trainor and Bettini (2019) found that teachers of color have a better understanding of the behavior of students of color and the students' experiences outside of school, leading to a greater connection and relationship between teacher and student. In order to address the cultural disconnect, Black teachers can bridge the proverbial gap and serve as role models.

Black teachers can positively influence all students as they provide important contributions to the school, enriching both the environment and the curriculum (Talbert-Johnson, 2001; Fish, 2019). More Black teachers would increase the understanding and awareness of the behaviors that often result in Black males being referred for special education. Likewise, Black teachers can advocate for academic and behavioral strategies and interventions for Black students. Increasing the number

of Black teachers in the United States should not be a dream, but a plausible outcome for providing equality in the public education system (Talbert-Johnson, 2001).

Recommendation 3: Culturally Responsive Screening Practices

The overrepresentation of Black makes as having disabilities would likely decrease if culturally sensitive screenings and evaluation practices were utilized (Morgan et al., 2017). According to Dizon et al. (2013), school psychologists who are involved in special education referral processes should utilize multiple forms of data prior to determining an eligibility. According to Mandell et al. (2008), in order to create an assessment that is culturally sensitive and standardized, collaboration between mental health and education systems may lead to a more effective approach towards evaluating Black male students for special education services.

Recommendations for Black Males Identified with Disabilities

Some scholars and other stakeholders theorize that restrictive special education classrooms further segregate and disenfranchise Black males from the school community (Harry & Anderson, 1994; Artiles et al., 2010; Obiakor, Beachum & Harris, 2010), and that the risk of being ostracized and restricted from general education curriculum may negatively impact the students (Irvine, 2012; Gatlin & Wilson, 2016). Black males, if properly assessed and determined to be eligible services, should be supported in special education while being provided access to general education settings to the greatest extent possible. Labeling students as having a disability and then placing them in a restrictive setting is not a support system (Golds & Richards, 2012; Linton, 2015).

Special education, if not supporting a student's needs, is solely a restrictive environment. Special education faculty and staff must be reflective of placement of students and examine how instruction is designed for students with disabilities. All students will benefit from access general education curriculum and peers without disabilities, and access must be provided for all students. Obiakor et al. (2012) emphasize that all students with disabilities must have access to "meaningful, rigorous general educa-

tion curricula; and special education is specifically designed instruction to assist them in maximizing their highest potential" (p. 478). Special education programs that are supportive with high expectations for all students and that include appropriate access to general education settings should be the primary goal for all students with disabilities—a stark contrast to restrictive, secluded environments.

Gatlin and Wilson (2016) explored the experiences of a group of high-achieving Black students placed in special education and found that three overarching themes resulted from the interviews and observations: high expectations, support, and organization. Reflecting on these themes may begin a conversation amongst special education programs and school administration. The Black male students in the study did not feel sufficiently challenged, reported a lack positive peer relationships, and had a misunderstanding of their next steps moving forward after high school, resulting in a high frequency of dropping out of high school. Therefore, it is important to establish high level of expectations, despite the student's label as having a disability. Our goal must be to have Black males students be competitive in society. When students are not placed in academic settings with the intention of the student thriving, they are disenfranchised from receiving opportunities of growth and empowerment (Irvine, 2012). Special education and general education teachers who support students with disabilities must have a variation of teaching strategies for each student's unique learning style, and take into students' perspectives (Fish, 2019).

Conclusion

With the overrepresentation of Black males in special education, educators in the United States must take action. While this process may be a long process, teachers can be more proactive with their approaches. Teachers, especially White teachers, need to be effectively trained and prepared to teach students from diverse cultural backgrounds (Obiakor, Beachum & Harris, 2010; Alter, Walker & Landers, 2013). Instead of continuing to ostracize and create barriers, students from different cultural backgrounds should be celebrated and their differences should be considered and appreciated.

Educators across the United States may lack an understanding of the myriad of often complex factors that lead to the overrepresentation of Black males in special education (Patton, 1998). Therefore, school site and

school district administrators, must advocate to reverse structural changes that create a divide between diverse students and general education. The societal, cultural, and behavioral context of the American educational system, founded in White middle-class norms, system must be adjusted (Artiles et al., 2010). Education in America can no longer be a system that promotes ostracizing and 'othering,' but rather a system where Black males are supported appropriately.

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Desired Traits in Mate Selection:
A Survey of Hispanic-American Female Students[1]

ABSTRACT. Previous research on mate selection has primarily focused on long-term relationships, i.e. spouse selection. Literature suggests that factors and traits playing a significant role in choosing a short-term partner have been mostly overlooked in mate-selection research. The present study, with a sample of 115 Hispanic-American females attending a public university, attempts to determine if there are significant differences in reported preferences when looking for short-term partners versus when looking for a long-term partner. The subjects individually listed their preferences for short-term partners from a list of traits generated by previous research. The participants were then put into groups consisting of five females in each group. Group members discuss their preferences among themselves and generate a list of desirable traits in a long-term partner. This paper reports the findings of the survey in two specific categories. It separates the desired traits for short-term and long-term partners, and it presents the differences in preferences based on relational status, i.e., single or in a relationship.

KEYWORDS: mate selection, casual dating, courtship & culture, marriage, interpersonal relationships

Introduction

In most Western, individualistic, cultures, individuals marry the person they love hoping to raise a family. Some marriages work for decades while in others, love and initial physical attraction deteriorate after a few years and marriages fail. Dissatisfied individuals either seek to dissolve their marriages or may engage in extra-marital liaisons. In many Western cultures, sexual infidelity and "keeping a mistress or a lover" are accepted practices. A majority of the casualties of failed marriages often remarry. In collectivistic cultures, marriages are not between two indi-

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[1] The author did not receive any funding for this research. There was no conflict of interest in conducting the research.

viduals but two families[2]. The individuals are raised not to think only of themselves but for the entire family. The purpose, however, remains that the couple will have children and raise a family. It is anticipated that, in time, love will evolve between the two people. In collectivist cultures, with or without love, some marriages work, some don't. Many of the Eastern cultures also condone polygamy and concubines by simply looking the other way.

In the days of cave dwellers, the males sought females with physical features best suited for childbearing and child-rearing. Females looked for males that showed a promise for protecting the offspring and a willingness to teach the children to fish, hunt, and become self-reliant. Biological characteristics were the basis for mate selection. It was simple and based on practical concerns.

With the emergence of social systems and religions, societies shifted the natural mate selection process to fit new criteria established and enforced by a new social institution and organized religions. Old requirements of physical ability, endurance, and strength were replaced by values rooted in social status, wealth, political standing, and beauty. In almost all cultures, the concept of family, i.e., a social institution, became closely woven into the institution of marriage—an institution that reinforced the church and religious values.

Mate Selection Models

Dating, on college campuses, has become a lost social script, giving way to a culture of hookups, friends-with-benefits, and having sex with strangers or acquaintances instead of seeking committed partners. According to a recent study between 60 and 80 percent of North American college students admit to having had a hookup; 63 percent of college men

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[2] The notion of an arranged marriage, as it's still commonly practices in many parts of the Eastern world is not particularly unique to India or China. The royal families in Europe, as well as in, China and India, married for political and economic gains, and to avoid wars. Some of those marriage arrangements worked; many did not. Shakespeare's histories of Western royalty are peppered with tales of arranged marriages and infidelity. The Mughal Emperor, Shah Jahan, who supposedly build the Taj Mahal for his beloved queen, had seven wives and several concubines/maids.

and 83 percent of college women say they would prefer a traditional relationship (Khazan, 2014).

From the primitive methods of the cave dwellers to the present-day speed dating and hooking, numerous mate selection theories and models have emerged. A brief description of some of the significant theories is presented here. According to evolutionary psychologists and Natural Selection theorists, females were drawn to males that could provide for the family and teach the offspring to become self-reliant. Males sought females that seemed healthy enough for having, caring for, and raising the children (Buss & Kenrick, 1998; Looy, 2001; Heath et al., 2014).

The socio-economic conditions and opportunities, especially, in the Western world have impacted the priorities and preferences for men and women when choosing short-term as well as long-term companions. Thus far, the social scientists, biologists, and behavioral economists have studied mate-selection in regard to marriage. Casual dating and short-term relationships have only recently been considered a social phenomenon deserving of serious academic consideration.

The present study focuses on the preferences for mates of the Hispanic-American college-aged females—women aspiring to achieve professional success as well as personal goals that may or may not include having and raising children; that may elect to remain single or marry once they have attained their career goals.

Below are brief descriptions of several mate-selection theories that have guided previous research.

Social Homogamy theory suggests that men and women are attracted to people from similar social and cultural backgrounds, i.e., people tend to marry within their race, religion, socio-economic group and apply similar standards of beauty (Cloninger, 1980).

Ideal Mate theory claims that people have an unconscious image of an ideal mate and as soon as one comes across a person that fits one's ideal, one feels a strong attraction. Love, at first sight, can often be explained through the ideal mate theory. This theory also asserts that since most people use their parents as role models, people tend to choose partners that are similar, in appearance and traits, to their parents. Hence, men marry women that remind them of their mothers and women seek men that remind them of their fathers. Both behaviors, respectively known as the Oedipus complex and Medea complex are demonstrations of Ideal Mate theory at work.

Social Exchange theory asserts that since people can fall in love with different people, most people look for a person who would make an equal contribution toward tangible and intangible rewards in a long-term association. Both parties are expected to bring equal amounts to the table (Sprecher, 1998).

The developmental theory holds that people try different courtships and the one that seems to fit a couple's needs the best has the best chance of succeeding (Surra, 1990; Houts, Robins & Houston, 1996; Surra & Hughes, 1997).

The feminist theory states that marriages between older and more established men and younger women occur for two reasons. Firstly, older men have greater resources, are better able to provide financial security and a better lifestyle for their younger wives. Secondly, men with traditional patriarchal values find it easier to maintain a dominant status with younger women that have fewer resources (Eagly & Wood, 1999; Eagly, Wood & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2004).

Market Experience theory compares mate selection to an open market situation where buyers and sellers look for the best bargains by comparing costs and benefits of all available alternatives. Applied to mate selection, the market experience is the dating practice where individuals learn about potential mates through the first-hand experience before making their long-term partner selection.

Free-Choice Mate Selection theory holds that attraction is the strongest factor in relationship formation. The first stage in the formation of a relationship is attraction. If person A is not attracted to person B, not much more is likely to develop. When people are attracted to each other, they pursue a relationship; they may fall in love; they may get married (Kauth, 2000).

Like-Attracts-Like Selection. Not unlike social homogamy, this theory proposes that people from similar socioeconomic status raised in the same neighborhoods (physical proximity) are more like to meet, interact, date, and eventually create marital bonds (Buss, 1989).

There appear to be two common threads in all the above theories.

1. People do use some sort of a criterion in making mate selection.
2. These criteria are culture-specific.

The second factor explains the different rituals, traditions, mores, and customs practiced by different cultures in condoning and condemning selection methods.

Related Research

Scholars around the globe have studied the rationale and reasons in human mate selection and attraction. E.g., Buss (1989) conducted a meta-analysis of 37 samples from 33 countries to determine the role of six factors in mate selection—earning potential, ambition, industriousness, youth, physical attractiveness, and chastity. In other projects, researchers studied—for example—the differences in ages when men and women chose to get married, analyzed the cross-cultural dimensions of passionate love and sexual desire in mate selection, compared mate preferences in the US and Singapore, explored the information-seeking behavior of Generation Y students. Moreover, they reported on the freedom of making mate selection, and the importance of different values in Chinese and American cultures, as well as focused their attention on the mate selection of children of the immigrants in the US. compared the dating behavior of white American and young Filipino women, and on intercultural marriages.

The present study reports on the self-declared preferences for mates by Hispanic-American College students. Three reasons prompted the study. Firstly, the mate selection aspect of this population has thus far remained relatively unexamined. Secondly, the Hispanic-American college-age population represents first-generation immigrants or second-generation immigrants, and it is primarily made up of a generation known as Generation Y. A group that, although, has been studied widely by marketing scholars, sociologists, and behavioral psychologists, has remained neglected regarding its mate selection practices.

When it comes to the selection criteria for short-term relationships and casual dating, the researchers have looked at male preferences. A social double-standard prevails: a man seeking a short-term relationship is acceptable; a woman seeking a short-term relationship is not. Thus, boys can still be boys; girls may not be girls.

This study has focused on exploring what the young women, single and in relationships, seek in short-term as well as long term relationships. This text focuses on heterosexual (male-female) attraction and mating and does not consider the characteristics or circumstances of alternative style attraction and mating. The terminology and conceptual definitions for terms such as sex (noun and verb), gender, male, female, and sexual orientation are derived from Kauth (2005).

Methodology and Sample

One hundred and fifteen (115) females[3] enrolled in Interpersonal Communication courses participated in the study. The data were collected in two stages. First, the participants were asked to list as many as 10 characteristics they desired in a person that they would consider dating. The subjects were not permitted to discuss their choices with other participants. The instrument also asked the students to identify their relational status—whether they were single, in a relationship. This set of data was used to analyze preferences for short-term relationships. For the second part of the study, the subjects were put in groups—with five females in each group. The group members were allowed to discuss the desired traits and characteristics they would seek in a long-term partner. This set of data was used to analyze the preferences for a long-term relationship.

The participants were from a State-supported university with nearly 95 percent of Hispanic students. Thus, it was relatively easy to obtain a reasonable size sample (N=115) of Hispanic-American women. All respondents were under 30 years of age. Hence, age as a variable was not considered. However, this was clearly a Generation Y sample. Among the 115 women, 66 (57 percent) said they were in a relationship and 49 (43 percent) claimed to be single.

Results

A master list was generated from the list of desired traits identified by the respondents. These 74 traits are presented in Appendix. Table 1 presents the 10 most desired traits by the participants. The choice of traits desired in a short-term partner includes fun, good looks, good time, and romance. Women, when looking for a male for dating, i.e., a short-term relationship, report that loyalty, ambition, success, or the employability of a male are unimportant.

The preferences shift when one moves from being single to being in a relationship. Table 2 presents the ranking of the top-10 desired traits in a short-term relationship by single women (N=49) and women in a relationship (N=66).

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[3] Differences in preferences based on gender have been dealt in detail and reported, among others, by Buss (1989), Wood & Eagly (2002), and Fisman et al. (2005).

Table 1. Top-10 desired traits in a short-term partner (N=115)

Trait	Ranking
Funny	1
Taller	2
Athletic	3
Attractive	4
Romantic	5
Faithful	6
Open-minded	7
Employed	8
Ambitious	9
Successful	10

Table 2. Ranking of desired traits by single women and women in relationships

Ranking of Traits by Single Women (N=49)	Ranking of Traits by Women in Relationships (N=66)
1. Funny	7
2. Smart	1
3. Attractive	10
4. Adventurous	12
5. Attractive	9
6. Romantic	8
7. Taller	11
8. Responsible	2
9. Kind	6
10. Caring	5
11. Honest	4
12. Faithful	3

It is clear to see that priorities change from fun, adventure, and romance, while single, to traits like smart, responsible, and faithful that are more relevant to raising a family and building a home become more important. Previous research (Regan & Berscheid, 1997; Fisman et al., 2005), reported that males, both single and in relationships, were more drawn to looks and beauty than their female counterparts. Present data suggest that single women also place a higher value on looks and athleticism as important traits for a short-term relationship.

For an analysis of desirable traits in a long-term relationship, the subjects were put in groups of five. There were 23 groups. The group members

discussed among themselves and generated their list of traits desirable in a long-term partner. The top-20 traits, from the most important (#1) to the least important (#20) are presented in table 3.

Table 3. Desired traits in a long-term partner

Traits	Chosen by Groups (23)
Attractive	14 groups; 70 participants
Hardworking	13 groups; 65 participants
Respectful	13 groups; 65 participants
Family-oriented	10 groups; 50 participants
Supportive	10 groups; 50 participants
Faithful	9 groups; 45 participants
Honest	9 groups; 45 participants
Responsible	9 groups; 45 participants
Smart	9 groups; 45 participants
Funny	7 groups; 35 participants
Height (taller)	7 groups; 35 participants
Humor	7 groups; 35 participants
Romantic	7 groups; 35 participants
Career	5 groups; 25 participants
Loyal	5 groups; 25 participants
Outgoing	4 groups; 20 participants
Rich	4 groups; 20 participants
Trustworthy	4 groups; 20 participants
Ambitious	3 groups; 15 participants
Caring	3 groups; 15 participants
Good listener	3 groups; 15 participants
Goals	3 groups; 15 participants
Religious	3 groups; 15 participants

Factors

Individuals and their personalities play a vital role in mate selection and relational happiness. Botwin, Buss & Shackelford (1997), citing a five-factor model proposed by Goldberg focusing on married couples,

stated: "Women whose husbands scored high on Conscientiousness were generally more satisfied, as well as being happier with the spouse as a source of stimulating conversation" (1997, p. 128).

Factors and factor-analyses in previous studies have primarily dealt with married couples. For the present study, several traits were combined to create five factors contributing to the *desirability* of a long-term partner. These factors are (1) *Earning Potential*, (2) *Attractiveness*, (3) *Chastity*, (4) *Ambition/Drive*, and (5) *Family Orientation.*

- *Earning Potential* was calculated by combining traits such as Smart, Responsible, Career, Health, Rich, and Hardworking.
- *Attractiveness* was calculated by combining Attractive, Good Body, Athletic, Eyes, and Hair.
- *Chastity* was calculated by combining Loyalty, Faithful, Trustworthy, Religious, and Committed.
- *Ambition/Drive* was measure by adding Responsibility, Good Goals, Ambition, Confident, Successful, and Determined.
- *Family Orientation* was measured by combining Protective, Supportive, and Caring.

The perceived importance of these factors in selecting a long-term partner is presented in table 4.

Table 4. Importance of factors in selecting a long-term partner

Factors	Ranked
Earning Potential	#1
Family Orientation	#2
Ambition/Drive	#3
Attractiveness	#4
Chastity	#5

Discussion

There are some notable similarities and differences among Hispanic--American college students and their mainstream counterparts.

- Overwhelmingly, the sample ranked *Attractiveness* as the most desirable trait in men and women. As Knapp (1978) and Archer (1996) have suggested, physical attraction is the foundation for most short associations. Our sample reports that attraction is more important than some other factors even in long-term relationships.

- In this sample, women ranked *Attractive* as more desirable than *Faithful* for short-term as well as long-term relationships. Among the five factors, *Attractiveness*, comprising of good body, healthy hair, and pretty eyes as more important than *Chastity* that included traits such as loyal, faithful, trustworthy, and committed. This may reflect the current times where most young people make social comparisons with faces and bodies of the celebrities that decorate so many of the magazine covers and advertising. This may also be one of the characteristics of Generation Y as identified by Twenge (2006).
- As noted earlier, 83 percent of the college women in North America said that they would prefer a traditional relationship, in our sample, only 57 percent of the participants reported being in a relationship. A strong Catholic tradition among the Hispanic-American population may explain this negative discrepancy.
- Looking at the five factors, women still choose Earning Potential and Family Orientation over Attractiveness and Chastity.
- Like their American counterparts, the Hispanic-American women attending college are looking for fun with attractive partners without much concern for careers, earning potential, responsibility, or commitment. This is very much in line with the rest of Generation Y, not just in the US but globally (Finn & Donavan, 2013). However, when it comes to long-term relationships, the qualities that Hispanic women are looking for are not too far from the Natural Selection theories, and Social Homogamy theories, i.e., females look for men that can provide for the family and help raise the children. Neither single nor women in relationships report to having much concern about chastity.

The undercurrent in the present data alludes to the trial-and-error permitted in a society that allows dating—a practice that provides people with an opportunity to learn about and chose from several partners. In most of the Western societies, two of the most important social institutions, religion, and education continue to provide more than spiritual and academic guidance; these institutions create opportunities for young people to get to know one and another so that they may make the best possible selection in choosing their long-term partners.

Due to the size of the sample and lack of diversity in age, the author is hesitant in drawing any general conclusions. However, the findings warrant further research with different age-groups and in different cultures. Similar studies in cultures with other established practices for mate-selec-

tion may further enhance our understanding of the differences in behaviors and customs in other cultures. It may also be worthwhile to conduct a similar study with Hispanic-American males in the same age-group that are pursuing a college education. The present study has strictly limited itself to heterosexual females. It would be of great interest to study the preferences for desired traits in short-term and long-term partners among the women with alternative lifestyles.

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Appendix. List of Desired Traits

Adventurous
Ambitious
Athletic
Attractive
Brave
Car
Career
Caring
Committed
Confident
Cute
Deep voice
Determined
Dog lover
Down to earth
Eyelashes
Faithful
Family-oriented
Friendly
Fun
Funny
Good body
Good dancer
Good goals
Good hair
Good health
Good listener
Good personality
Great body
Hardworking
Has a job
Healthy hair
Height (taller)
Helpful
Higher Education
Honest
Humble
Humor
Independent
Kind

Likes animals
Likes children
Likes to cook
Loves to learn new things
Loyal
Mature
Never been arrested
Nice
Nice Eyes
Nice smile
Non-alcoholic
Non-cocky
Non-smoker
Not to romantic
Older
Open-minded
Outgoing
Patient
Polite
Positive
Pretty eyes
Protective
Reader
Religious
Respectful
Respectful to parents
Responsible
Rich
Romantic/loving
Same music interest
Sense of style
Smart
Spontaneous
STD free
Strong
Successful
Supportive
Sweet
Trustworthy
Understanding

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Digitized technology and evolving selfie obsession among University of Port Harcourt students: A gendered culture?

ABSTRACT. Digitization is a prime globalized ideology in the 21st century high tech revolution. It essentially deals with automation of manual process to make room for easy documentation and sustainable data regime. Africa is an emerging digital domain with many of its young generation becoming keen lovers of Information Technology (IT), and many of the youth population fast becoming internet devotees, social and new media addicts. One of the trending fantasies, among the numerous exploitations and innovations of the new technology is selfie. **Selfie** is simply a self-photograph of a person's portrait by himself. This is possible by the use of smartphone or digital camera held out at arm's length by the person taking the snapshot. Presently, there is craze for digital identity among African youths. It is against this background that undergraduate students at the University of Port Harcourt were sampled purposively for deployment in this study. This study utilizes questionnaire and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) as instruments for data gathering in order to determine whether the use of selfies is more common to the male or female members of the African digital society. Finally, the study is guided by Uses and Gratification theory and Symbolic Interactionism Theory.

KEYWORDS: digitization, technology, selfie, obsession, gendered culture

Introduction

Digitization is pivotal aspect of the technologies of Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). It is in fact a driving force of software technology. Africa, particularly Nigeria, is an emerging digital region with many of its youths and young-at-heart population becoming keen lovers of Information Technology (IT), others are devotees of the internet world, while yet many others are social and new media 'soft' addicts. Digitization, dig-

italization and digital information are three concepts that usually appear within same or similar technological domain. Digitization deals essentially with automation of manual processes into digital formations or creating digital formats of physical objects. Digitalization is about leveraging digital technologies and digitized data so as to transform business processes, while Digital information is that which is stored up in digital/electronic form ready to be manipulated or used by means of digital tools. Digital technology emanates from the fundamentals of logic. Digitization started off in the 1990's and by the early twenty-first century Africa has caught the swirling wind of digital technology: this was evident in the ready acceptance and adoption of digitalized mobile phones in the continent. For instance, "In 2011 Africa overtook Latin America to become the second biggest mobile market in the world after Asia, with 620 million mobile connections by 2011 alone. This has ensured that a lot of great innovation and creative ideas have emerged from the African continent" (Digital Skills Global, 2020, p. 1).

African digital culture is an emerging, evolving and developing digital revolution that explores and applies digitization process in the place of age-long analogue or paper file routine in business, government and official works. John Mancini (2015, p. 3) has said that "paper clogs up processes. Paper creates disruption to smooth information flows. Digital processes require digital information." Nations who take advantage of evolving technology will become more competitive in the global economy. Technology is a sophisticated system which can power up our country and facilitate the fixing of usually ailing economy. Until we allow digitization to really disrupt our 'business as usual syndrome' in our ways of thinking, communicating, business transactions and living, and until we allow digital revolution to prop us up the box, we may not actually come to know how to do things differently.

African nations with their potentially huge macroeconomic system are responsively adapting to digital operations, since that seems to be the way to go in the twenty-first century and onwards. For instance, Nigerian government gave until 2015 for all television houses and programmes to go digital. This is sequel to UN's Geneva's 2006 Agreement which set 17th June, 2015 as a dateline for countries using analogue television transmission to switch over to digital transmission. Digital technology is a pervading culture which transcends every aspect of life. According to Floyd (2015), in the preface to his book, 'Digital Fundamentals', "Digital technol-

ogy pervades almost everything in our daily lives. For example, cell phones and other types of wireless communications, television, radio, process controls, automotive electronics, consumer electronics, aircraft navigation—to mention only a few applications—depend heavily on digital electronics" (Floyd, 2015, p. 9). Floyd further stated that "A strong grounding in the fundamentals of digital technology will prepare you for the highly skilled jobs of the future" (Floyd, 2015, p. 9). He also noted that "As digital information, the signals are not subject to real-world analogue interference. Real-world physical problems have no effect on the television signal when it is digitized" (Floyd, 2015, preface). From the ongoing discourse it is therefore deductible to forecast that Africa's digital future holds much hope for its fast-pacing technological strides, especially when its youths' ingenuity is adequately harnessed and appropriated.

Self-smart photographing:
A brief historical review of selfie

Selfie is a photoshoot of a person's portrait taken by oneself. Modern selfies are usually in the digital format. This is possible by the use of smartphone, photo electronic device such as webcam or digital camera held out at arm's length (with or without a selfie stick) by the person taking the snapshot and routing this photo to loved ones or the general public via the New- or social- media. Selfie could be taken to keep memory of any event in a person's life, e.g., to mark a birthday or graduation ceremony. More importantly, it is majorly useful as a digital communication via major online social media platforms such as the Facebook and Instagram. Mary Bellis, in an online article stated that:

> Selfie is the slang term for self-portrait, a photograph you take of yourself, usually taken using a mirror or with a camera held at arm's length. The act of taking and sharing selfies has become widely popular due to digital cameras, the internet, the ubiquity of social media platforms like Facebook and, of course, because of people's endless fascination with their own image (Bellis, 2020, p.1).

To further lay emphasis on the status of this emergent technological advancement of taking photography of oneself, Bellis noted that 'the word "selfie" was even chosen as the "Word of the Year" in 2013 by the Oxford

English Dictionary, which has the following entry for the word: "a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website'" (Bellis, 2020, p. 1).

Selfie's history is however traced to Robert Cornelius (an amateur chemist and photography enthusiast from Philadelphia, US.A.), who probably took the first photographic shot of his own image all by himself in 1839 (Bellis, 2020, p. 1). Robert Cornelius wrote on the back of the self-taken image "The first light Picture ever taken 1839" (The Public Domain Review, n.d). Understandably, selfies belong to the generation of earliest photographs taken of humans, although there was no online transmission of the selfie at the time. Also, in 1914, a 13-year-old Russian, Grand Duchess Anastasia Nikolaevna was said to have taken self-portrait 'using a Kodak Brownie box camera (invented in 1900) and sent the photograph to a friend with the following note, "I took this picture of myself looking at the mirror. It was very hard as my hands were trembling." Nikolaevna appears to have been the first teenager to take a selfie' (Bellis, 2020, p. 1).

There is a claim by Australia as being the originator of digital (modern day) selfie. It is said that "in September 2001, a group of Australians created a website and uploaded the first digital self-portraits onto the internet. On 13 September 2002, the first recorded published use of the term «selfie» to describe a self-portrait photograph occurred on the Australian internet forum (ABC Online)" (Bellis, 2020, p. 2). The anonymous poster (probably a drunk) wrote the following, along with posting a selfie of himself: "Um, drunk at a mates 21st, I tripped over and landed lip first (with front teeth coming a very close second) on a set of steps. I had a hole about 1cm long right through my bottom lip. And sorry about the focus, it was a **selfie**" (Bellis, 2020, p. 2). However, a twist to the argument of who originated selfie emerges from the claims of Lester Wisbrod, a Hollywood cameraman of being the first to "take celebrity selfies, (a self-taken photo of himself and a celebrity) and has been doing so since 1981" (Bellis, 2020, p. 2).

These Three Research Questions were devised to direct the proceedings of this study:

1. Is Selfie making more appeal to students of the University of Port Harcourt than conventional photographs?
2. Do female students of the University of Port Harcourt take Selfies more than their fellow male students?
3. Are more youths into Selfies than adults?

Purpose of the study

The study aims to ascertain the attitude of male and female students of University of Port Harcourt toward Selfie indulgence and digital culture. The Study also aims to find out the degree of involvement of male students at the University of Port Harcourt in relation to the female members of the same Institution. This study also sets out to determine whether or not the students of the University of Port Harcourt are getting obsessed with this exciting digital culture known as selfie. The study also sets out to find out the degree of awareness of selfie as a trendy socializing force within the University of Port Harcourt community.

Theoretical framework for the study

This study is hinged on Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) and Symbolic Interactionism Theory. 'Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) is an audience-centred approach that focuses on what people do with media, as opposed to what media does to people' (David, 2016, p. 1).

Cynthia Vinney (2019) asserts that the Uses and Gratification Theory is credited to the works of Jay Blumler & Elihu in 1974. She traces the origin of Uses and gratifications to the 1940s 'as scholars began to study why people choose to consume various forms of media.' According to her, the few decades that followed after the 1940s had researches on gratification concentrate on 'the gratifications media users sought.' Conversely, the 1970s had researchers shifting their focus to 'the outcomes of media use and the social and psychological needs that media gratified' (Vinney, 2019, p. 1). In her submission, 'Uses and gratifications theory asserts that people use media to gratify specific wants and needs. Unlike many media theories that view media users as passive, uses and gratifications sees users as active agents who have control over their media consumption' (Vinney, 2019, p. 1). In order to drive home this theory as it relates to media users and the gratification they get; it is important to understand the underlying principles that drive media users as explained thus:

> Uses and gratifications theory relies on two principles about media users. First, it characterizes media users as active in their selection of the media they consume. From this perspective, people don't use media passively. They are engaged and motivated in their media selections. Second, people are aware of their reasons for selecting different media options. They rely on their know-

ledge of their motivations to make media choices that will help them meet their specific wants and needs.

On the basis of those principles, uses and gratifications goes on to outline five assumptions:

Media use is goal-directed. People are motivated to consume media.

Media is selected based on the expectation that it will satisfy specific needs and desires.

Media influence on behaviour is filtered through social and psychological factors. Thus, personality and social context impact the media choices one makes and one's interpretation of media messages.

Media are in competition with other forms of communication for an individual's attention. For example, an individual may choose to have an in-person conversation about an issue instead of watching a documentary about the issue. People are usually in control of media and therefore are not particularly influenced by it (Vinney, 2019, p. 1).

Explaining the pivotal role of the theory in relation to media technologies, Vinny emphasises the importance in research on uses and gratifications theory as it aids in "understanding people's motivations for choosing media and the gratifications they get out of it" (Vinney, 2019, p. 1).

To bring it down to this study, people must be seeing selfie as a medium to express themselves to their world as well as a means of entertainment. This aligns with Peirce's assertion that "the Uses and Gratifications Theory is based on the idea that media audiences are active rather than passive, meaning they do not only receive information, but also unconsciously attempt to make sense of the message in their own context" (Turney, n.d., p. 2).

The second theory undergirding this study is Symbolic Interactionism Theory. Otherwise referred to as symbolic interaction perspective, symbolic interactionism constitutes a key framework of the sociology theory. Ashley Crossman (2020, p. 1) asserts that 'this perspective relies on the symbolic meaning that people develop and build upon in the process of social interaction.' Although symbolic interactionism traces its origins to Max Weber's assertion that individuals act according to their interpretation of the meaning of their world, the American philosopher George Herbert Mead introduced this perspective to American sociology in the 1920s' (Crossman, 2020, p. 1).

In his work 'The Socialization Process in a Brazilian State-Owned Company,' Roberto Aylmer (2019) relays the origin of The Symbolic interaction-

ism theory (SIT) to the 'seminal work of George Herbert Mead (1863–1931), based on Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), Charles Horton Cooley (1864–1929) and John Dewey (1859–1952) (ResearchGate, 2020, n.p.). He credits the coinage of the term to one of Mead's student known as Herbert Blumer (1900–1987). Aylmer makes reference to Ashworth's 1997 claim that 'Mead assumes that symbols develop the mind, and they are used as means for thinking and communicating' (ResearchGate, 2020, n.p.). To complement the source of this theory, the reference below however er lays credence to Mead's pivotal role in its evolvement:

> George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) is considered a founder of symbolic interactionism though he never published his work on it (LaRossa and Reitzes, 1993). Mead's student, Herbert Blumer, coined the term "symbolic interactionism" and outlined these basic premises: humans interact with things based on meanings ascribed to those things; the ascribed meaning of things comes from our interactions with others and society; the meanings of things are interpreted by a person when dealing with things in specific circumstances (Blumer 1969). If you love books, for example, a symbolic interactionist might propose that you learned that books are good or important in the interactions you had with family, friends, school, or church; maybe your family had a special reading time each week, getting your library card was treated as a special event, or bedtime stories were associated with warmth and comfort (Symbolic Interactionist Theory, 2012, p. 1).

A deeper insight into the Symbolic interaction theory is evident in Todd Spencer, Brandon Burr & Daniel Hubler (2019) work titled: *Problematic Bed Time Media-Use and Couple Sexual Satisfaction*. In their work, Spencer et al. (2019) made reference to Schenk and Holman (1980) explanation that 'the meanings derived from social interaction theory provide the foundation for evaluation of self, other people, and objects' (as cited in ResearchGate, 2020, n.p.). Spencer et al. (2019) also relayed to (Blumer, 1969) claim that 'individuals ascribe meaning to everyday reciprocal interactions with others and their environment' (as cited in ResearchGate, 2020, n.p.).

They further simplified this theory through their reference to Aksan et al. (2009); Blumer (1969); Schenk and Holman (1980) explanation that "Symbolic interaction theory posits that our interactions with others and our environment provide the foundation for evaluation of self, other people, and objects" (as cited in ResearchGate, 2020, n.p.).

This goes to show that the Symbolic interactionism theory has its focus on human relationship, especially among individuals within a community or society. Thus people use language and symbols as means of communication to make a meaningful living hence "communication—the exchange of meaning through language and symbols—is believed to be the way in which people make sense of their social worlds. Theorists Herman and Reynolds (1994) note that this perspective sees people as being active in shaping the social world rather than simply being acted upon" (Symbolic Interactionist Theory, 2012, n.p.). In sum, we can deduce from the various views above that symbolic interactionism theory is centred around human behaviour and the meanings we derive from our interaction or environment, especially through the use of language and symbols. It has to do with the way we read meaning, the way we learn as well as interact.

Below are some ideas promoted by Symbolic Interactionists:

1. Humans are not products of society, but rather the creators of society. They define their environments and shape their own behaviour.
2. All of society is a series of interactions. Therefore, to understand human behaviour, social psychologists should make human interaction their main focus of study.
3. Self-concept is the result of how a person thinks other people view him or her based on the messages he or she receives (Symbolic Interactionism Theory online, 2019, p. 1).

Therefore, it goes right to state that selfie connotes a symbolism of self-concept and acceptance that comes through as people react or respond to another's pictures posted online in social media. It is a kind of image-selling and personality canvassing or advertisement to the public of whoever cares to look-at-and-appraise.

African digital culture and Nigerian youths: Empirical review of relevant literature

It seems that the craze for identity parade, social window-(s)hopping in the digital space and participation in the online community created in the social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Reddit, Badoo, Tumbir, LinkedIn, Meduim, Instagram, SnapChat, WeChat, Flickr, Google+, Pinterest, MySpace, etc, has ensnared large youth population of Africa urban and sub-urban settlements and trapped them in the maze of

selfie digital culture. Hand-held personal digital agents such as iPhones, android and smartphones are specialized for selfies photographing and can carry out online transaction through global network to send your pictures to friends and relatives via social media platforms. Therefore, selfie has come to be essentially online phenomenon. Without gainsaying, the development of Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) has been a tremendous quantum boost to Africa's technological drive.

According to Mourdoukoutas (2017, p. 2), the key to Africa's achieving its own digital revolution has been innovation at every step, with engineers adapting technology to suit the specific needs and dynamics of the continent instead of the other way around. About 80.8% of Africans own a mobile phone, according to 2016 data from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations agency for information and communication technologies. This is a 10% jump from 71% in 2014. The Nigerian Communications Commission, NCC, said the number of active mobile phone lines in the country rose to 144 million in December 2017. This showed an increase of 2,731,273 lines, from 142 million recorded in November 2017. The commission said the active lines moved to 144,631,678 in December compared to 141,900.405 in November 2017 Mourdoukoutas (2017, p. 2). The report said the number of fixed wired/wireless in December was 139,344 as against 137,190 in November, showing an increase of 2,154 lines, and the number of Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) was 70,926 in December, while it was 61, 488 in November—an increase of 5,977. NCC disclosed this in its monthly Subscribers Operator Data (SOD) posted on its website (Mourdoukoutas, 2017, p. 2–3).

Mobile phones coupled with Internet access have allowed governments to put their services online and digitize their records. Rwanda bills itself as the continent's leader in complete digitization. For the past 15 years, the country has been working to digitize its education, health care and economy, and now it is pushing to be Africa's first cashless society in the public sector; it is already paying its government employees electronically. Mourdoukoutas (2017) has linked Africa's technological ascension, in part, to submarine Internet cables lining the continent's coasts. He noted that Internet access has become more affordable and has increased in quality since the first cable in 2002, and that high-bandwidth undersea cables enabled countries to upgrade from 2G to 3G technologies, and even 4G/LTE in Addis Ababa and Nairobi. GSMA foresees 80% of the African

continent being connected to 5G internet networks by 2022 (Mourdouk-outas , 2017, p. 2–3).

Africa remains the fastest-growing mobile phone market in the world, and is on track to have 725 million smartphone users by 2020, according to a 2016 report by the Global System for Mobile Communications Associ-ation or GSMA—a trade body representing the interests of mobile opera-tors worldwide (Mourdoukoutas, 2017, p. 2–3). The majority of cell phone users in Africa are not using smartphones. Across seven countries—Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda—only 15% of respondents reported having a smartphone in a 2014 survey by the Pew Research Center, a "fact tank" based in the United States that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping the world. Instead, until recently, many Africans used "feature phones"—lower-cost mobile phones with limited capabilities (Mourdoukoutas, 2017, p. 2–3). Accord-ing to GSMA, mobile services accounted for 6.7% of the continent's GDP in 2015, largely due to their ability to stimulate financial development (Mourdoukoutas, 2017, p. 2–3). For example, farmers can now, by sending a message to a code, find out market prices for crops before going to mar-ket, says Ernest Acheampong, a research analyst at the African Technology Policy Studies Network, based in Nairobi. Mr. Acheampong told Africa Re-newal: "Mobile phones have really changed the face of how we do business in Africa" (Mourdoukoutas, 2017, p. 3).

Many a mobile phone in use in African, including Nigeria are fea-ture phones that have internet facilities in them. The internet platform has made these phones endeared to the youth population, who find it easy to get into social media space for interaction and socialization with loved ones and friends. It enables these young folks to seek out and to belong to an online community that best suit their personalities and in-terests, e.g. Tea Party Community—an online dating-focused communi-ty provided by Badoo social network. The cell phone has contributed invaluably in transforming and transporting Africa into digital sphere, because it provides internet platform which is both easy and convenient to access, anytime and anywhere there is connection. To add to a con-scious speedy digitization and digitalization process, some African na-tions are running a technological race of digitizing both their economy, finance, power, media and broadcasting, security systems and the public services.

Valentine Obi, the Managing Director/CEO of eTranzact Internation-al Limited, in a symposium organized at Nigeria-South Africa Chamber of

Commerce, Lagos, Nigeria, advocates the joint efforts of the government, mobile phone makers and marketers in making smart phones available and affordable and adaptable to rural communities to ensure the use of mobile technology system in the advancement of the people collective economy and individual potentialities.

Speaking on the development of smartphones in west Africa especially on how it relates to one's status, Valentine Obi remarked that 'in year 2000, I bought a cell phone for N156,000 and, rather than being a device for communication, it was a device to show status symbol' (Innovation Village, 2015, n.p.). He however observed that from day to day, Nigerian users are migrating from feature phones to smart phones. (Innovation Village, 2015, n.p.).

Youths of Nigerian society happen to readily fall in love with mobile applications on phones, which make it easier for them to adapt to emerging digitized culture: every communication and messaging, including socials, is easily carried out via handset phone. It is becoming commonplace to see primary and secondary school children, especially from the high and middle socio-economic class to be in possession of at least a feature phone. Some have two at a time. Therefore, it is safe to assert that apart from computer system, mobile phone drives our modern technological culture and it easily defines the lifestyle and social preferences of Nigerian youth. This is where selfie's socializing sensation makes a bold statement. Precisely, the advent and availability of mobile phones with built-in internet applications has been solely responsible for the frequent and large-scale online communications and exchange among Nigerian youths with their counterparts nationally and globally.

Gender and selfie culture: Do more women take selfies than men?

It is possible that different cultures and peoples have not same gender experience in how they adapt to selfie technoculture. There could be different folks in different geographical locations with different gender understanding and practice of selfie culture. According to Sparks (2015, p. 1), "Young British men share twice as many selfies as women the same age, it can be revealed, with over a third of males vainly posting five or more self-portraits a week. There are around eleven million 18- to 30-year-olds in the UK and they posted a billion selfies in 2014, according to smart-

phone maker HTC, which polled 2,000 people on their habits. The average person in that age group posts over 100 selfies a year. But men are seemingly twice as vain as women" (Sparks, 2015, p. 1).

Sparks, continues, by saying that the main reason for men to take selfies was to show off or attract the opposite sex, the survey revealed. A quarter of men polled share selfies to make current or previous partners jealous, and one in ten did it to make themselves more desirable to potential partners. In comparison, half that number of women take selfies to make ex or partners jealous (just 13 per cent), and only one in 15 (seven per cent) take pictures to make themselves more desirable to potential partners. The main reason women take selfies is to share what they're doing with friends (35 per cent) and to record memories (26 per cent). But men and women are equally as likely to share selfies to show off (19 per cent) (Sparks, 2015, p. 1). He further gives detail of the gender parity in the outcome of the research thus:

> As well as taking more selfies, men are far more likely to show off their bodies than women—three quarters (76 per cent) of male selfies are shots of their body, compared to less than half of womens' (45 per cent). Women are more likely to share facial selfies (55 per cent) whereas men are most likely to show off their chest (20 per cent), followed by their torso or six pack (17 per cent). However, 12 per cent of women who are posting selfies of their bodies admitted to revealing their breasts. Almost as many have taken "hot dog" shots of their legs (11 per cent) and over a quarter of a million women in the UK have channelled Kim Kardashian's "selfie", with one in 20 women sharing shots of their bottom (six per cent) (Sparks, 2015, p. 2).

Sedgewick, Flath & Elias (2017) in the abstract to their study which was published online on 21 April 2017 give further details of the diverse ways the male and female gender utilize the features in phones to manipulate their selfie to suit their purposes.

> When taking a self-portrait or "selfie" to display in an online dating profile, individuals may intuitively manipulate the vertical camera angle to embody how they want to be perceived by the opposite sex. Concepts from evolutionary psychology and grounded cognition suggest that this manipulation can provide cues of physical height and impressions of power to the viewer which are qualities found to influence mate-selection. We predicted that men would orient selfies more often from below to appear taller (i.e., more powerful) than the viewer, and women, from an above perspective to appear shorter

(i.e., less powerful). A content analysis was conducted which coded the vertical orientation of 557 selfies from profile pictures on the popular mobile dating application, Tinder (Sedgewick, Flath & Elias, 2017, Abstract).

Consequently, the research showed a gender difference in the use of selfie indicating that "men's selfies were angled significantly more often from below, whereas women were angled more often from above. Our findings suggest that selfies presented in a mate-attraction context are intuitively or perhaps consciously selected to adhere to ideal mate qualities. Further discussion proposes that biological or individual differences may also facilitate vertical compositions of selfies" (Sedgewick, Flath & Elias, 2017, Abstract).

Furthermore, the research revealed that "selfies exhibited in online dating profile photos were predicted to vary by vertical camera angle depending on the sex of the individual. Our results revealed that profile photos of men and women users of the mobile application, Tinder, exhibited opposing vertical biases; the camera's perspective was presented more often from below for men, and above for women. These findings simultaneously demonstrate a mechanical bias of selfies within a mate attraction context, as profile photos were not only chosen, but also taken by the Tinder user" (Sedgewick, Flath & Elias, 2017, n.p.).

Dhir et al. (2016), carried out a study titled: Do Age and Gender Differences Exist in Selfie-Related Behaviours? According to them, scholars in recent times have started studying behaviours that are selfie-related and they lay emphasis on women, but much is not known when it comes to differences in age and gender as relates to selfie-taking and posting patterns. In the bid to address this gap, they carried out an online survey comprising 3763 Norwegians who are social media users. The study, which span various categories of person: adolescents of age 12–19, young adults from age 20–30, and adults of 31–50 however helped to offer the first empirical evidence on how these three categories of people or age group behave differently in relation to selfie.

The results of the study show the following:

1. 'Females were more likely to take personal and group selfies, post personal selfies, crop photos and use photographic filters compared to males,'
2. 'Adolescents were found to be more likely than young adults to take own and group selfies, post own selfies, and use photographic filters,'

'Young adults were more likely to take own and group selfies, post and edit photos than older adults.' Finally, 'the predictive effect of age was

stronger among women than among men regarding selfie taking, posting and editing behaviour' (Dhir et al., 2016).

Is selfie a digital obsession or a mere trend?
Is there any medical or psychological proof of selfie obsession?

Selfie is a welcome digital and technological phenomenon because of its online advantage, easy-to-produce and share mechanism, simplicity of operation, aesthetic appeal, timesaving and less-expensive production. Selfie is fast becoming a universal digital phenomenon and is therefore trendy. Youths as well as adults, professionals across the urban and semi-urban divides, males as well as females, people of all occupations and social class across board have come to be associated directly or indirectly with selfie revolution. However, abuse could be a common snare, especially when too much time and attention is given to selfies at the expense of other more important issues of life and business.

Selfie lovers and enthusiasts need self-discipline so as to avoid obsessive or compulsive behaviour or personality disorder or perfect pose problem resulting from ideal cisgender female body syndrome. A student who regularly and indiscreetly does selfie at a time the fellow should be studying or attending to class work is already in for trouble and, therefore, raises a counselling concern. The fellow should be referred to a counsellor or psychologist for possible help. The fellow is already distracted, and attention deficit to real and more meaningful business is obvious. The concern for the mental health of selfie users is raised by Bellis (2020) when she noted that:

> medical authorities have begun to associate the taking of too many selfies as a potentially unhealthy sign of mental health issues. Take the case of 19-year--old Danny Bowman, who attempted suicide after failing to take what he considered the perfect selfie. Bowman was spending most of his waking hours taking hundreds of selfies everyday, losing weight and dropping out of school in the process. Becoming obsessed with taking selfies is often a sign of body dysmorphic disorder, an anxiety disorder about personal appearance. Danny Bowman was diagnosed with this condition (Bellis, 2020, p. 1).

Bellis' observation calls for caution for the mental state of selfie users to be checked when such obsession on how perfect they look takes toll on their social lives or academic performances.

Methodology for the study

The research design for this study is ex-post facto design and phenomenological model (of qualitative research). This method utilizes interviews, observation and surveys to gather information from subjects. Phenomenology is highly concerned with how participants feel about things during an event or activity. The goal of the phenomenological method of research is to describe how any one participant experiences a specific event.

Population of the study, sampling technique, instruments for data gathering and administration of the instruments

The study's population consists of all the male and female students at the University of Port Harcourt who were available to respond to the twenty-three-item questionnaire titled, "YOU AND SELFIE INVENTORY", and all those who were gathered for different Focus Group Discussion. They are drawn ex-post facto from forty-four academic departments in the University of Port Harcourt. Content and face validity of the instrument was carried out. Purposive sampling technique was used to determine those that make up the sample for the study. Two hundred male and female students (102 males and 98 females) of the University of Port Harcourt were pooled as sample size for the study. Their age ranges are: 16–18years, 19–22years, 23–26years, 27–29 years, 30+ years. Those who were taking selfie at the time were selected together with those who are prone to doing selfies. The researchers administered the research instrument to the respondents personally and collated the responses personally, also. Faulty responses were sorted out and discarded. Three hundred and sixty questionnaires were given out, of which two hundred and twenty-two questionnaire scripts were retrieved.

Method of data analysis

Simple percentage (%) was used to analyze the data collated from respondents to the administered questionnaire. Five Focus Group Discussion (FGD) sections were also involved in the study. Analysis of data was in response to the Research Questions raised earlier in the work. Thus:

Research Question 1: Is Selfie making more appeal to students at the University of Port Harcourt than conventional photograph?

Table 1. Shows the percentage rating of responses of students at the University of Port Harcourt on whether the prefer taking selfies to conventional photographing, as contained in items 1–10 of the questionnaire

S/N	Items	Number of Respondents Males			Number of Respondents Females			Remark
		Yes	No	No Resp.	Yes	No	No Resp.	
1	I like selfie	79 (77%)	22 (21.6%)	1 (0.98%)	95 (96.94%)	3 (3.06%)	-	77% male students and 96.94% of female students like selfie: this is high stake. More females than males like selfie in the University of P.H.
2	I cannot do without selfies	59 (57.8%)	38 (37.25%)	4 (3.92%)	78 (79.60%)	17 (17.35%)	3 (3.06%)	57.8% of male undergraduates cannot do without selfie, while more female students (79.60%) cannot do without selfie
3	To me, selfie is a lifestyle and a fun	72 (70.59%)	12 (11.76%)	18 (17.64%)	62 (63.27%)	11 (11.22%)	25 (25.5%)	70.59% male says selfie is a lifestyle and fun; 63.27% female undergraduates accepts that selfie is a lifestyle and fun
4	I take selfies often	58 (56.86%)	38 (37.25%)	6 (5.88%)	77 (78.57%)	18 (18.37%)	3 (3.06%)	More females (78.57%) take selfies than males undergraduates (56.86%)
5	I prefer a particular selfie pose / angle	52 (50.98%)	17 (16.66%)	33 (32.35%)	36 (36.73%)	29 (29.59%)	33 (33.67%)	50.98% of males says "yes" to certain selfie pose, while 36.73% of females prefer certain selfie pose

#	Statement							
6	I have favourite filter to edit my selfies	41 (40.19%)	60 (58.82%)	1 (0.98%)	45 (45.91%)	12 (12.24%)	41 (41.83%)	40.19% males edit selfies with certain filters, while 45.91% of females edit their selfie.
7	I have not visited photo studio a long time because of selfies	71 (69.6%)	13 (29.4%)	18 (17.65%)	50 (51.02%)	29 (29.59%)	19 (19.39%)	69.6% male students have not gone to photo studio a long time, while 51.02% females have not patronized conventional photographers because of selfie.
8	I think that selfie is an indispensable technological innovation	46 (45.10%)	16 (15.68%)	40 (39.22%)	40 (40.82%)	22 (24.45%)	36 (36.73%)	45.10% male says that selfie is vital tech innovation. 40.82% females accent to the same opinion of selfie's technological relevance
9	I don't print my selfies: I send them online	14 (13.72%)	80 (78.43%)	8 (7.84%)	62 (65.26%)	20 (20.41%)	14 (14.29%)	Only 13.72% males send their selfies online, while 65.26% females send their selfies online
10	I take conventional photos in addition to selfies	40 (39.2%)	45 (44.11%)	17 (16.67%)	25 (25.51%)	60 (61.22%)	13 (13.27%)	39.2% males take conventional photos in addition to selfies; 25.51% females take both selfies and conventional photos
	Total Scores	532	341	146	475	221	187	

Research Question 2: Do female students of the University of Port Harcourt take Selfies more than their male counterparts?

Table 2. Shows the percentage rating of responses of students of the University of Port Harcourt on whether female students do more selfies than their male counterparts, as contained in items 11–19 of the questionnaire

| S/N | Items | Number of Respondents | | | | | | | Remark |
| | | Males | | | Females | | | |
		Yes	No	No Resp	Yes	No	No Resp.	
11	Selfie is effective means of communication to male and female students equally	61 (59.80%)	34 (33.33%)	7 (6.86%)	68 (69.39%)	15 (15.31%)	15 (15.31%)	69.39% of females says that selfie is effective communication channel, while mere 59.80% males says the same
12	Female students send their selfies to the social more than male students	61 (59.80%)	34 (33.33%)	7 (6.86%)	68 (69.39%)	15 (15.31%)	15 (15.31%)	59.8% males send their selfie pix to the social media, while 69.3% females do likewise
13	Males take selfies when the need arises, while females take selfies whenever they look good	21 (20.59%)	34 (33.33%)	21 (20.59%)	55 (56.12%)	19 (19.39%)	24(24.49%)	56.12% female undergraduates take selfies more often than only 20.59% males who take selfies based on need

14	Males students more than females' welcome selfies as necessary technological culture	57 (55.88%)	28 (27.45%)	17 (16.67%)	60 (61.22%)	19 (19.39%)	19 (19.39%)	55.88% males see selfie as necessary tech culture, while 61.22% females regard selfie as important tech culture
15	Female students take selfies more than male students	90 (88.24%)	4 (3.92%)	8 (7.84%)	54 (55.10%)	24 (24.49%)	20 (20.41%)	55. 10% females agree that more females do selfies than males, while 88-24% males say that more females take selfie than males do
16	Female students are getting obsessed with selfies more than male students	68 (66.67%)	14 (13.73%)	20 (19.61%)	43 (43.88%)	38 (38.78%)	17 (17.35%)	66.67% males admitted that females are getting obsessed with selfie, while 43.88% females admit so
17	Taking selfies hold more advantages for females than for male students	55 (53.92%	42 (41.18%)	5 (4.90%)	55 (56.12%)	35 (35.71%)	8 (8.16%)	53.93% male says that selfies benefit females more; 56.12% females admit that assumption

18	Female students more than males need to be counselled on control over selfie indulgence	53 (51.96%)	28 (27.45%)	21 (20.59%)	47 (47.96%)	20 (20.41%)	31 (0.32%)	More males (51.96%) than fewer females (47.96%) accept that female students more than males need counselling on selfie
19	Female students understand the concept and culture of selfie more than male students	96 (94.12%)	4 (3.92%)	2 (1.96%)	44 (44.89%)	37 (37.76%)	17 (17.35%)	94.1% males and 44.89% females claim that females understand selfie thing more
Total scores		476	308	108	494	222	166	

Research Question 3: Are more youths into selfies than adults?

Table 3. Shows the percentage rating of responses of students of the University of Port Harcourt on whether youths are comparatively more into selfies than adult members of society, as contained in items 20–23 of the questionnaire

S/N	Items	Number of Respondents							Remark
		Males			Females			
		Yes	No	No Resp	Yes	No	No Resp.	
20	Youths take more selfies than adults	91 (89.22%)	6 (5.88%)	5 (4.90%)	65 (66.33%)	21 (21.43%)	12 (12.24%)	89.22% males and 66.33% females claim that selfie is more of youth thing than adults
21	Smart phones and androids have done more harm than good to youths	46 (45.10%)	43 (42.16%)	13 (12.75%)	56 (57.14%)	27 (27.55%)	15 (15.31%)	57.14% females and 45.10% females admit that smart phones and android phones are engaging the youths badly
22	I admit that selfies can be distracting to the youths more than the adults	69 (67.64%)	27 (26.47%)	6 (5.88%)	63 (64.29%)	25 (25.5%)	10 (10.20%)	67.64% of males and 64.29% female students admit that selfie can distract the youths much more than adults
23	I sincerely think that students of the University of Port Harcourt really need some counselling on the use of selfies	71 (69.6%)	14 (13.73%)	7 (6.86%)	52 (53.06%)	30 (30.6%)	16 (16.33%)	69.6% males and 53.06% females insist that Uniport students need counselling on the use of selfies, generally
Total scores		277	90	31	236	103	53	

Analyses of response
from five Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Participants at the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were derived from 6 departments of the University of Port Harcourt. These include: Department of Theatre and Film studies, Department of Music, Department of Geography and Environmental Management; Department OF Pharmacy AND Pharmaceutical Technology; and a cluster of students from Accounting Department; and Biochemistry and Technology Department.

The researchers used focus groups to derive answers from the query of this research "whether selfie is a gender issue." Five groups were conducted with students from four departments, and another group was a mixed-up of two departments. The discussions took place between August 7th and September 10th, 2018. Participants were a mixture of both gender to create room for divergent views and reactions from the students. Discussions were video-recorded and later transcribed and documented for analysis. The discussions were anchored and moderated by one of the researchers at different instances.

Number of participants in the various focus groups varied, ranging from 4–14 students, of both gender ranging from year one to final year students, and graduating students. These students were mostly those who are interested in taking selfies. Focus group was open with the question: "Which gender like taking selfie the most and why"? This is to create a forum for interaction between the male and female students and to cite examples of those who are engulfed in this practice.

Selected responses from Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

These responses here are a selection from the focus groups which reflect the opinions of the students regarding the issues raised in this research.

In responding to the question of which *gender takes selfie the most and how frequent* they take it, their responses vary.

Female: "Both male and female take selfie but the female takes more because we like pictures, it comes to us naturally."

Female: "There's one of my friends, his name is Steve, whenever we are taking selfie, Steve must join us, he's a male."

Generally, the males say they rarely and a few take it often, while the female take it spontaneously. Females' responses: "everyday, anytime," and "whenever I see anyone appreciate my looks, I would just take a selfie to see a full view of myself." Male's responses include: "Occasionally," "It's like a spirit, it comes," "not as the female who take it as a habit." Another female consent to this assertion: "Selfie is not planned. It's an act that actually happens impromptu. Like you just finished dressing and you just feel like let me just take it, and you already have a good phone; ... that's why it's often."

Question: Why do you like selfie?

Female: "I enjoy it and I feel happy whenever I take a selfie of myself. I feel it's very beautiful more than when someone else takes a photograph of me."

Female: "When we just have fresh make-up, instead of waiting for some time, sweating and everything, and your face becomes oily, at that moment when it still looks fresh, we like to snap."

Female: "It's stress free, it can be taken anytime, it has no time boundaries, you don't pay any photographer to snap you."

Other females say it's "for fun", "selfie is a way of self-love, self-acceptance, and for memory sake, you know we may not see ourselves again but at least, we would tag each other on Facebook".

They all agree that they can take as many pictures as possible and select the best pictures and use filter to their desired image.

Responses by males include: "We take selfie for posterity sake," "the cost of snapping pictures make us take selfie," "for fun," "We do it, so it doesn't seem we don't belong." While another male added that a lot of students indulge in selfie due to the recent development in social media and online, social charting networks and platforms.

Both male and female agree that *selfie is an advantageous technological innovation*; reasons include:

Male: "Personally, I like taking pictures. I have a picture at every stage of my life. For me, that technology is a plus, for others it's a distraction."

Female: "I think selfie is a good innovation because through that you see yourself, how you have advanced, how you changed, positively or negatively. It will help your self-worth, in the sense that people see themselves; it helps them to reflect on who they really are. Many women out there suffer from inferiority complex and I think it's a way to show them that they are beautiful."

In response to *What they do with their selfies*, reactions differ: Both sexes agree they post them online. Male: "I post them to the social media." Female: "I post them to the world to see how beautiful I am, then I get 'like' from it. I also get money with it."

According to this female, the more 'likes' she gets, the more she makes money. Another female remarked that she won cash from an online holiday contest in her pharmacy school, she says: "I got a cash prize: The pictures were posted on our Facebook page, people voted on the pictures. Whoever got the highest vote got the prize."

Another female says, "If you usually post your selfie pictures on social media, you update people on where you are or what you are up to at the moment." Both genders agree that they rarely visit a photo studio and rarely print their selfie pictures.

In response to the question whether *taking selfie has become a culture among students and if it's a gendered culture.* They agreed it has become a culture among students, and that males and females practice selfie culture. A female observed that they take selfie to capture the moment because: "You don't need anybody to help you capture the moment; you can just take your phone and click the picture. So, I think the girls, the female folk does it more than the male. Generally, it's for everyone." Another female explains why it has become a culture especially among the females since they like taking selfie when their make-up is fresh on their faces because they are very conscious of their faces coupled with the fact that selfie may help hide unpleasant body features like "big tummy", "the K leg," and "fat body," and "to show a new environment."

In response to the question *whether selfie has become an obsession among students and a distraction to their studies*, females reactions include: "We like fun... it's in our gene. We can't escape it, so that's why it is more with us. It's not liked an obsession per see;" "It's not an obsession, it's something that gives you joy. If you were to be young, you would love to take it every day, just go with the trend;" and "young people love what is trending."

In responding to the query *whether older people take selfie*, the students agree that older people also take selfie but not as rampant as youths do. They give reasons why younger people indulge in selfie more than adults.

A female student responds: "we are young people, we are youths, that's what trends on social media. Sometimes we want our friends to see us. Sometimes we want them to say, okay, look at how good we look, and we want them to say 'you are looking good...' We are young people, so, we

want them to know we are here, we are there. Maybe when we go out, we just want to put the picture for them to comment 'I was there'."

Another female responds that when a group of friends wear a dress by one designer, they would take a selfie: "We snap and tag the person that so, so, so person made this dress!" "It brings customers to her."

Another female comments: "Young people love fun, young people love keeping exciting moments, so you want to see elderly people like mothers that have children and businesses to take care of taking selfie, they do that, but it won't be as much as young people that, when they are with their friends, they will just say 'let us take this'."

A male student argues that older people take selfie because they have good phones.

A female argues that selfie can be taken on the dying bed: "I took selfie with my dying dad before he gave up," and she captured the moment for future reference.

Discussion of findings

Selfie has 'inherent' limitation of taking mostly the upper body and, especially the face, and not the full image or view of the individual.

Findings show that the males don't really have any intentions for taking selfie but for fun while the females take it to keep a memory, to save online and update their pictures on Facebook, to socialize, document history in pictorial form. Also taking a good selfie requires a good phone, with features and Apps that can help in good editing of pictures. For some, distraction and obsession are relative terms since they feel taking selfie is a personal attitude and requires personal discipline.

Both genders agree that some students, especially females are obsessed with selfie and are easily distracted by it as they take it in class even while lectures are going on. Their advice varies, for some females, students should continue taking selfie while others advised that it be minimized, and controlled, and others advice that they face their studies which is their primary obligation on campus.

Summary, conclusion and recommendation

This study has discussed selfie as an emerging culture among students in Nigeria's University of Port Harcourt. This study has established that the

female gender engages in selfie more than the male gender. This study has used questionnaire and focus group discussion (FGD) to assess the attitude of students at University of Port Harcourt towards selfie, and the findings show that although both males and female persons, mostly undergraduate students, enjoy taking selfie, some students are obsessed with it and are distracted from their studies. This study therefore recommends that caution should be taken by students so that this technological advancement in the 21st century would be a culture that should enhance their social lives without a draw back in their academic career.

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Appendix

Selfie pictures from focus group discussion (FGD)

Selfie of FGD with students of Accounting Dept., & Biochemistry and Technology Department (August 7, 2018)

Selfie of FGD with graduating Students of Dept. of Theatre & Film Studies (August 14, 2018)

FGD with graduating students of Geography & Environmental studies (August 30, 2018)
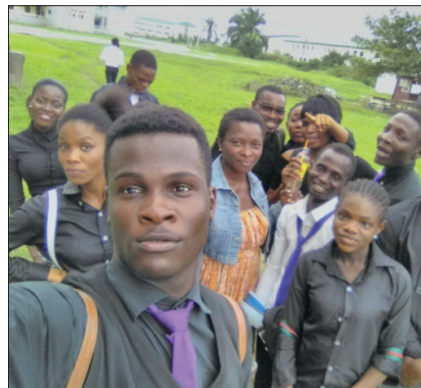
FGD with students from Music department (September 4, 2018)

Selfie with students of FGD from Pharmacy Dept. (September 10, 2018)

Selfie with another set of students of University of Port Harcourt (August 6, 2018)

Selfie of FGD with graduating Students of Dept. of Theatre & Film Studies (August 14, 2018)

Selfie with overexcited handful of stuents of University of Port Harcourt (2018)

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Towards a Research Agenda on Individual Differences in ELT in Nigeria[1]

ABSTRACT. There are a variety of individual differences that English language teaching (ELT) professionals cannot afford to ignore. This essay is based on a premise that teaching and learning English in Nigeria's multilingual background of 526 languages (Ethnologue, 2018) present an extraordinary context of multiculturalism and individual differences in the language classroom. ELT professionals in such a context require significant expertise in the application of inclusive practices. The essay identified gaps in the praxis and policy dimensions of Nigerian ELT practice relating to individual differences and suggested a research focus on these two areas. It concluded that teachers should adopt clear, empirically tested methodologies to cater for the different students in the class, create good relationships in the classroom to develop learner self-confidence, integrate activities and tasks that clearly appeal to different learning styles and personalities, personalize learning as much as possible, create learner autonomy, and pay attention to cultural variations among L2 learners.

KEYWORDS: individual differences, English in Nigeria, learning strategies, affective factors, L2.

Introduction

In learning a given language, certain variables account for the rate and speed at which learning tasks are attained. These differences are marked in individuals to the extent that in a class of as few as ten learners, sharp differences may abound in the level of acquisition, if measured, at the end of a well delivered lecture.

By individual differences in learning, we are referring to specific factors in the individual learner, which account for the rate at which such a person learns and attains a high level of competence in that task or fails to do so. It

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[1] This paper is dedicated to the memory of late Dr Isaac Tamunobelema, who passed on after contributing to the initial draft.

has been observed that in the same learning environment, some learners are more successful than others, and Richards and Schmidt (2012) noted that individual learner factors have been frequently identified as the possible causes of differential success rates. Some of these categories of learner difference areas include age, sex, attitude, motivation, cognition style, learning strategies and personality traits.

1. Theoretical Framework

This essay is based on Robert Sternberg's Triarchic Theory of Intelligence also known as the Theory of Three Forms of Intelligence. The theory proposed three distinct types of intelligence (practical intelligence, creative intelligence, and analytical intelligence) that humans can possess and these account for the differences in the ways that individuals learn and the need for inclusive practices that integrate these in teaching and assessment. The theory consists of three categories of sub-theories: the contextual, the componential, and the experiential.

1. The contextual sub-theory views intelligence as relative to the sociocultural situation of an event: what passes as an act of intelligence in a context at one place may not pass as same in similar context at another place. Intelligent behaviour is determined by both the event and the external world where it happened. Contextual intelligence therefore involves the modification of the present environment to make it more favourable, the adaptation to a new environment, and the selection of a more favourable environment.

2. The componential sub-theory specifies that metacognitive, performance, or knowledge acquisition components underpin intelligent behaviour. These structures and mechanisms constitute the potential set of mental processes that underpins human behavior.

3. The experiential sub-theory specifies that intelligent behavior should be referenced as cumulative of experience from the unknown to the familiar. It determines intelligence by considering the relationship between the level of experience the individual possesses and the individual's behavior in the same task.

Based on the Triarchic Theory of Intelligence, a comprehensive evaluation of human intelligence requires the consideration of these three

sub-theories. The theory stipulated the following principles for its operation (Culatta, 2020):

1. Training for intellectual performance must be both socially and culturally relevant to the needs of the individual trainee.
2. A training program should provide links between the training and real-world behavior.
3. A training program should provide explicit instruction in strategies for coping with novel tasks/situations.
4. A training program should provide explicit instruction in both executive and non-executive information processing and interactions between the two.
5. Training programs should actively encourage individuals to manifest their differences in strategies and styles.

The consciousness of these principles will enable teachers to make appropriate selection of materials, activities, and methodologies during lesson planning. Overall, the principles of the Triarchic Theory of Intelligence enhance learning outcome by emphasizing both the relevance of learning experience and inclusive practices.

2. Literature Review:
Traits of Individual Differences in Learners

Learner differences have left language practitioners in search of possible solutions and these problems are descriptive, theoretical and practical in nature. The descriptive perception is related to how best to research and categorize the differences between learners, and the relationship between those differences and the achievement of greater learning objectives. The theoretical dimension is related to the relevance of those differences in actual second language learning situations. The practical questions border on how to design instruction that would best capture the contributions of each variable in the learning process. Some of these individual variables can be voluntarily controlled while others cannot be similarly controlled. For example, age and cognitive traits are outside the experience of the applied linguist who may not be able to do anything to change them. On the other hand, learning styles, preferences and cultures are amenable to changes in the hand of the practitioner who is aiming at achieving greater learning outcomes.

2.1. Age

Age difference in learning a language is a controversial issue because, while some practitioners believe that the younger the learner, the better the learning takes place, others believe in the contrary. One of the theories in this regard is the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), which proposed that younger children naturally and quickly acquire language more easily between ages 0 and 9 years and tend to lose that ability later in life (Penfield & Roberts, 1959). Sebastian-Galles, Echererria, and Laura (2005); Harley (1986); Scherage et al. (2004) take into account age difference in relation to individual's reproductive fitness, inherent nature of the learner, environment, and cost and consider the critical period as an adaptive mechanism, keeping all other factors in equilibrium, which determines optimal reproductive success in the language user.

Some language acquisition practitioners have argued that results in critical period apply to only first language context and that in second language situation, older students learn better than younger ones (Snow & Hoefnagel-Hoehle, 1975; Swaine, 2000). Ur (2012) adduced certain reasons to support the above assertion and some of them include motivation and cognitive ability of the learner. However, the age factor, viewed from any angle has implications for the practicing applied linguist since rate and speed of acquisition will definitely vary among learners of different ages.

2.2. Culture

In learning English, whether as a foreign or second language, individual differences in terms of culture must be considered since it is not possible to have homogeneity in learners' culture. Culture, here refers to the total social behavior, experience and background of the individual learning a language. These cultural differences of the individuals may cause problems, because learners tend to incorporate elements of these into their behavioral repertoires (Kobayashi & Viswat, 2007) including their use of language. Studies conducted to identify the cultural differences between Japanese and American students in four areas have shown that students' attitudes towards discussion, approach to problems, approach to competition, and pragmatic values in learning styles vary considerably (Stewart & Bennett, 1991; Samovar & Porter, 2001; Fink, 2003). The four areas covered in the studies are namely: differences in students' attitudes towards discussion, differences in ways of voicing objections to teachers remarks, differences in views about competition, and differences in views about efficiency,

However, what a language teacher does with the marked cultural differences in the class is a central issue in Applied Linguistics (Pica, 1994). In a way, it has been postulated that cultural differences can result in two kinds of motivation, namely: integrative and instrumental motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). The former refers to the ability of a language learner to acquire the language at the same time immersing self into the whole culture of the language. The latter refers to the functional need the learner has to acquire the language in order to serve some utilitarian purpose, such as securing a job. But despite the fact that both kinds of motivation in learning a language cannot be separated, they are putatively linked. Language is alive, not dead and is not divorced from the culture that produced it (Tang, 1999). Consequently, it is the responsibility of the teacher in the classroom to exploit these numerous cultural varieties for effective language learning.

2.3. Gender

Gender differences in language learning have attracted numerous investigations with a view to enhance language learning and linguistics. Saville-Troike (2012) and Kimura (1999) have made inputs into the body of research in sexual differences among learners of language. Zoghi, Kazemi, & Kalani (2013) observed that the females in their study population performed better in English as foreign language (EFL) learning than the males in the study. It has also been argued that females are less asymmetrical for speech, are better at memorizing complex linguistic forms, have high estrogen levels, which correlates with better semantic and interpretive skills, and possess a high verbal fluency in communication. Similar works in the areas cover differences in sex behavior, intelligence, memory, aggression, personality traits, empathy, emotion, ethics and moral orientation, mental health and cognitive skills (Saville-Troike, 2012).

A recent investigation carried out by Nima, Parviz, and Parviz (2016) showed that male and female brains biologically do not have the same floor plan. They posited that female brains process language activities more easily, earlier, and faster than males, while males more readily excel at spatial-mechanical and gross motor skill tasks. Similarly, Gurian and Stevens (2004) examined the characteristics of girls' brain and that of the boys and concluded that girls do better than boys in reading and writing, while boys tend to gravitate towards motor activities. Also, the report indicated that because of the presence of high amount of white matter in corpus callosum, female brains enjoy a high degree of bilateralization than

boys. This, according to the investigation account for females excelling in communication practices. Knowledge of both sexes in this regard will enable the classroom teacher to explore possible avenues to close the gap in the acquisition of second language.

2.4. Learning styles

Cognitive style and cognitive strategies are terms, which have been used interchangeably with learning style, a term that first appeared in language learning in 1954 (Thelen, 1954). Learning style is used to describe a particular way in which a learner prefers to learn something (Richards & Schmidt, 2012). The terms are used to designate the preferred forms of brain activity associated with information acquisition and processing and consider personality variables to represent another kind of learning style (Ehrman, 2001). Learning style conjures the idea of the individual's natural, habitual and preferred way of absorbing, processing and retaining new information and skills in the environment.

It is quite usual to note that in second or foreign language learning, learners adopt varied means of solving their learning problems. For instance, a learner may prefer explanation to grammatical rules, such as the notion of grammatical concords. Another may be more comfortable with explanation and writing down illustrative sentences on the chalkboard. Yet, some others may remember those lessons and apply them in daily use when explanations go with pictorial associations. These ideas buttress the claim that it is wrong to expect uniformity in gaining proficiency or success in a particular field, especially in language studies from a group of students due to learners' background, intelligence, interest, aptitude and so on.

Researchers and practitioners use learning style research with personality and cognitive styles to determine ability, predict performance and improve classroom teaching and learning (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Erhman, 2001; Ehrman, Learner & Oxford, 2003). Richards and Schmidt (2012, p. 85) have identified several different dimensions of cognitive styles namely:

1. Analytical versus global styles where the learners focus or concentrate on the details of the main idea or big picture.
2. Visual versus auditory vs. hands-on or tactile styles which refers to different sensory preferences in learning.
3. Intuitive/random versus concrete/sequential learning which refers to a difference between thinking in an abstract or non-sequential

way and. a focus on a concrete fact or a preference to approach learning in a step by step, organized fashion. Learning styles theory contributes in no small way to the way students succeed or otherwise in approaching learning in their different styles.

2.5. Learning Strategies

The theory of learning strategies has a clear, unambiguous concept distinguishing it from others, such as learning styles. A learning strategy is the way in which learners attempt to work out the meanings and uses of words, grammatical rules, and other aspects of the language they are learning (Richards & Schmidt, 2012). In a second language learning situation, it is pertinent to add that a strategy is always an intentional behavior carried out by a learner with a view to achieving success in language learning. However, the efficiency of a given learning strategy, that is, whether it is good or bad is considered in relation to the context of use.

Ehrman and Oxford (1995) stated certain conditions under which a strategy is regarded as useful. They include: (1) the strategy must fit into the learning style of the students in a certain degree, (2) the strategy must be seen to be related to the L_2 learning task ahead, and (3) the learners must be able to employ the strategy effectively, relating it to other learning situations. In her view, if a strategy meets these conditions, learning becomes easier, faster, more enjoyable, more effective, and even more transferable to new situations. An effective strategy promotes learner independence and autonomy, which are pedestals of lifelong learning.

Instructions on language learning strategies dominate the field of Applied Linguistics and the theories of language learning. Ehrman (1996); Cohen (1998); and Wenden & Rubin (1987) are among leading contributors to the literature. Erhman, Learner and Oxford (2013) identified six main groups of learning strategies. They are:

1. Cognitive strategies, in which the learner manipulates language materials directly through reasoning, analyzing, note-taking and synthesizing.
2. Meta-cognitive strategies imply being aware of one's learning, planning and monitoring one's progress.
3. Social strategies involve asking questions, seeking clarification, asking for help, talking with native-speaking persons, or working with peers in a classroom setting and desiring to learn through interaction.

4. Memory-related strategies help learners link one L_2 item with another, with deep understanding such as images, acronyms, sounds, similarities, and so on.

5. Compensatory strategies help make up for the mixing knowledge such as guessing from the context, circumlocution, gestures and pause word.

6. Affective strategies which identify one's mood and anxiety and help learners manage their emotions and motivational levels. These and many other strategies are guidelines for teachers and students alike for choosing and using the appropriate strategies for the enhancement of language learning.

7. Affective Factors: Literature in affective domain is rife in language learning since about the 1950s and motivation is the most commonly investigated factor.

In its simplest sense, affective factors have objectives tilted towards development in students' attitudes, feelings and values. Besides motivation, self-efficacy, tolerance of ambiguity, anxiety and the likes are included. Motivation in learning has been classified into domains. In Gardner's (1985; 1988) Socio-educational model of language learning, we have integrative and instrumental motivations. Integrative orientation is wanting to learn language for the access it gives to the culture of the other community with a desire to participate as a member of it. Instrumental orientation on the other hand, entails gaining benefits essentially within one's own culture from speaking another language, such as career advancement, societal esteem, education, and so on.

There are numerous investigations of the integrative and instrumental orientations in their various nomenclatures. For instance, Clement, Dornyei & Noels (1994) identified five orientations of foreign language learners. In their view, some of the reasons for learning a second language include: (a) friendship and travel-related (b) identification with a foreign culture, (c) identification with the target language group, (d) expansion of knowledge of the world and career improvement and (e) a desire to be acquainted with the media of the target language. Deci and Ryan (1985) also researched along intrinsic and extrinsic motivation where it is stated that the former comes from within the individual and with a sense of self identity and well-being. But the later (extrinsic) is external, which entails learning the foreign language for the sake of reward. Many language learning philosophers have argued that intrinsic motivation correlates more closely with language learning success

(Walqui, 2000), but it must be emphasized that students' motivation is often a combination of both.

Despite motivation as a factor for learning, other affective factors include: anxiety (Dickson, 1995), internal attitudes (Crooke & Schmidt, 1991), self-management, self-monitoring (Krashen, 1981), emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995), and others. All these factors are somehow related to motivation and all play an important role in either promoting or hindering learning by an individual. It is therefore necessary to reiterate, even at the risk of repetition, that findings in motivation in affective factors in learning have not been unanimous. Walqui (2000) disagreed with the view that integrative orientation is far less important in foreign language setting. The same also goes for other affective variables such as anxiety, internal attitudes and self-monitoring.

The literature reviewed above established the relevance of individual differences in English language teaching (ELT) and the contributions it could make to language learning. The learning of English would therefore be enhanced if teachers of English are aware of the concept of individual differences and apply its principles in teaching their learners.

3. The Language Situation in Nigerian Classrooms

In Nigeria's multilingual context of approximately 526 languages, differences in learner attitude are further multiplied by the implicit multicultural background the learners bring along with their native languages to the classroom. The *National Policy on Education* (NPE) (FRN 2013) introduced another dimension to the challenges of coping with individual differences. Section 2(20) of the policy provided that "The medium of instruction in the primary school shall be the language of the environment for the first three years in monolingual communities. During this period, English shall be taught as a subject." The policy provided further that teachers should transit to English as medium of instruction from Primary 4 up to the tertiary level. "Language of the environment" is a loose term in Nigerian cities where the English-based Nigerian Pidgin has significantly taken over the communicative roles of Nigerian native languages, which the policy formulators obviously referred to by the quoted term. Adherence to this provision is not strictly monitored and school operators choose whether to comply with the policy stipulations or to start their learners off with English as medium of instruction. This situation creates further challenges in

individual difference among learner in terms of their periods of exposure to English as medium of instruction in higher classes. Teachers in higher levels of education receive learners who not only are instructed in an L2 as medium of instruction but also have disparate degrees of proficiency in that L2. ELT professionals in Nigeria can therefore turn to the application of individual differences pedagogy to enhance the learning experience of their students. We submit that significant literature on the subject support the following observations we make here about usefulness of individual differences in learning English in Nigeria:

- A sound knowledge of the principles of individual differences is necessary in lesson planning because modern classrooms are hardly homogenous in terms of linguistic background, age, sex, culture, and cognitive ability of the learners. Urban classroom in Nigeria especially manifest these diversities and require conscious efforts to deliver learning that integrates individual differences.
- The application of the principles of individual differences will enable the teacher to select appropriate materials, effective learning activities and tasks that would suit kinesthetic, auditory, tactile, and visual learners in the class.
- When teachers apply the principles of individual differences among learners of English, it inculcates the cherished ideals of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in the learners. This may become useful life-long learning on diversity and tolerance for students in Nigeria's multiethnic, multi-religious, and multilingual society. The application of yardsticks of individual differences regarding sex, age, culture, learning styles, etc. would reduce prejudices and promote learning in diversity and mutual respect among learners.
- Learning and practicing the principles of individual differences promotes fair and healthy competition among learners, who compete to achieve the highest outcomes for individual learners, contrary to unfair monolithic standards of achievement evaluation that breed jealousy, racism, resentment, sexism, and bullying.
- A teacher's mishandling of individual differences of learners could demotivate some learners and lead to unfair assessment of some learners based on their differences from a perceived "ideal" learner; rather than an appreciation of diversity of learner characteristics.

These observations are based on both our personal experiences of individual differences in teaching English as L2 in Nigeria and on the substantial review of literature presented above, in which authors generally

lauded the benefits of inclusive integration of individual differences in the classroom. However, certain indices raise doubts regarding the level of awareness and practice of individual differences among teachers of English in Nigeria.

4. Teaching and Learning English in Nigeria: Agenda on Individual Differences

ELT in Nigeria offers more employment opportunities than any other single school subject and there is a constant high demand for teachers of the subject in the country. One of the consequences of these is a constant dearth of qualified teachers of English and a resultant employment of non-ELT professionals to fill the gap. Consequently, graduates of non-teaching degrees, as well as graduates of disparate disciplines such as Sociology, Mass Communication, Political science, Theatre Arts, Geography, History, etc., are employed to teach English, especially in poorly regulated private primary and secondary schools across Nigeria. Obviously, these categories of teachers come unprepared for the task of handling learners' individual differences in terms of lesson delivery and assessment. Although this challenge may be applicable to the teaching and learning of other subjects in the Nigerian school system, our focus is on how it affects the learning of English. Applied linguists in Nigeria may direct more research focus on praxis and policy as two important foundations for a sustainable application of the principles of individual differences in ELT in Nigeria. Below are the details of our proposed research agenda and some justification for the ideas.

Firstly, praxis-based studies on teacher awareness and application of the principles of individual differences in learning delivery and assessment would enable applied linguists and English language teachers to determine both the challenges and the level of compliance of ELT professionals with the requirements of individual differences in teaching and learning English in Nigeria. It is important to re-examine the resources, theories, and processes of utilizing individual differences that could enhance the teaching and learning of English in Nigeria. This line of research will complement the abundant literature on individual differences in language learning. Teaching and learning an L_2 in Nigeria's multilingual background of 526 languages present an extraordinary context of multiculturalism and individual differences in the language classroom. According to Ethnologue (2018), "The number of individual languages listed for Nigeria is 526. Of these, 519 are living and 7

are extinct. Of the living languages, 509 are indigenous and 10 are non-indigenous". Rural primary and community-based secondary schools would have less diversity than metropolitan schools and tertiary institutions, which generally have more diversity in learner backgrounds. The typical tertiary and urban classrooms in Nigeria are made up of learners from different ethno-linguistic and cultural backgrounds. What degree of awareness of cultural differences does an average teacher require to effectively reflect principles of EDI and avoid hurting cultural sensibilities? How do Nigerian teachers of English currently cope with learners from such widely divergent cultural background? In selecting cultural content, is it possible for teachers in this situation to integrate elements of the cultures of all the learners? If there are choices to be made, what are the criteria for either inclusion or exclusion of specific cultural contents?

Consequently, praxis-based research agenda on individual differences of Nigerian L2 learners should include resources that answer the questions raised in the preceding paragraph and similar ones for the ELT professional. The resources could be channelled towards assisting them in handling individual differences in their classes.

Stakeholder agencies should become proactive in issues of English and Nigerian indigenous languages in education. They could initiate studies and endowments on the different aspects of the subject and prepare a database of findings. Agencies such as the Nigerian Educational and Research Development Centre (NERDC), the Nigerian Council for Colleges of Education (NCCE), the National Universities Commission (NUC), and the National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN) could provide leadership on this agendum. Unfortunately, they have not provided curriculum guidelines on managing linguistic and cultural diversities in Nigerian classrooms. Rather than provide policy support for teachers on this subject, NERDC allowed Nigerian history (which could provide resource on cultural diversities for teachers and learners) to be expunged from the school curriculum for political reasons. Under the supervision of the NCCE, pre-service teacher education curriculum in the country is designed and operated along concepts of the teacher as insignificant social agent. Therefore, pre-service training (PRESET) of teachers is not accorded the same regiment of broad-based learning and extensive internship that is given to other important professions such as law, aviation, medicine, pharmacy, etc. In most cases, there are no opportunities of institutionalized in-service training (INSET) for teachers in Nigeria and the teachers are abandoned to self-help as primary means of professional development.

Secondly, policy-based studies that may interface individual differences and learning outcome are required to provide clear policy dimension and professional guideline in the medium and the long terms. *The national policy on education* (NPE) provided that "Every child shall be taught in the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community for the first four years of basic education" (NPE, 2013, Section 1[8]). It went further to claim that "Government will ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother tongue (MT) of the learners or the language of the immediate community" (Section 2[16]) for early childhood care development. However, there are no adequate preparations and provisions to ensure effective implementation of this policy. For instance, the school curricula at that level have not been translated into the 509 native Nigerian languages that constitute the mother tongues and it is doubtful to us whether such a project would ever be accomplished in Nigeria's present political structure. Many of the native languages are not codified languages yet and many that are codified require further development to become useful in expressing mathematical and scientific concepts. Such a major policy required pilot studies, phased implementation, and perhaps, the creation of special PRESET curriculum to produce teachers that would implement it, while practicing teachers update their knowledge through INSET. Policy-based studies on the subject should address these gaps and adapt global best practices to suit Nigeria's context on the subject. It should also address the challenges of effective grading system in view of individual differences in L_2 learning of English in Nigeria and determine the best method Nigerian institutions should use in achievement measurement.

Also, policy-based studies on individual differences should interrogate the factors responsible for any identified gaps between the theory and practice of the subject against the background of Nigerian educational system. They require a broad-based approach that would integrate infrastructure, manpower, policy, and environment in the interrogation. The studies may produce action plans and articulate recommendations for the government and the ELT professionals.

5. Implications for Language Learning

The traits of individual differences (age, sex, culture, learning styles, learning strategies and affective factors) affect learning in different ways. Bearing this in mind, applied linguists have proposed different ways of

dealing with these differences in achieving good results in the classroom. Among them are, Dornyei and Csizer (1998) who proposed Ten Commandments, a number of activities which a practicing teacher should evolve in a second language learning situation. These are: personal examples; conducive atmosphere; proper presentation; good relationship; learner self-confidence, making the class interesting, promoting autonomy, personalizing instruction, good orientation, and paying attention to culture. They explained that if each of these factors comes to play in different circumstances in the context of demand, most of the learners' different needs should be met.

Individual differences can make a profound difference in teaching and learning of English. The awareness of the differences enables the teacher to manage the variables and perhaps, turn them into learning assets. The teachers' knowledge of the fact that the individual differences may result in different learning outcomes is a good starting point. Fink (2003) noted that recognizing each other's culture will prevent teachers and learners from imposing their own on others, allowing for individual pace and style in learning in the classroom.

In the affective domain, our emphasis is on intrinsic motivation, as a result of which the individual strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in the learning task (Gardner, 1985). The teacher bears the responsibility of providing students with learning experiences that meet their needs for competence, relatedness, self-esteem and enjoyment. Also, the teacher can generate intrinsic motivation by allowing students to make choices thereby increasing their sense of autonomy which most learners' desire. It requires the teachers' expertise for flexibility and a clear syllabus that can provide for individual differences among students in L_2 situation.

Conclusion

In this essay, we examined the traits of individual differences that have manifested among learners in L_2 situations. We identified among others, differences in age, sex, culture, learning styles, learning strategies and affective factors. These factors lead to variations among learners in speed and rate of acquisition in language learning, and also enhance or hinder the learning processes depending on teacher roles. Language learners must be ready and have a clear reason for such a learning task. But it

is the responsibility of the teacher, in many ways to guide the students to get the best out of learning. Based on the experiences in differences among individuals, the teacher should create the right atmosphere for language learning, where different learners would benefit. The teacher should adopt clear, empirically tested and acceptable teaching methods to take care of the different students in the class; create good relationships in the classroom where every student will develop self-confidence and integrate activities and tasks that clearly appeal to different learning styles and personalities. The teacher should, where appropriate personalize learning, create learner autonomy, and pay attention to cultural variations among L_2 learners.

We have given a panoramic view of L_2 learning of English in Nigeria and have also set two research agenda on individual differences in L_2 learning of English in Nigeria. The agenda focus on the praxis of individual differences in the delivery and the assessment of learning of English in the Nigerian L_2 classroom and on evolving lasting policy positions on the subject of diversity in education. We hope that both the review and the proposal espoused in this paper open up a vista for teachers to appreciate how different learners work, the similarities and differences among learners, and the teachers' reflection on how they have observed individual differences in their own practices.

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Gender, Productive Resources and Agricultural Development in the Urban Area

ABSTRACT. The Nigerian society is a patriarchy society where men dominate over women most especially in access and control over productive resources and decision-making process. This limitation often has negative impacts on food security; most especially in urban areas where more than half of the world's population now dwells. This study aimed at documenting the experiences of urban women farmers in accessing critical agricultural productive resources. The study engaged both quantitative and qualitative methods in designing the research. Multistage sampling technique was used to select 250 respondents, and information was elicited through the use of questionnaire, Key Informant Interview (KII), and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The study revealed that the urban female farmers in the study area have inadequate access to critical agricultural productive resources and are still making use of crude and traditional implements in their various agricultural activities. Likewise, through usufructuary rights, in reference to access to land the urban status quo is gradually weakening the patriarchal nature of the society.

KEYWORDS: access to, urban agriculture, urban women farmers, critical agricultural productive resources, social relations

Background to the Study

Urban Agriculture (UA) refers to any processes that produce traditional, subsistence, nutritional, or commercially profitable food, or other grown or raised products, cultivated within an urban area or in its surrounding peri-urban regions (Lesher, 2006). It is an essential source of support for both men and women which can improve their access to food and also meet the nutritional and medicinal needs of urban dwellers (Armar-Klemesu, 2000). The rate of migration from rural to urban area

in most developing countries has led to decrease in population of rural dwellers and increase in population of urban dwellers (Deshingkar, 2004). The resultant effect of this is an increase in demand for food in urban areas, malnutrition, hunger, decrease in food supply from the rural areas, increase cost of supplying food from the rural areas, high rate of unemployment and increased poverty in the urban centres (Baker, 2012). The limited and unavailability of cold and storage facilities in most developing countries have restricted the type of agricultural produce that can be supplied from the rural areas to the urban areas. Also, the costs of supplying agricultural produce from rural areas to the urban areas or to import food for the urban areas are incessantly increasing (de Zeeuw, 2004). Hence, UA is being promoted in urban areas as it is increasingly becoming more difficult for middle income and poor urban dwellers to adjust to this unfavourable condition (Olayioye, 2012).

The exquisiteness of UA activities is not just limited to agriculture professionals alone but can be practised by both women and men, young and old, locals and immigrants, wealthy and poor, commercial and subsistence farmers. Mougeot (2000), stated that majority of urban farmers are low-income men and women who grow food primarily for household consumption on small plots of land that they do not own and have little, if any, support or protection. Together with the men, women perform significant roles in production of agricultural produce for consumption as well as generating income. There might not be a general consensus to the level of contribution of women to urban agriculture, but it has been empirically proven that women contribute significantly to agricultural production and food security in the urban area (Mougeot, 2000; de Zeeuw, 2004; Kutiwa et al., 2010; Adedayo & Tunde, 2013). Women's roles as farmers, labourers and entrepreneurs, are often not recognised (World Bank, 2009). In fact, women have been observed to face more serious limitations than men in access to agricultural productive resources (SOFA Team & Doss, 2011). The agricultural sector in many developing nations of the world is underperforming due to many reasons, especially because women who represents a crucial and fundamental resource in the sector are often being marginalised (Food and Agriculture Organisation, FAO, 2011).

The persistent existence of wide gender gap between women and men in access and control over resources, and the discrimination against women through history, are presently comprehended as a hindrance in both national and international development agendas (Aina, 2011). Women limited access to agricultural productive resources such as land, labour, entrepre-

neurial skills, among others is a great limitation to agricultural productivity in Nigeria and in some other nations of the world. This limitation in manufacture of agricultural produce has negative impacts on food security; most especially in urban areas since more than half of the world's population now dwell in urban area (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UNDESA], 2010). Not astonishingly, women apparently represent the larger proportion of the world's poor in both rural and urban sectors (World Bank, 2009, 2012; Spieldoch, 2007). They also constitute larger proportion of people in the informal sector such as petty trading, subsistence agriculture, services, among others (Spieldoch, 2007; Ajani, 2008).

The Nigerian society is a patriarchy society where men dominate over women (Aina, 1998). Gender gaps have been identified in access and control over productive resources in six major agricultural resources and inputs: land, labour, credit, extension services, information, and technology (World Bank, 2012; Sheahan & Barrett, 2014). Ajani (2008), asserted that if female farmers were given the same essential agricultural productive resources as well as same enabling environment as their male farmers, female farmers would equally utilize these agricultural productive resources to increase their production and earn greater profits.

One of the major economic constraint militating against women farmers is the lack of access and control over land (Ogunlela & Mukhtar, 2009). Traditionally, women in Nigeria do not usually have direct and easy access to land, their main access to land is often through their male relatives and they are usually bound to the decision of the land owners (Aluko & Amidu, 2006). In both patrilineal and matrilineal societies, men are usually favoured by rules for inheritance and ownership of land. Iruonagbe (2009), asserted that in some societies in Nigeria, a girl child does not have access to land even after her father's death and a widow does not receive land; she only acts as a caretaker until her sons are grown. In some instances, a widow is willed along with the land to her deceased husband's brother. She can only continue to use the land for agricultural purposes only if she marries the new owner; but if she declines she may lose access to the land and her source of income. In all of these, a woman with only female children or a childless woman is in a perilous position as she will not have access to any form of land within the family. This often results into lower access to other productive resources such as credits, agricultural inputs and reduction of yields (United Nations, 2015).

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, only 10% of land in Nigeria is owned by women, and because of this restricted access to land, fe-

male farmers find it more difficult to undertake commercial scale farming. Likewise, high population of urban dwellers generates a high competition for land for several uses i.e. residential, commercial and industrial. Moreover, the demand for land in the city of Lagos is overwhelming for other use, and allocation of land in the metropolis is rather uneven against urban crop farmers. Therefore, as more women take option in urban farming against all these odds, to ensure food security, availability and sustainability in the urban areas, it is important to examine the state of urban women farmers, documenting their experiences in access, and control over critical productive resources in the urban area, hence this study.

Objectives:

1. Examine the sources of agricultural productive resources used by the urban female farmers.
2. Examine their level of access to critical productive resources (land, labour, capital, management skills).
3. Examine the social relations of production to critical agricultural productive resources.

Methodology

This is a descriptive cross-sectional study that was conducted among urban female crop farmers in Lagos metropolis. The study was limited to crop farmers because of the overwhelming demand of land for other use within the metropolis which might lead to an uneven distribution against urban crop farmers. A multistage sampling technique was used for the study because of the complex distribution of urban crop farmers within the study area. At the first stage, purposive sampling technique was used to select Ojo LGA, Kosofe LGA, and Surulere LGA, from the three senatorial district within the state, based on their agrarian nature (Figure 1). At the second stage, purposive sampling technique was also used to select Ojo, Alapere, and Tejuoso farming community from the previously selected LGA respectively. Finally, snow balling sampling technique was used to select 255 urban female crop farmers.

Data Collection Instruments

Data for the study was collected by using questionnaire, FGD, KII and IDI guide designed to obtain information from the respondents on urban

agriculture on empowering the women farmers. The self-administered questionnaire solicited information on urban women's farmers socio economic and demographic characteristics and inquired the empowerment of women involved in urban agriculture. Although the IDI, KII and FGD followed a formal guide, the interviewees were given the opportunity to express their views independently and were probed further through questions that arose from the discussion. The interview explored themes relating to Women in Agriculture (WIA), policy, and special intervention for female urban farmers This was done by tape recording and taking notes without losing important details. The quantitative and qualitative guides were structured in-line with the specific objectives of this study. This provided an opportunity to probe deeper on issues the questionnaire was not able to deal with extensively, also, to complement data generated through questionnaire.

Univariate analyses were used to present data through frequency distribution and simple percentages while the Qualitative data was analysed along the study themes. These entailed categorizing responses from interviews and questions in the questionnaire into themes as outlined in the study objectives. Other emerging themes were also documented. Responses were audio recorded and notes were taken to enable for further analyses and interpretation without losing details. The responses were transcribed and verbatim quotations utilized to describe the responses from the qualitative instrument. The FGDs respondents were given pseudo names for easy identification and proper analyses.

The Lagos State Ministry of Agriculture was consulted for permission to carry out the study in the area. The farming communities' heads were also informed as the gatekeepers to the communities. Anonymity was ensured through use of pseudonyms where no direct or indirect identifiers were used. Rights and integrity of respondents were respected in the course of the research. Respondents for this study were informed that their participation is voluntary, and no one was put under duress to provide relevant information to this study.

Results and Discussions

Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1 shows that the age range of the respondents is between the age of 25 years to 65 years, while their mean age is 43 years with the standard devia-

tion of 7.316. The respondents were classified into three different age catego-
ries. Urban women farmers aged 40–50 were the majority (46.2%), followed
by those less than 40 years (35.9%) and age group more than 50 (17.9%). The
proportion of the respondents married were more (86.1%) than those who
were widowed (9.2%) and single (4.7%). The family size of the respondents
ranges from 3 persons to 12 persons with average household size of 5 per-
sons. About half of the respondents (45.8%) belong to the Igbo ethnic group.
Cumulatively, majority of the respondents had access to formal education,
most especially secondary (39.4%) and primary (29.5%) education.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Socio-demographic characteristics	Frequency (n=251)	Percentage
Age		
< 40	90	35.9
40–50	116	46.2
> 50	45	17.9
Minimum age = 25 years; Maximum = 65 years; Mean age = 43 years; SD = 7.316		
Marital Status		
Single	12	4.7
Married	216	86.1
Widowed	23	9.2
Family size		
<5	89	35.7
5–7	148	59.4
>7	12	4.8
Minimum no = 3; Maximum no= 12; Mean = 5; SD = 1.381		
Ethnic group		
Yoruba	47	18.7
Igbo	115	45.8
Other ethnic (Edo, Delta, Calabar, Rivers, Tiv, Benue)	89	35.5
Education qualification		
No formal education	23	9.2
Primary	74	29.5
Secondary	99	39.4
Tertiary	55	21.9

Sources of Productive Resources for Female Urban Farmers

Table 2 reveals the major sources of productive resources acquired
by the urban female farmers. Results shows that the major productive re-
sources acquired by the female farmers themselves were labour (97.6%),

fertilisers (92%), seeds (91%), and non-mechanized equipment (89.6%). On the other hand, labour (69.3) and credit (30.3%) were provided by the respondents' family members i.e. spouse, children, father, mother, among others. Furthermore, the data presented in table 2 reveals that agricultural land (81.7%) and extension services (57.4%) were mainly provided by the government. On the contrary, access to agricultural and technical training (29.5%), credit (23.5%) and improved seeds (21.9%) were the major productive resources accessed through the various associations the women farmers belonged to.

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents by their Sources of Agricultural Productive Resources

Sources	Self Freq. (%)	Family Freq. (%)	Government Freq. (%)	Association Freq. (%)
Productive resources				
Credit	71 (28.3)	76 (30.3)	36 (14.3)	59 (23.5)
Pesticides	147 (58.9)	46 (18.3)	26 (10.4)	31 (12.4)
Fertilizer	231 (92)	39 (15.5)	43 (17.1)	37 (104.7)
Seed	229 (91)	50 (19.9)	35 (13.9)	29 (11.6)
Irrigation equipment	55 (21.9)	28 (11.2)	30 (12)	38 (15.1)
Non mechanized equipment	225 (89.6)	37 (14.7)	17 (6.7)	36 (14.3)
Mechanized equipment	24 (9.6)	22 (8.76)	10 (4)	14 (5.6)
Storage facilities	65 (25.9)	31 (12.4)	14 (5.6)	32 (12.8)
Improved seed	150 (59.8)	51 (20.3)	67 (26.7)	55 (21.9)
Land	75 (29.9)	49 (19.5)	205 (81.7)	20 (8)
Labour	245 (97.6)	174 (69.3)	2 (0.8)	48 (19.12)
Agricultural skills/ Technical skills	148 (59)	58 (23.3)	75 (29.9)	74 (29.5)
Extension services	17 (6.8)	13 (5.2)	144 (57.4)	40 (16)
Aggregate source of productive resources	**129 (51.5)**	**52 (20.7)**	**54 (21.6)**	**39 (15.7)**

Level of Respondents' Access to Agricultural Productive Resources

Table 3 presents data on level of respondents' access to agricultural productive resources. The mean scores show that the urban female farmers had more access to non-mechanised equipment ($\bar{X}$ = 1.486; SD = 0.641), agricultural skills/technical training ($\bar{X}$ = 1.382; SD = 0.798), fertilisers and pesticides ($\bar{X}$ = 1.347; SD = 0.635), and labour ($\bar{X}$ = 1.274; SD = 0.651) than other agricultural productive resources. The most inadequate productive resources in the study area were mechanised equip-

ment (0.175), irrigating machine, (0.390), extension services (0.610), storage facilities (0.713), and credit facilities (0.781). This result is similar to the findings of Toriro (2009), FAO (2011), and Adedayo and Tunde (2013) which submitted that access to credits, expensive and essential farming inputs, were the most pressing issue affecting urban women farmers. The findings also affirmed the study of Carr and Hartl (2010) and Perez et al. (2015) that women farmers often lack access to irrigation infrastructure and technologies. On the average, the level of access to productive resources among the respondents was inadequate (35.6%; X̄ =1.040 SD = 0.697).

Table 3. Level of Access to Productive Resources

Level of access to Productive resources	No access Freq. (%)	Inadequate Freq. (%)	Adequate Freq. (%)	Mean (X̄)	SD	RANK
Agricultural land	43 (17.1)	134 (53.4)	74 (29.5)	1.124	0.674	5
Capital						
Credit	95 (37.9)	116 (46.2)	40 (16)	0.781	0.701	7
Non-mechanised equipment	20 (8.0)	89 (35.5)	142 (56.6)	1.486	0.641	1
Mechanised equipment	214 (85.3)	30 (12)	7 (2.8)	0.175	0.448	11
Fertilisers and pesticides	22 (8.8)	120 (47.8)	109 (43.4)	1.347	0.635	3
Irrigating machine	180 (71.7)	44 (17.5)	27 (10.8)	0.390	0.674	10
Storage facilities	119 (47.4)	85 (33.9)	47 (18.7)	0.713	0.762	8
Improved seeds	83 (33.1)	72 (28.7)	96 (38.3)	1.052	0.845	6
Labour	28 (11.2)	126 (50.2)	97 (38.7)	1.274	0.651	4
Extension services	118 (47)	113 (45)	20 (8)	0.610	0.631	9
Entrepreneurial						
Agricultural skills	50 (19.9)	55 (21.9)	146 (58.2)	1.382	**0.798**	2
Aggregate level of access to productive resources	**87 (35)**	**89 (35.6)**	**75 (29.4)**	**1.040**	**0.697**	

Figure 1 shows respondents level of access to the various factors of production. The figure shows that the respondents had more access to entrepreneurial skills ($\bar{X}$ = 1.382; SD = 0.798), and labour ($\bar{X}$ = 1.274; SD = 0.651) than to the other factors of production. This can inhibit women effective performance in urban food production. According to various studies, inadequate access to agricultural productive resources implies inadequate exposure to agricultural value chains which signifies lesser productivity.
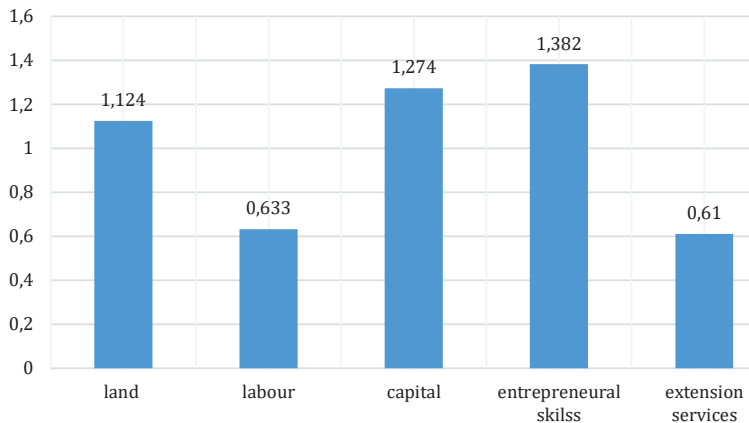

Figure 1. Level of access to the various factors of production

Social Relations of Production

The quantitative data is also corroborated by qualitative evidence in table 4 which presents key findings from the FGD sessions, documenting women's experiences with securing critical productive resources (land, capital, farm inputs, extension services and innovative agricultural technology). Data presented in the table indicated that both urban male and female farmers have similar problem in accessing critical agricultural productive resources though the female farmers seems to be more affected. It also tends to support respondents' inability to access appropriate agricultural productive resources.

Access to Land

Due to high rate of industrial growth and unprecedented urbanisation in the study area (Akinmoladun & Adejumo, 2011; Adedayo, 2014),

there is severe competition for different land uses; thus, many of the urban farmers could not afford high rents or high land prices. Larger proportion of the female farmers across the three LGAs have their farmland located within the military barracks, unused public lands, along the road, drainage channels, undeveloped housing properties, river banks, and Government staff quarters. Nevertheless, the women have no control over the land as higher proportion of them, most especially in Ojo LGA are wives of military officers who can be told to vacate the military barrack upon the death of their husband on the warfront or are either squatters who have usufruct rights for cultivating crops but can be ejected from the land without prior notice whenever any urban development is to take place.

Corroborating findings from the FGD sessions, it was established during the Key Informant Interviews with Extension officers that vast majority of lands cultivated in the study area belongs to the government, while access to such government land does not present overt gender gaps. This implies that procedurally, both men and women could apply to government for agricultural farmland within the city of Lagos. It is therefore interesting to note that urban conditions/situations are gradually ruling out patriarchal culture and traditions or at least making them less relevant.

Excerpt 1. KII with a 40-year old Female Block Extension Supervisor

...so far it is for agricultural purposes, the Lagos State Agricultural Land Holding Authority supports farmers to get easy access to farming lands within the state, although it might not necessarily be within the state metropolis ...while the Lagos State Agricultural Input Supply Authority (LAISA) provides fertilisers, seeds, pesticides for the farmers within the state (not for free though) ... in the beginning of this year, some of our female farmers were given re-usable plastic crates for them to carry their vegetables rather than using baskets or sacks.

Excerpt 2. KII with acting Head of Department of Agriculture Surulere LGA, Lagos

...there is no payment for the use of the land for any agricultural activity. The land belongs to the Federal Government under the Nigerian Railway Cooperation. ...farmers there are mostly staff and retired staff of the Ministry and others are Hausas. ...the women there are either members of staff of the Ministry, wife of a staff member or the portion of land was passed down to her by her father who was a member of staff.

Excerpt 3. KII with Head of Department of Agriculture Kosofe LGA, Lagos

> ...land for farming in our local government? There are many FADAMA female farmers farming along the stream behind the Local Government Office here, some are also along the road on the other side, while very few who are indigenes inherited the land from their families.

Findings from interviews also revalidate the outcomes of the study that attributed the difficulty of acquiring land for agricultural activities to the growing urban populace and sequential high demand of land for other land-use activities in the urban area i.e. commercial, residential, industrial, and recreational use. It was inferred from the study that urban female farmers have difficulties accessing land for urban farming. The difficulties in accessing adequate and secured land for farming within the city have led many of the urban female farmers to different modes of accessing lands. In this regard, it was gathered from the interview that vast majority of land cultivated by farmers were unused public lands which were set aside for other purposes and can lead to sudden ejection from such lands without prior notification and compensation. The implication of which can lead to increase in feminization of poverty in the urban areas as more female headed households and women who find difficulty in accessing waged labour are becoming more dependent on urban agriculture for survival.

Access to Credit

The data from the table also established that the major source of credits for farmers were through informal sources like their family and various farmers' group. Many of the respondents were compelled to resort to informal lenders such as friends and relatives. They unanimously stated during the FGD session that this has limited them from adopting new innovative technologies, most especially the use of pumping machines, and also from undertaking new investments. The implication of this result is that access to and purchase of essential farm inputs will be difficult. In essence, access to credit facilities plays a significant role in economic development.

Access to Labour

Majority of the urban female farmers depend on hired labour augmented with self, but with little or no assistance from their children, which makes their agricultural production more expensive and unprofitable. In essence, their children render little assistance because of the quantity of time they spend in school.

Table 4. Social relations of production

Experience securing critical productive resources	Ojo LGA FGD (F)	Ojo LGA FGD (M)	Kosofe LGA FGD (F)	Kosofe LGA FGD (F)	Suru LGA FGD (F)	Suru LGA FGD (M)
No access to innovative agricultural technology. Only use traditional farming methods	+++	++	+++	++	+++	++
Land insecurity. This land does not belong to me	+++	+++	+++	++	+++	+++
Land insecurity (can be ask to vacate the land anytime soon)	++	+	++	+	++	+
No access to irrigating machines. Only make use of watering cans	+++	+	+++	+	+++	++
No access to storage facilities, we look for whatever means to sell off our vegetable	+++	++	+++	++	+++	+++
Poor access to farm inputs e.g. seedlings, fertilisers etc.	+++	++	+++	++	+++	++
No access to loans. I have never borrowed money from the bank for my agricultural production	+++	+	+++	++	++	+
I have very easy access to extension agents	++	+	+	+	+	+

I have only met with extension agents once	++	++	++	+++	+++	++
No financial support from Government	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++
Government does not help in sourcing for farm inputs	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++	+++
Problem of farm labour	++	++	++	++	++	+
Very little assistance from children in area of labour supply because of schooling	++	+	++	++	–	+
Poor access to water for irrigation	++	+	+++	+	++	+

Key:

+   = where an opinion was expressed by 1–2 participants

++   = where an opinion was expressed by 3–5 participants

+++ **=** where an opinion was expressed by 6+ participants

–   = where that opinion was not expressed at all

Evidences from the qualitative data sources elaborated women's lack of access to agricultural critical resources, especially land, capital, extension services and innovative technology. Excerpts 4, & 5 shed more light on these findings.

Excerpt 4. FGD, a 49-year old female urban farmer in Ojo LGA, Lagos

… tractor? all the 15 years I have spent farming on this land, I had never made use of tractor. You can ask anybody around, I had never seen anyone use it in this area … we work with our cutlasses, wheelbarrows, shovels and hoes, … forget it, we only live and farm in the city, but we are not practicing city farming.

Excerpt 5. FGD, a 49-year old Women Farmers' Association leader in Ojo LGA, Lagos

…for example, all the women in my group are making use of watering can to wet our vegetable beds, we fetch water from hand dug wells not too far from us, … sure, some of those Mallams (Hausa male migrants) have pumping machine that they use … those pumps are just too expensive, though I need them but I cannot afford them.

Access to Water

In order to mitigate the negative impact of inadequate productive resources on their productivity, many of the respondents during the FGD sessions admitted that they often find substitutes for expensive and unavailable agricultural productive resources. For example, it was established that lack of regular source of water has compelled most of the urban female farmers to make use of any available source of water for irrigating their vegetables. It is interesting to note that across the three LGAs, not a single female farmer interviewed possesses irrigating machine, while it was commonly used among their male counterparts across the three LGAs. The most common source of water among the female farmers in Ojo LGA is shallow hand-dug well using watering can; while in Surulere LGA, female farmers make use of both drainage channels and shallow hand-dug well. The most common source of water among female farmers in Kosofe LGA is nearby streams, fetching with the aid of watering can.

Support from Government

The urban women farmers unanimously stated during the FGD sessions that they are faced with lack of access to extension services, loans, storage facilities, poor access to water for irrigation, and most importantly, lack of support from the Government. Lack of support from the Government remains a huge barrier to their productive activities as they need funding and support to be able to pay for farm labour, purchase fertilisers and organic manures, improved seeds, and other productive resources. The under listed FGD Excerpts 6 & 7 elaborate more on these findings.

Excerpt 6. FGD with a 48-year old urban female farmer in Ojo LGA, Lagos

> …I am not happy, the government is not helping us… there is no financial support from the federal and state government whatsoever, despite the fact that we are the major suppliers of vegetable within the state, it is like they don't know that we exist. It is very discouraging.

Excerpt 7. FGD with a 50-year old urban female farmer in Surulere LGA, Lagos

> The last time we received something from the Federal Government was during Buba Marwa time (Lagos State Governor, 1996), when they gave us fertilisers and we obtained it as groups. The only person helping us now in the government is Honourable Femi Gbajabiamila who constructed about 154 solar street lights and solar powered water tanks for us within the farm.

However, an interview with an acting Head of Department contested the result, suggesting that women farmers have adequate access to productive resources within the State (see Excerpt 8).

Excerpt 8. KII with the acting Head of Department of Agriculture, Surulere LGA, Lagos

> Our farmers do not suffer to get farm inputs, regardless of the sex or tribe. Most of these farm inputs are made available, accessible, and even relatively at a cheaper price through the Lagos State Agricultural Input Supply Authority (LAISA).

Conclusions

The study revealed that urban female farmers do not have adequate access to appropriate agricultural productive resources. Formal ownership of land was not common among the urban female farmers, since majority of the land in use belong to the government, but through usufructary rights, they appear to have equal access to land with the men, and its utilisation as against the conventional way of unpaid labour on their husband farm or family land. This, however, represents a deviation from previous studies, most especially in the rural area, which submitted that difficulty in accessing land by women farmers were mainly because of patrilineal property inheritance. This urban status quo in reference to access to land is gradually weakening the patriarchal nature of the society. Hence, majority of the women earn income directly from their own farm. Thus, decision-making over agricultural produce and income is disproportionately concentrated towards women in the study area.

The government should encourage and promote the use of innovative technology in agriculture, such that urban female farmers can easily adopt

mechanized farming, hydroponic agriculture, Integrated Pest Management (IPM), greenhouses, vertical gardens, and the use of hanging gardens, as against the traditional methods of farming currently in use. Since land is one of the critical agricultural productive resources, Government should incorporate urban agriculture into the town planning for urban areas in such a way that it will be easier for women to access lands for farming. There is also need for more effective and enabling structures to ensure that urban agriculture becomes a successful enterprise, most especially for the women.

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Di bụ ugwu nwanyị
(Husband is the dignity of a woman): Reimagining the Validity of an Igbo Aphorism in Contemporary Society

ABSTRACT. Cultural aphorisms tend to sustain gender disparity. There are certain cultural expressions which tend to sustain gender disparity and oppression among the Igbo of Nigeria. One of such is *di bụ ugwu nwanyị*, literally translated 'husband is a woman's dignity'. This Igbo maxim tends to foster gendered marginalization and oppression in contemporary Igboland. The saying reinforces the status of the husband as requisite for the visibility and pride of the woman. Perhaps this may explain why some marital issues such as husband infidelity, wife-battering, are culturally underplayed for protection of the man. Thus women are forced to endure abuses in their marriages. There exist a plethora of other gender related issues that are rooted in the *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* metaphor. This paper engages the implications of this Igbo cultural expression amidst the advocacy of gender justice and inclusivity in Igbo land. As qualitative study that adopts the phenomenological approach, this paper, draws insight from interviews, observations, oral histories and extant Igbo literature. Akachi Ezeigbo's snail-sense feminism and Obioma Nnaemeka's negofeminism undergird the theoretical framework. The paper advocates for the obliteration, or reinterpretation of *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* that honours dignity for gender equity and inclusivity so as to valorize the status of women in Igboland.

KEYWORDS: *Di bụ ugwu nwanyị*, Igbo, aphorism, feminism, marriage, patriarchy

Introduction

Igbo worldview and cultural practices are given expression in their aphorisms, proverbs and metaphors. Such sayings are regarded as words of wisdom and are consciously handed down and perpetuated orally from one generation to another. The age long aphorism among the Igbo—*di bụ*

ugwu nwanyị which literally means 'husband is the dignity of a woman' has survived the ages. This has fostered the social practice among the Igbo that the visibility of a woman depends on marriage or that marrige established a woman. Thus, an unmarried woman in the community is usually seen as deficient in her personality and oftentimes taunted for that reason by members of her family or even the community. Singlehood, therefore, among the Igbo is stigmatized as evil. The saying *di bụ ugwu nwanyị*, has created palpable pressure and desperation in the psyche of women of marriage age in Igbo society, resulting to such women seeking marriage either by crook or by hook.

Di bụ ugwu nwanyị creates an impression that women in Igbo land lack dignity, personality, honour and self-worth independednt of a man. Little wonder women are often identified as either their father's daughter, their husband's wife or their child's (often first son) mother. She is always an object, never a subject. By definition, an Igbo woman is subsumed in and has no identity outside the man. Perhaps, this explains why Okoye (2017) posits that women are potrayed as inferior in the name of marriage. Continuing, Okoye (2017, p. 363) sums up as "oppressive proverbs", sayings like *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* and other such idioms that foster gender imbalance and oppression among the Igbo. Chukwuma (2012, p. 90) notes that because of patriarchy, "woman is there for and at the pleasure of men. Husband is supreme, is the head of the family." This therefore lays credence to some of the expressions that innundate feminist studies in Africa, that women are subjugated, oppressed and infact victims (Agbasiere, 2000, p. 45, 139; Chukwuma, 2012; Shaka & Uchendu, 2012; Ngcobo, 2013; Ogbujah & Onuoha, 2014; Ike, 2017; Oluremi, 2017; Schmidt's introduction to Heise, 2018, p. 197; Smith, 2019). Agbasiere (2000, p. 46) corroborates this while discussing the taboos that surround marriage in Igbo society. In her words, "the weight of taboo falls less heavily on men than it does on women. The discrepancy is evident in sanctions governing marriage and conjugal relations." Little wonder "many twentieth-century feminists condemned marriage as a central source of patriarchal oppression and control" (Schmidt's introduction to Heise, 2018, p. 197).

From the foregoing, the effect of *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* in Igbo societies is deemed repugnant and counterintuitive. Oduyoye (2002, p. 153) rightly observes that "closely binding a woman's sense of being to marriage and child-bearing has been a traditional means of marginalizing women." This view is not peculiar to African scholars alone. Schmidt's introduction to Heise (2018, p. 197), agrees with Oduyoye and many oth-

er African scholars that marriage is apparently an institution that guarantees what he refers to a "(legal) oppression." of women. Young women paradoxically, live all their lives in preparation for marriage in order to add 'dignity' to their lives at the detriment of preparing themselves for a tremendous future, whether married or not. Girls get indoctrinated into patriarchy early:

> where the value of women lies only in their sexuality. Her worth is measured by first the shape of her body, second whose daughter she is and thereafter, whose wife she is ... her mental energy is expended thinking of and imagining a prince charming of a husband with whom she will live happily ever after. (Shaka & Uchendu, 2012, p. 5).

Unfortunately however, some women settle for lazy or abusive men, just because their dignity is defined by marriage. Not to mention the harrowing experiences like battering, infidelity and verbal abuse some women go through in some Igbo marriages. Most times, these women continue to stick around at the expense of their lives sometimes because they cannot afford to be mocked or held in disdain by a community that ridicules single women or women from a broken marriage. More disturbing, is the fact that daughters of Igbo communities (*umuada* or *umuokpu*), made up of married and mostly unmarried daughters of the community, do not integrate and synergize with the wives' group (*ndi inyom*), who are naturally their brothers' wives. The *umuada* are perhaps discriminated against, either real or imagined, on the basis of their marital status, with the married women glorying in the glee that their 'dignity' is very much intact. It could also be that *umuada* deliberately maintain the dichotomy between the two women's groups so that they would be able to antagonize or 'cut the excesses' of *ndi inyom.* Hence, women among the Igbo do not speak with one voice against patriarchal structures that have kept them bound in the society. Women generally, irrespective of marital status, share similar experiences and face thesame patriarchal obstacles such as demeaning aphorisms that subsume a woman in the man. The unjust structure contributes significally to women's lack of access to economic power. This limits the women from maximizing their potentials and enjoying their dignity as full humanbeings independent of men.

One wonders why *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* is parochial. Do men and women not complement each other in every human society? Are unmarried Igbo men not regarded as *efurefu* (a foolish or lost person)? Does mar-

riage in Igbo land, with a few exceptions of matrilineal communities not benefit the man more?, where his wife becomes his servant, gives him children that will bear his name, nurtures the children and takes care of the home. All these without a paycheck. In addition, she endures all manner of patriarchial injustice and restrictions on her fundamental rights as humanbeings even more, she looses her identity as a person to patriarchy. Why then is there no corresponding aphorism among the Igbo as regards the important place of a woman in a man's life with respect to marriage?

This paper therefore, engages the effects and relevance of the aphorism *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* among contemporary Igbo amidst the outcry against all forms of subjugation and dehumanization of women as well as a clamour for gender equity and justice all over the world. To carry out this task, the research design deploys phenomenological and descriptive approaches and data gathered through the instrumentality of personal interviews, oral histories, participant observation and extant literature. Data collection and presentation is purely qualitative.

Obioma Nnaemeka's negofeminism and Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo's snail-sense feminism is used as the theoretical basis for this study. It is hypothesized that the saying, *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* and its despicable consequences has become antique and parochial in present realities and is anti-gender equity. It fans the embers of gender disparity and injustice and sequesters Igbo women from self-realization. In this paper, attempt is be made to understand the 'patriarchal wisdom' behind this dictum. The twists and turns of *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* will be explored as well as its flows and ebbs in modern times. More so, *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* will be evaluated with respect to its practical application in present times. Then, recommendations will be made and conclusion drawn from findings.

Theoretical Framework

The rationale behind this research is based on two feminist theories—negofeminism and snail-sense feminism indigenous to Africans (Nigerians) and propunded by feminist scholars of Igbo ethnic origin. In this paper, the agelong saying *di bụ ugwu nwanyị,* which exacerbates gender disparity among the Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria is interrogated against contempoary context.

Nego-feminism

Negofeminism is an afro-centric feminist theory that was put forward by Obioma Nnaemeka in her 2005 work titled: *Negofeminism: Theorizing, Practicing and Pruning Africa's way*. Nnaemeka and many other afro-centric feminist theorists identified patriarchy and the disadvantaged position of women in Africa as a problem. On the other hand, they were dissatisfied with the Euro-centric 'universal' feminist theories that was incongruous with peculiarities of African women experiences, or ways of living and knowing. Acknowledging the fact that gender issues in the West and gender issues in Africa are not coterminous and that the experiences and voices of women of African decent and other non-caucusian women were not represented in mainstream feminist theories, African women gender scholars resorted to developing indigenous feminist theories to address the issues of women in Africa in the African way. Nnaemeka, therefore, proposed negofeminism as a culturally appropriate and compliant model. Negofeminism is about negotiation; 'no ego' in the bid to herald gender balance and justice in Africa. 'No ego' here, stands for pursuit of harmony and justice without ego either from the women or even the men. Nnaemeka, the theorist, admits that patriarchy is pathological in African culture and culture drives and props gender disparity in Africa. However, since African women valorize marriage, motherhood, complementarity, solidarity and other forms of femininity (to be distinguished from feminism), Nnaemeka contends that African women should be willing to negotiate with and around men in conflicting circumstances in ways that are congruent with Africa's historical and cultural contexts. She promotes negotiation and cooperation which she believes is rooted in the value system of Africans. For her, negotiation here, should not be mistaken for passive resistance. She unequivocally states that an African woman knows "when, where and how to detonate patriarchal landmines. In other words, she knows when, where and how to negotiate with or negotiate around patriarchy in different contexts" (Nnaemeka, 2005, p. 377–378). Negofeminism advocates for negotiation and an indigenous feminism devoid of ego from any of the sex groups. Gender is thus, men and women working collaboratively. Alkali, Talif and Jan (2013, p. 11–12) note that "nego-feminism surrounds issues of peace or conflict management, negotiation, complementarity, give-and-take, collaboration, bargaining, mediation, and arbitration." According to Nnaemeka, for African feminists to cross boundaries, they need to be

guided by the 'chameleon sense'. The chameleon makes slow and calcu-
lated steps in one direction, and then in another depending on prevailing
circumstances of the environment. Such 'moves', according to Nnaemeka,
could be helpful in feminism. In Nnaemeka's (2005, p. 382) words, the Af-
rican feminist, like the chameleon, should be—"goal-oriented, cautious,
accommodating, adaptable, and open to diverse views." This theory repu-
diates antipathy towards men. Rather, men are seen as allies in their fight
for emancipation. Ike (2017, p. 210) writes that negofeminism is one of
the Nigerian gender theories that "seek to nigerianise feminist struggle by
devising strategies for gender complimentarity that support African com-
munal life."

The weakness of Nnaemeka's negofeminism lies in the fact that it can-
not claim sufficiency in addressing the nuances of African women's expe-
riences in a non-monolith Africa. On that basis, it has been criticized for
exclusion.

Snail-sense Feminism

This theory was advanced by Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo in her 2012
monograph series, titled: *Snail-sense feminism: Building on an indige-
nous model.* Snail-sense feminism is Ezeigbo's own version of Nigerian
(African) indigenous feminist theory. Her work develops from the the
fact that Western feminism lacks the temerity to authoritatively speak
for non-European women. Just like Nnaemeka and other African feminist
theorists like Catherine Acholonu, Chioma Opara, Molara Ogundipe-Les-
lie, and others, Ezeigbo (2012, p. 26) is of the opinion that a suitable
feminist theory for Nigerians (Africans) must be built on the indigenous
and must be "realistic, practical and functional." Uwandu (2018, para.
4) posits that such theory has to "fit into Nigerian/African worldview,
mannerism and ideals." Ezeigbo used the habits of snails and its smart
sense as a model for feminism in Africa. The snail is a small feeble animal
with antenna-like tentacles on both sides of the head, a shell into which
it retracts when faced with a strong obstacle or when it senses a threat.
It moves slowly with its always lubricated lips and is dogged in terms
of reaching its goals. It navigates through rough, smooth, rocky, thorny
paths undeterred from reaching its target. A snail is also an individual-
istic animal as it is hardly seen in a closely-knit group or in the company
of its young. Ezeigbo avers that Nigerian women in the past, successful-

ly employed the habits of the snail, that is, wisdom, sensitiveness, resilience, doggedness and determination, in their relationship with men and patriarchy; she believes those habits remain germane in the present context as well. Snail-sense feminism is about tolerance and accomodation. In Ezeigbo's (2012, p. 27) words, the snail "does not confront objects but negotiates its way past any obstacle."

Unlike other afro-centric feminist theories that center on communalism, Ezeigbo's model centers on the individual woman first. When she succeeds in achieving self recognition and preservation which are crucial to a woman's success, the success of the family or community follows naturally (Ezeigbo, 2012). In essence, "snail-sense feminism, symbiotically, advocates Western feminism's individualism and African womanism's communalism" (Ezeigbo, 2012, p. 35).

Snail-sense feminism can be used by the modern Nigerian woman as a strategy to "negotiate tradition, respond to political, socio-economic and cultural impositions" (Ezeigbo, 2012, p. 33). This model is phenomenal because it querries the efficacy of extant ideas about sisterhood, female agency and group consciousness. Ezeigbo (2012, p. 36) contends that, "in the end, it is the individual that constitutes the group." Nevertheless, Ezeigbo pointed out that her theory has been criticized as demeaning to Nigerian women, owing to the fact that the snail is weak and sluggish. Critics of snail-sense feminism subscribe more to African women being more unapologetic in their demand for their rights and justice.

Negofeminism and snail-sense feminism are similar in the sense that they are both Nigerian variants of feminism that are not radical, separatist and appreciates female-male complementarity. The theories only differ slightly in approach. Negofeminism is communalistic, while snail-sense feminism is more individualistic than communalistic. Both are however practical home-grown models for issues bordering on feminism in Nigeria and among the Igbo in particular.

Be that as it may, the theories are appropriate for this paper because they are built on the indigenous model with respect to the issues about the Africanness of African women. This theoretical framework will help push the frontiers of knowledge forward because it will be used to interrogate *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* among the Igbo in the contemporary society. In order to engage this aphorism that promotes female oppression among Igbo people, negofeminism and snail-sense feminism remain instructive. According to Alkali, Talif and Jan (2013, p. 11), "efforts are needed to proffer ways for women to achieve their objectives without recourse to injurious method-

ology. Nego-feminism in this exact sense sets out to achieve just that." Also, snail-sense feminism is unique as a result of its emphasis on individualism which is uncommon among traditional Igbo people.

Historical Justification for *di bụ ugwu nwanyị*

The aphorism *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* evokes the psychology and consciousness that patriarchy holds sway in Igboland. The expression props and perpetuates societal disequilibrium as it marginalizes the femalefolk. However, nothing happens without a reason. Some of the reasons held as justification for this aphorism are apt and somewhat convincing, others seem trivial, androcentric and ridiculous.

In an interview conducted on 27 December 2019, Mrs Evelyn Aniago avered that *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* is used in Igboland to deter young women from promiscuity. She opined that suitors only ask for the hands in marriage of ladies that are perceived to be 'chaste'. Promiscuous ladies remain unmarried. According to Aniago, to remain unmarried was highly undesirable for any family or even young girl. Hence *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* was to prevent the distasteful condition of remaining single. Marriage was elevated to almost a sacrosanct rite of passage in Igboland. Thus, it was normative for every young girl in Igboland to marry. During an interview conducted on 16 March, 2020, Prof Ngozi Iheanacho asserted that in Africa, "perpetuity in a woman's home of orientation makes her a failure." At a certain stage and age in the life of an Igbo woman it is said that people will cease to ask whose daughter she is and begins to ask whose wife she is (PK Amilo 2019, personal communication, 29 December). Such cases serve as strong reminders to the lady that culturally, she ought to have over-stayed her welcome in her natal home.

On the other hand, the Igbo believe that marriage restricts sexual relationship to one partner or at least with one's spouse in the case of polygyny. This is hardly true with some couples though. However, it is assumed that an unmarried woman is open for sexual advances from every interested man since she has 'no dignity' without a husband. During an interview conducted on 16 March 2020, Prof Ngozi Iheanacho noted that when the man who is like a protective cover is not there, any man could come at any time knocking at the door of a woman for sex. To protect the sexual sanctity of Igbo societies therefore, women should get married (P Isintume 2020, personal communication, 2 January). Isintume insisted

that marriage *per se*, does not regulates sexual advances on women but marriage to a man. *Di* (husband) does not only connote male among the Igbo, a woman's in-laws represent her *di*, whether the husband is alive or dead. When a woman is widowed, she still has many *di.* Her in-laws, some men outside the inlaw-*di* relations, still make undue advances at her suggesting different kinds of marital relationship in Igbo society.

Different kinds of marriage are recognized among the Igbo. One of such is the marriage of two women. This relationship is nothing to being lesbians. Progeny drives this form of marriage. In the case that a woman could not have children, or wants to advance her status in society, she could marry a woman for herself. The woman so married becomes her wife. The female husband claim the children the 'wife' bears. Amadiume (1987) spells out this relationship among the Igbo. In this case of a 'female husband', marriage hardly regulates sexual advances on her. In essence, the Igbo society has regard for a woman that is married to a 'male', that is to say, the marriage is not for her sake, but for the sake of the male husband.

Strictly gendered roles in Igboland in the past, where the man was responsible for catering for the family, and the woman was responsible for domestic chores, placed women in an economically disadvantaged position. Their job both in their natal homes and marital homes majorly attracted no financial remuneration. With no compensation for the long labours within the household, women's work was usually regarded as 'nothing' (Oduyoye, 2002; Chukwuma, 2012). Consequently, marriage served as economic covering for women. Wives depended on their husbands for their needs, chief among which were dresses which remain a major boost for married women (N Iheanacho 2020, personal communication, 16 March). Many take pride in the fact that their husbands provided them clothing. "In the patriarchal world order, there are a few possible means by which a woman can break out from the circle of perpetual poverty. One way is marriage to a wealthy man who can offer the luxury required to live well" (Shaka & Uchendu, 2012, p. 14). Aside economic dependence on the husband, preference for males in child bearing indirectly fuels *di bụ ugwu nwanyị.*

It is common knowledge among the Igbo that male children are preferred in child bearing because they perpetuate their family line (Mbonu, 2010, p. 89–90). From childhood therefore, girls were socialized in such a way that they come to terms with their second fiddle status in the family. The girl-child grows up painfully aware that she does not have a permanent abode in her natal home. Her transitional existence within the family motivates her to actively seek solace in marriage. This simply corroborates

the impression young women have been made to embrace and make marriage appear a safe haven as well as dignifying. Dignity in marriage is not without children, especially male.

That notwithstanding, the Igbo of Nigeria valorize fecundity for many reasons. Children are regarded as blessing and must be sought after. As Oduyoye (2002, p. 141) put it, "procreation is the most important factor governing marriages in Africa." For the women, among other things, children, especially male children provide security in marriage and guarantees a secured old age. According to Chukwuma (2012, p. 90), "in Igbo traditional ethos, motherhood is the quintessential honour and crown of the married woman." To have children therefore, in a socially approved way in line with cultural mores in Igboland, marriage becomes a necessity. In other words, to enjoy the benefits that come from motherhood, one must necessarily pass through the 'dignifying' institution of marriage. In essence, motherhood is empowering (Chinweizu, 1990); but this empowerment often contends with other societal bottlenecks on women. Hence, Chukwuma (2012, p. 90), asserts: "though motherhood elevates a woman's status in the society, her femalism continues to define and limit her." Religion has also been pointed as a justification for *di bụ ugwu nwanyị.*

In a way, Christian religion, which majority of the Igbo have come to embrace supports *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* in principle and in practice. Okure (2013, p. 364) decries the scriptural injunction that wives be subject to their husbands in all things. For Okure, this "places on the wife an impossible burden that borders on a case of conscience; it creates internal conflict and reduces the wife to a non-person." Continuing, Okure impressively bares and debunks the obvious anomalies in the biblical reference to men as head in Eph. 5:25–33. She posits that whether 'head' here means source, part of the body or boss (being in charge) of the woman, such comparisons cannot stand their ground. Without condemning the author of Ephesians, Okure (2013, p. 370) thinks it is time to "carry forward in our own context, with over 2000 years of history, the christologizing of the passage that he [the author of Ephesians] started." Okure concludes that the distorted use of scripture against women are misrepresentations by men and not based on Christ. Decock (2013) shares thesame thoughts with Okure. On her own, Oduyoye (2002, p. 182) submits that, "a church that consistently ignores the implications of the gospel for the lives of women ... cannot continue to be an authentic voice for salvation".

The aphorism—*di bụ ugwu nwanyị* is also strengthened by the Igbo religious views. Igbo indigenous religion as well as the Christian religion, are

patriarchal religions. These religions reinforce male domination and women's marginalizaion (Shaka & Uchendu, 2012; Decock, 2013; Okure, 2013; Ezenweke, 2015; Schnabel, 2019). Although the participation of women in Igbo traditional religion is said to be adequate (Oduyoye, 2001), patriarchal structures sometimes eclipse this fact. For instance, Okafor (2012, p. 20) avers that, "as daughters, wife and mothers, women are revered because of that principle that extends to the [earth] goddess but patriarchal social organization tends to constrain this power."

The argument canvassed above are the explanations given as justification for the saying—*di bụ ugwu nwanyị.* Some interviewees accept the adage as chiseled on stone, they simply note that the axiom is cultural and normative for the Igbo ethnic group.

The Twists and Turns of *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* in Igbo Contemporary Context

Having looked at some reasons for *di bụ ugwu nwanyị*, it becomes pertinent to consider its merits and demerits in Igbo contemporary context. The effects of the saying *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* on women, perhaps unintended, remains repulsive. The aphorism portrays an unmarried woman as worthless and handicapped. Moreover, the concept of woman's dignity issued from that of her husband subjects her to perpetual serfdom in marriage.

Marriage is desirable among the Igbo of Nigeria and the absense of it is sinister for the female folks. Women are therefore 'talked' into marriage sometimes when they are neither ready nor have a suitor of their choice. Mothers who have been immersed in Igbo traditional practices and aphorisms like *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* pressurize their daughters into marriage so that the daughter may be a "dignified humanbeing". This is a contested situation for the society. Such pressure create psychological problems for young women, some suffer depression and some others settle hurriedly for some man they are incompartible with. Such is the predicament of young Igbo women. Ngcobo (2013, p. 540) insists that "the plight of a woman is desperate, ... Many will hang on to the same man long after he has lost interest. This raises a crucial question for African women today—that of self-definition and self-determination." Such shaky marriages could easily end in divorce.

The is an unwritten code attributing perfection to women in Igbo society in terms of marriage. The society holds her accountable if she does

not get married, and again if she does marry and the marriage fails, she is deemed culpable for her inability to endure the indignities and attrocious relationship. Therefore, women hardly 'left (divorced) their husbands' in the past. Regardless of of whether a man left his wife and went his way, or sent her out of the house, or maltreated her until she could take it no more, it was said that she 'left her husband' (Nwapa, 1966). Writing about women and divorce in African literature, Ngcobo (2013, p. 539) rightly states:

> the image of divorced women in our society and our literature is negative. Only a handful may earn the understanding of the community ... On the whole a wife will do anything to endure even a stressful marriage, for in a divorce she comes out the loser: Even when her husband is the offending party.

Thus, women in Igboland usually endure mistreatments as *ijedi* (liabilities that come with marriage). The notion of *ijedi* was unequivocally and exhaustively discussed by Agbasiere (2000). It is troubling however, that many women in Igboland past and even in contemporary times silently endure untold abuses and inhumane treatment from husbands because they believe their humanity and dignity rest in the marriages. This bares the 'culture of silence' that has bedevilled Igbo women and perhaps, women in other parts of the globe. Defining the good woman in Africa, Udumukwu (2007, p. 3) says that she is "that woman who suffers the effects of oppression ... and who must maintain a silence and passivity in order to remain good." In the same vein, Shaka & Uchendu (2012, p. 9) aver that nollywoood video films, in line with African patriarchy, often potray Nigerian model of a 'good' woman as "docile, submissive, accepting, never protesting, never questioning." Such a woman as described by Udumukwu (2007), Shaka & Uchendu (2012) must be a robot, without emotions or will.

On the other hand, Makama (2002), cited in Ike (2017, p. 207) stresses that in Nigerian movies, "educated working women activists are portrayed as audacious insubordinate agitators, while those who opt to remain single are portrayed as prostitutes, social degenerates and immoral human beings." Depicting a typical Igbo sentiment about marriage in Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones*, Diala-Ogamba (2012, p. 320) states that women "stay in marriage even when there is chaos or some kind of spousal abuse in their marital homes." In the same vein, in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Chukwuma (2012) narrates how brute force is used to bend wives to submit to their husbands.

Additionally, among the Igbo, at the demise of a husband, the wife apparently looses 'dignity'. The unwholesome widow rites meted out and the untold woes of widows in Nigeria and Africa have been adequately documented (Shaka & Uchendu, 2012; Mbonu, 2013; Quayson, 2013; Ogbujah & Onuoha, 2014; Oluremi, 2017).

For the Igbo woman, marriage could be a fulfilling, ambivalent or even an awful experience. Nevertheless, the strength of *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* lies in the fact that it serves to champion marriage, a decidedly esteemed institution in Africa. Most African gender activists, past and present, amidst their struggles for gender equity and justice, endorse marriage. Moreover, marriage remains the only institution that guarantees a woman the privilege to bear children according to cultural norms. Marriage strongly regulates sexuality, continence and chastity among women in Igboland. Having considered the flow and ebb of *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* in contemporary Igbo societies, a discourse on *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* in contemporary context will follow.

Di bụ ugwu nwanyị in Contemporary Context

Modernity brings to the fore the full implication of the concept of *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* in contemporary Igbo society. The pertinent question becomes whether this expression is still relevant in the present realities among the Igbo. In the past, *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* served some palpable purposes. This not withstanding, the relevance and practicability of *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* in the contemporary times has become problematic. With advancement in knowledge and the whole new area of gender roles, feminism and other forms of women's activism and struggle, the age old marginalization structures have began to crumble. Issues bordering on Igbo traditions are however recalcitrant because for the Igbo, tradition is sacrosanct and should not be questioned. Quayson (2013) therefore calls for subtlety in handling them. Nnaemeka's negofeminism and Ezeigbo's snail-sense feminism are subtle and strategic and should be applied in finding a way around and making a headway within obstinate traditions.

No doubt, marriage among the Igbo is *sine qua non* and mutually reinforcing to women and men. In other words, ideally, marriage is essential and beneficial to both parties in Igboland. However, culturally, men seem to be the ones that benefit more in marriage. Be that as it may, strong changes that alter or point to a modification of the saying *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* have

permeated the system. For instance, in contemporary times, due to education and other modernizing agencies, patriarchal structures that support the marginalization of Igbo women is being interrogated. Some women are now demanding for a deconstruction of patriarchal structures that have thingified Igbo women as second class citizens for a long time. As a result, the aphorism *di bụ ugwu nwanyị,* honorific titles such as Oriaku (wealth consumer) and names like 'Ejinwanyiemegini' (what can one do with a female?), which disparage women and the very essence of their humanness are being questioned. Among the Igbo of Anambra State, for instance, *oriaku*, which is pejorative in a sense, has been modified and replaced with *odoziaku* (wealth manager), *oso di eme* (supporter of husband). Because culture is dynamic, Igbo culture and sayings have continued to evolve.

In the past, Igbo women were hardly given formal education. Currently, a significant number acquire formal education and are equipped to contribute meaningfully to the society with or without the assistance of the malefolks. This way of being could not have been acceptable in the past. Again, with education, women seek and obtain financially secured employment in business and industries, although many still engage in menial or skilled labours. Women now contribute economically in their household. They no longer depend totally on their husbands for their economic and financial needs. For the woman, there is a way in which the sense of economic independence convey a sense of dignity.

Today, most women, Igbo women inclusive, whether unmarried or divorced, stand their grounds and achieve great feats without a husband. For instance, Genevieve Nnaji, a multiple award winning Nollywood actress, producer and director is single, but very successful. Also, Tsai Ing-wen, the current President of Taiwan is unmarried. Today, there are single women who are captains of industries, Chief Executive Officers of Companies, owners of big and small businesses, bosses, University Professors and even world leaders. The likes of Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Dr Oby Ezekwesili and late Prof Dora Akunyili, who are women of Igbo extraction, have served and performed excellently in different national and international fora. This simply testifies to the fact that women are humanbeings in their own rights and can achieve fabulous feats with or without a husband. These positive examples of these and other such women debunks *di bụ ugwu nwanyị*. Oduyoye (2002, p. 147) states that "real change will come about when women can say—with or without husbands, ... the most important fact is that women are human and will find fullness in reaching for goals that we set for ourselves."

On the other hand, there are also married women who are successful and at the same time, value femininity, heterosexuality and feminism. For instance, an advertisement campaign—*Modern Bride*, launched by US bridal magazine in 2008, "shows quite palpably how the 'modern' bride defines herself through quintessential femininity and heterosexual appeal while simultaneously claiming a feminist stance" (Heise, 2018, p. 204).

Needless to say, *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* can only continue to offend Igbo women's psyche and render them powerless and unproductive. This is not good for the Igbo society. The saying has apparently lost its relevance and applicability in modern times. Perpetuating it will amount to taking Igbo society decades back. Chukwuma (2012, p. 98) notes that the brute force with which Okonkwo in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* cowed women has:

> faded away into the horizons of history. Achebe the master artist that he is has continued to upgrade his narrative reflecting the pulse of the times. His other novels leading to the *Anthills of the Savannah* (1981) show the female characters slowly reclaiming their self-worth. ... Beatrice in Anthills, created her own identity as a person, educated, knowledgable and accomplished. She did not clamor for marriage and motherhood in order to win social acclaim.

It must be clearly stated that the position of this papaer is not that marriage in itself is a bad phenomenon. Marriage and all that it brings—the fulfillment and pleasure that comes with companionship and coitus, procreation, family relationships, fostering of human societies and other benefits are desirable and as a matter of fact, endorsed by Igbo culture and religion. The worry here, is the agelong cultural practices perpetuated by such expressions as *di bụ ugwu nwanyị,* which tends to devalue women and subject them to bear the brunt of male indiscretions, while the man becomes the winner who takes all both in and outside of marriage.

Recommendations

To strike a balance in the present context, this papers supports a proactive move to engage and change the gender insensitive adage: *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* that has endured from times past among the Igbo so as to avoid culture stagnation. This may not be without the problem of Igbo women taking their rightful place in modernity and at same time re-

nouncing 'normality' (Quayson, 2013). It must, however, be reiterated here that culture is dynamic. As it evolves, it sheds some traits and imbibes new ones in a continuous process of modification without necessarily loosing its originality. There is need for adjustments so as to strike a balance between the past and present realities. Apparently, *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* in the face of present circumstance, particularly with advance in women's education and new ways of knowing, among the Igbo, has become outdated for the most part. The Igbo should move along with the rest of the world that is clamouring for and vanguarding gender harmony and inclusivity. The Igbo should therefore shelve the sayings and practices that exclude gender justice and equity in society. Traditional rulers, heads of Igbo communities as well as leaders of other smaller communities in Igboland can propagate this new understanding, however subtle. To continue to promote the virtue of marriage among the Igbo, if the society deems fit, they can modify the vexing adage to read: *di na nwunye bu ugwu onwe ha* (spouses gives dignity to each other) or *alum di na nwunye mara mma* (marriage is beautiful) or *ezi mmekolita di na nwunye di ike* (marriage relationship is empowering).

That said, there is need for Igbo women (married and unmarried) to unite and speak with one voice with respect to their rights and dignity. Women's groups for the married and singles in communities should put their efforts together to deconstruct the cultural structures that tend to promote backwardness and underdevelopment. Oduyoye (2002) challenges women to join together in the face of increasing social pressure to return to or remain in 'tradition' while men move on into the twenty-first century. To achieve this bonding among women, therefore, sensitization needs to be carried out especially at the grassroots to encompass rural women, who sometimes appear to be trapped in an ever ending marital servitude. Nnaemeka's negofeminism, that is nonviolent and non-confrontational would be a veritable tool in the campaign as well as Ezeigbo's snail-sense feminism. The basic ingredients of African feminism which include gender complementarity and love for all of humankind should be the watchword. Nevertheless, the sensitization should include the place of mutual respect among women regardless of marital status. Igbo women, as individuals or a group, should therefore be taught to desist from perpetuating the ideology behind *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* through the repugnant practice of giving respect to women on the basis of their marital status and not who they are. Oduyoye (2002, p. 108) insists that women should refuse to "let seemingly trivial issues—such as our naming by Madam, Mrs.,

or Ms.—overshadow questions of real autonomy, the naming and defining of who we are."

Again, since gender is transmitted through different avenues, awareness should be created for Igbo women (mothers) to begin to play their nurturing roles in transmitting the right mien to their children so as to begin to close the gender gap. For instance, Ezenweke (2015) meticulously describes the various stages of preparing a girl for marriage. No such rigorous training/preparation is done for the young men. Hence, there are strict societal expectations from the young lady, but not from the young man. In addition, feminist scholars should not relent in writing more balanced literature. There is need to complement some androcentric literature that young adults read in Nigerian schools that continue to transmit a prejudiced idea of gender such as Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* with literary works that depict independent women that are not passive, but active and assertive. 'Her-story', as opposed to 'his-story' that is biased against women need to be told. Those are models for the modern woman to help her overcome subservience. A good example is Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* and Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*. For instance, Efuru the protagonist in Nwapa's novel is heroic, strong, independent, self-reliant and courageous against patriarchal odds that fought to hold her down.

Finally, since every marriage is unique in itself, issues about marriage becomes individualistic. Therefore, women's agency or synergy to pull down unfavourable structures may not work perfectly in marriage matters. Hence, Ezeigbo's snail-sense feminism which is more individualistic and a bit communalistic fits well. Igbo married women should look inwards, build the snail's survival traits that makes it dogged, focused, and strong enought to navigate through diverse kinds of terrain and hit its target all by itself and not in solidarity with other snails, even though it is a feeble animal. In other words, individual Igbo women have to take their destinies in their own hands in marriage and be determined to make it work without being swallowed up in it.

In summary, efforts should be made to better the lots of women in Igbo society. These women, without doubt, are indispensable agents of transformation. Their potentials cannot be maximized in a subervient position. Therefore, "any attempt to transform the society must start with enhancing the lot of women" (Ogbujah & Onuoha, 2014, p. 56). In the same vein, Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry, can also play a role in this regard. Shaka and Uchendu (2012, p. 21) note that "film is a very powerful medi-

um for the dissemination of information and the engendering of a particular ideology in the psyche of a people. It can be used to enslave or liberate." Hence, the story lines should be written with a view of its effect on society. Gender inclusivity abhors sexist movies, however stealthy. This must be discouraged.

Conclusion

Di bụ ugwu nwanyị is an old aphorism that has outlived its usefulness. There were much rationale for it in the past, ranging from deference to chastity in young girls to preserving the sanctity of the society and so on. This saying, amidst its strengths has its major pitfall in the fact that it objectifies women and makes them of little or no relevance as individuals. This, of course, has a lot of negative consequences for the women as well as the Igbo society generally.

Marriage should not be a death sentence for a woman. Some women endure indignities in marriage in order to guarantee their dignity. Nnu Ego in Emecheta's (1979, p. 186) *The Joys of Motherhood*'s lament and desperate prayer: "God when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody's appendage?" captures the sentiments expressed in this paper.

Single women are being ridiculed and disdained for the singular reason that they are not married and therefore lack dignity. This is a clear example of culture lag—a situation whereby evolved cultural practice moves ahead, while cultural thoughts and sayings lag behind. *Di bụ ugwu nwanyị* bares the gap between actual reality and cultural dogmas among the Igbo in the contemporary. This saying therefore, in contemporary practicality, is not without obvious contestations.

Without demeaning the institution of marriage among the Igbo, the aphorism *di bụ ugwu nwanyị* has lost its practical relevance in modern times because it props Igbo women's objectification and thingification. In present realities, mutual respect and equity should be key. *Di bụ ugwu nwanyị* has to be reviewed, modified or discarded entirely in the midst of an international clamour for gender inclusivity, visibility, mainstreaming and respect for women's rights. Like Negofeminism and snail-sense feminism, unlike Western feminism, are built on indigenous knowledge and are not hostile to men, neither do they abhor marriage and motherhood. Hence, these theories are suitable models for discussing marriage among

the Igbo of Nigeria. In all of this, Igbo woman's ability to simultaneously navigate femininity and indigenous feminism, which collaborates with men, in her quest to carve out a space as an important and equally indispensable part of the society is ultimate.

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Mobility Trope: Travelling as a Signature of the Afropolitan Female Quest for Existential Subjectivity in Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*

ABSTRACT. The mobility trope is a key aesthetic feature in Afropolitan fiction and it crystalizes as the act of travelling which has become an important subject-matter in postnationalist African fictions by women such as Chimamanda Adichie, Noviolet Bulawayo or Chika Unigwe as a way of intervention on the debate of the Afropolitan female quest for existential subjectivity in 21st century African fiction. This is against the backdrop of negative essentialism and the exertions of patriarchy evident in the representation of African women's in 20th century African fiction. Drawing from the foregoing, this paper interrogates Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* (Hence *OBSS*) to demonstrate how the writer deploys mobility trope which manifest as travelling as a signature of the Afropolitan female quest for existential subjectivity. I argue in this paper that, though existing studies on *OBSS* portray Efe, Sisi, Ama and Joyce as exported commodities in neoliberal sex market, their relocation however opens up a new vista to understanding their motivation and quest for new subjectivity, empowered fluid agency, individual autonomy and translation into Afropolitans. This is within Achille Mbembe's phenomenological criticism of Afropolitanism and a methology that is based on qualitative content analysis of the text—*OBSS*. On the long run, the identity which travelling confers on the female characters is fluid, as they represent an African being in a globalized world and a strong sense of cultural mobility.

KEYWORDS: travelling, signature, Afropolitan, existential, subjectivity, Chika Unigwe, agency

Introduction

The debate on female subjectivity remains largely, a very crucial topic today, in contemporary African feminist discourse as it informs to a large extent, the aesthetic imagination of the African woman in neoliberal/post-colonial/postmodern discourse and modern fiction. More so, it is a backdrop to Nwapa (2007), pertinent question on "how […] African literary texts project women?" (p. 527). Immanent in such debate is the need to de-

construct essentialist imagery which portrays the African woman as a canvass upon which institutional, socio-economic and cultural forces legislate and make inscription upon.

This is coming on the heels of the new turns in feminist imagination in modern African fiction. We need to note that the 20th century colonial/postcolonial imagination of African women has been from a victimhood perceptive, static geographical confinement, powerlessness, and disempowered agency, but the new turn in 21st century imagination of the African woman imbue the African woman with a rhizomatic existence, a metropolitan agency, and an ability to subvert hierarchies of subjugation. The outcome is that contemporary imagination of African women are in terms of what Bratman (2007) calls "autonomy, self-governance and agential authority" (p. 4). Thus, for the fact that colonial or postcolonial imagination of African women essentialism fictionalises modern African women as an abstractions created by men according to Udumukwu (2015, p. 273), makes such imagination an aporia (Udumukwu, 2007, p. 19), a subtle manicheanism aggravated by the troubled genealogies of modern African states.

There are three models or strategies of female identity representation in Nigeria's postcolonial literature as underscored by Omotayo Oloruntoba-Oju & Taiwo Oloruntoba-Oju (2013, p. 5–18) include: entrenchment, negotiation and challenge. Following a neo-liberal/postmodern tradition which basically seek to argue that individual's freedom depends on the existences of a free operational system, Omotayo Oloruntoba-Oju & Taiwo Oloruntoba-Oju (2013) challenge the essentialized identity stencilled on the modern African women by a rigid culture which is phallocentric. And in his analysis of *OBSS*, Umezurike (2015), this is also one of the underlying conjectures Umezurike seeks to make that a phallocentric culture makes it difficult for African women to reconstitute their agency (p. 152) at several fronts whether it is economic, cultural, institutional, and political. It also impedes African women's right to self-definition through an elaborate regime of rules, social codes and taboos.

Examples of the foregoing include: Aleks mother's admonition to Alek in *OBSS* "Do not play football, Alek. It's not lady like. Do not play 'awet, it's for men only. Do not sit with your legs spread like that, Alek, it's not ladylike. Do not. Do not. Do not. Do not" (Unigwe, 2010, p. 185); or the characterisation of Li in Zainab Akali's *Stillborn*, Firdaus in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*, Iyese or Emilia in Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain*, Nita in Ifeanyi Ajaegbo's *Sarah House*, Mara in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*, Aissatou and Ramatoulaye in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*, and

Nnuego in Buchi *Emecheta's Joys of Motherhood*. These characters are iconographies of colonised bodies and they speak of colonial metaphors of subjugation.

By a way of response to such essentialized subjectivity, Afropolitan feminism have emerged as an aesthetic transition in Afro-feminist discourse. It seeks to counter negative aesthetic imagination of African women through its anti-essentialist writing which challenges subservient metaphorisation of women by institutions (family, church, governance, education) as powerless, passive, static agents, geographically confined by the kind of social roles inscribed upon the body of Africa women as produced, distributed and consumed in various artistic media.

Afropolitan feminist writers are alert to those essentialism and ontological stereotypes in colonial/postcolonial fictions such as *Mr Johnson* by Joyce Cary, *Jagua Nana's Daughter* by Cyprian Ekwensi, *Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe*, *The Last Duty Isidore Ekpewho*, *The Concubine* Elechi Amadi, *Petals of Blood*, but they choose to subvert such imaginations in their creation of Afropolitan female characters whose motivations are driven by desires for existential subjectivity and self-empowerment through what Ede (2018) calls "professional excellence". We see this in the character Ifemelu, created by Chimamanda Adichie's in *Americanah*, and Buchi Emecheta's creation— Adah—in *Second Class Citizen*, Ama and Joyce in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*, or Darling in *We Need New Names* by NoViolet Bulawayo. They are good examples of Afropolitan female characterisations in modern fictions who through hard work, subvert hierarchies of female subjugation and powerlessness in African and in the diaspora by their professional excellence. The characters are existentially driven in their quest for subjectivity signalled by their choices and action by any means necessary which reflect the ideological traces of neoliberal concerns with breaking free.

The Afropolitan feminist writer's characterisation presages the writer's commitment to Afropolitan feminist consciousness raising. A common strategic motif embedded in such writing is the creation of characters who are nomadic, travels or relocates outside Africa or leave the rural Africa to reside in Africa's metropole by their own volition. Such relocation into another space which for Sisi, Efe, Ama and Joyce is Belgium, offers the female characters opportunities to take charge of their lives and become existential subjects through their freedom to make choices against "the exertions of patriarchy" (Egya, 2018, p. 75).

We see the "exertions of patriarchy" demonstrated in the experiences of the character Ama and her mother in *OBSS*. They had to endure great

physical and psychological humiliation in the hands of Brother Cyril who regulates their lives. Another example is evident in the consent given to Titus by his wife who is very much aware of Titus' sexual activities with young females. Titus' wife is passive at the reification of her own sex and gender by her husband. She could live with it, because:

> From the day she married Titus and caught him looking at her chief bridesmaid with a glint in his eye, she had known that he had a roving eye. As long as women swayed their hips at him, he would go to them, a drooling dog in heat. **It was not his fault; it was just the way he was created**. She could live with it. He could have his women. Have their children, even. She had no problem with that. What she had a problem with, though, was the women turning up with their children and expecting him to take care of them (Unigwe, 2010, p. 71, boldface emphasis are mine).

The foregoing portrays Titus' wife as an inappropriate model or representation of the modern African women who seek a life that is self-regulated. For one would begin to wonder the logic which informed her acceptance of the assumption that men like Titus were created that way. The expression "**It was not his fault; it was just the way he was created**" reeks of a justified Hegelism, tantamount to living in a denial of existential fact. Titus' wife replies which is an explanation to justify Titus' lecherous lifestyle places her on a spot for interrogation. She exhibits traits of a "passive agency".

The idea of passive agency deployed here draw from transformational generative grammar when a kernel sentence inflects to assume a derived sentence. Passive agency is similar to the thematic role of elements in a sentence structure grammar where the object of a sentence through sentence transformational movement relocates and occupies the subject position but is incapable of real actions. While such object occupies a position meant for a subject, its actions are false and non-existing, because the object is a mere sufferer of an action, hence lacks the capacity to initiate real action. Thus, whatever action a passive agent may appear to initiate is an illusion. Titus' wife represents that passive agent. While Efe visits Titus to present his baby to him, Titus is mute, calm and appears dumb, instead, his wife, takes the floor, and makes utterances, and actions which should have been performed by Titus. But whatever Titus' wife uttered reveals to a large extent how deeply entrenched she is in her role as a passive agent. This kind of agency is a product of an acculturation due to prolong exposure to phallocentric culture which betrays the Afropolitan feminist ideal, since Afropolitanism as an anti-essentialist frame, rejects Hegelian totality (p. 29).

The consequence of prolong exertion of patriarchy on women is the voluntary conscription of women in as cyborgs who justify their own slavery and prevent their own sex manumission. Other subtle form "the exertion of patriarchy" in postcolonial feminist novels manifests are in terms of men and society making legislation—similar to a command economic system—on the issue of marriage as we see in the dilemma of Polycarp who wants to marry Alek but his parents discouraged it (Unigwe, 2010, p. 225), which also played out in travails of the characters Aissatuo and Ramatoulaye (Chukwuma, 2003, p. 44), and the regulation of body, subjectivity and voice as we see in Firdaus a character in *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi (Udumukwu, 2007, p. 60). The exertion of patriarchy therefore describes African women as patients, sufferers, being without proper self-individuation, at best, they are reified beings whose actions are limited to just complain and indifference.

Postcolonial Conditions in Lagos and Sudan: When the State Becomes the Eye of Medusa

The postcolonial conditions of Nigeria and Sudan as imagined in *OBSS* speak of unemployment, joblessness, declining economic activities and corruption for Lagos, and a society ravaged by civil conflict as we see in Sudan. The situation in Lagos greatly define the amount and quality of life options available to Efe, Chisom and Ama. On the other hand, the civil crisis in Sudan speaks of a traumatised nation manifesting ailment of colonial disruption. This nation is metaphorised in the character Alek (Joyce) whose body which was raped speaks of plunder of Sudan by warring citizens. The memory of her childhood experience of rape, death and carnage hover around her like a phantom. The Nigerian and Sudanese states renegade on their duty to their citizens. For instead of an assured wellness and the safeguard of the lives of individuals through the securing of their liberty, economic well-being, social, cultural, political expectations, the states assumed the instrument which negates its own role. The city of Lagos and the country Sudan become the eye of the mythic medusa, which turn her victims into dead stones. What this implies is that the institutions and systems in place reify the characters desires and agency, for as individuals, they look up to the state but instead of support, they become calcified, paused, and lifeless towards their goals and dreams.

Contemporary Lagos imagined in *OBSS* represents the state in this regard. Its binary of urban centres and ghettos serve as one of the narrative settings in *OBSS*. It offers precarious conditions of existence which adversely affected Chisom's (Sisi) desires for agency. Chisom desires to work to earn good money, but the job is not forth coming as she is trapped in a manicheanism of hope and despair. Two years after leaving a university, she still roams the city of Lagos mainly unemployed even after writing several application letters to several banks without getting a reply. To her chagrin, even her less intelligent classmate gets a job because they are connected (Unigwe, 2010, p. 22).

And not being able to cope with such reality, Chisom, like a liminal, is tied up in a dilemma, a desires for escape as she could not stand another year in Lagos (State) (Unigwe, 2010, p. 30). This is the same challenge which confronts Efe. Efe desires a new meaning and purpose in life beyond that which the city of Lagos offered her. Sisi (Chisom) and Efe serve as iconographies of Africa's contemporary women in modern fiction who seek a new type of subjectivity, economic, social and corporeal freedom. They seek to break free from the eye of Medusa—the state. These desire for freedom crystalizes in their capacity to make their own choices and finally, their travel to Belgium, not minding the many months of chattel slavery as commercial sex workers which await them, as we see in the works of Kamalu & Ejezie (2016); Otu (2016); Chukwudi-Ofoedu (2017); Courtois (2019). An expression which represents the characters obstinate desire for freedom is the statement made by Chisom "I must escape" (Unigwe, 2010, p. 30).

 Urama and Nwachukwu (2017, p. 124) has read the travelling of Sisi, Efe and Ama as a type of escape (p. 124),while this is logical, there is also a need to see their action as a symbolic act, of breaking free, a quest for new subjectivity and agency away from the dilemma Lagos offered. In a bid to free themselves from the dilemma of existence in Lagos they had to make difficult choices, choices with obvious consequences they could not escape from. Meanwhile we need to note that even if they had refused to go to Belgium that, in itself is a choice. The choice before them is thus between two degrees of evil, the greater evil is what appeared as an assured poverty and a life of probably misery in Lagos without any hope of life getting better. A limbo like existence. The lesser evil is also a life of great risk outside Lagos—in Belgium—which allows them to get reward for their labour and send money to their home country and siblings.

The actions of Sisi, Efe, Ama translate them into existential subjects, neoliberal beings, who choose their own path in life, and are willing to

accept the risk that comes with these choices and their readiness to follow any commitment it brings, to the end. Sisi, Efe, Ama did not make their choices in abstraction but in consideration of the fact that a new geography such as Belgium, offered more options for them, than is readily available in Lagos. Their gaze on Lagos has yield nothing but pain, penury and differed dreams. This decision is not necessarily an afro-pessimism, but a sensibility which enables one identify ones critically assess reality in the light of experiences and circumstances before taking up subjectivity as an identity. This type of subjectivity or agency transcend the traditional Hegelian notion of agency associated with women experience, which Reinares (2019) argues, can actually constitute a huge problem than solving any of the African female problem (p. 57). It is a type of problematized female agency, an agency in a dilemma, what Ligaga (2019) calls an ambiguous agency (p. 82).

Travelling/Nomadism as a Signature of Female Action in *OBSS*

Characters like Sisi (Chisom), Efe, Ama and Joyce in *OBSS*, represent women agitation for new subjectivity through demonstrated through travelling. Travelling a type of nomadism is galvanised beyond mere movement from one point to another to assume a semiotic act, a signature of the characters quest for existential subjectivity. The lexical term signature in the noun phrase *a female signature of action* has its origin in structural linguistics of Roman Jakobson, importantly, is drawn from the sense in which Udumukwu (2007) deployed it, that is, as a conventional sign capable of symbolic representations (p. 29–30).

Thus, travelling constitutes a conventional signature for the characters like Sisi, Efe, Joyce and Ama because of what it symbolises for them. It symbolises the power of such female characters to sub-vert, re-imagine and re-make themselves with new semantic inscriptions other than what postcolonial Nigeria and Sudan imposed on them. This allows for a form of agency, subjectivity denied them in their previous geography.

Traveling as a signature also speaks of the resistance put forth by the characters to the institutionalized poverty in Lagos. It is a resistance to the socio-economic, political and cultural challenges they faced in Lagos as African women. These conditions made takes their gaze to Europe which seemed like an Eldorado (Ligaga, 2019, p. 82). For while Lagos reifies

them, Europe lures them as a place for new subjectivity. Subjectivity as used here is in line with the sense Sartre used it, as "simply our proper being, that is, the obligation on us to have to be our being, and not simply passively to be" (p. 44). Most importantly, their travelling underwrites their motivation, desires and hope. It becomes a chance for them to break free from the grip of Lagos, while offering them a new phenomenology of experience in other geographies, or what (Smethurst, 2008) calls "imaginative geographies" (p. 1).

Lastly, travelling as a signature of action reveals Unigwe's handling of the poetics of postcolonial mobility or movement as an aesthetic design, to underscore the fact that beyond the notion of relocation that comes to mind when the word travelling is mentioned in the novel, travelling also carries within it, specific authorial ideologies and journey metaphors of desire and hope for a better life elsewhere. This is important as Ashcroft (2015) has shown that "Almost all journeys [travelling] are begun in hope. While they may not begin with the expectation of arriving at utopia, the impetus of travel is essentially utopian because it is driven by hopeful expectation in one form or another" (p. 249).

The experiences and causality behind the desire to travel by each of Unigwe's character is captured in an anti-linear pattern of plot representation with an interconnected twist of events which bring the character to a centre in Belgium. The meeting of the characters in Belgium gives focalisation to each character's life when they hold the narrative floor to talk about themselves. This also allows the reader to become familiar with the choices each had to make, the options available to each character and how all of those point to their individual quest for existential subjectivity. Thus, for a reader to fully grasp the meaning behind the movements of the female characters from one geographical area to another in the novel, the pertinent question should be, what does the female characters hope to gain by relocating elsewhere? Not only that, another important question is, what ideology is masked and unveiled in the text in the travelling and movements of the characters.

Afropolitan Feminism, Travelling and New Subjectivity in *OBSS*

Afropolitan feminism is an anti-essentialist, deconstructive discourse model. It is different from other sub-typologies of African feminism which

Nnolim (2009) highlighted, such as womanism, accommodationist, reactionary/middle of the roaders, and gynandrists (p. 137–138). The word Afropolitan before feminist is an adjective.

> The adjective 'Afropolitan' is a shorthand for 'African and cosmopolitan', cosmopolitanism, being a macrocosm of transculturation, borderlessness, bi- or multi-ethnicity, bilingualism, near-nomadic and rhizomatic existence, urbanity and expansive worldliness, which the substantive, Afropolitanism, contemplates philosophically and critically (Ede, 2018, p. 37).

Afropolitan feminism is a neoliberal and postmodern afro-feminist theorising that have emerged in the twenty first century. If we recalled that the need to provide nouveau afro-feminist theorising began to emerge after Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) called for a new theorising of feminism by African women in other to enable African women talk about themselves within their own lenses (p. 208). Afropolitan feminism fills in this gap as it as one of the:

> [...] determining factors that will have an impact on women's lives beyond 2015 and into the 2015–2035 generation, and which will contribute to the development of a new kind of feminism, more compatible with the requirements of the development of our continent and more capable of integrating the principles of equity and social justice are the main command variables of the current evolution of women in our countries, which are the strongest variables, are not really driving forces and are difficult to change (Ndiaye, 2014, p. 67).

Afropolitan feminism has gradually gain ground in art, media and literary and philosophical discourse. But we must not forget that it emerged from Afropolitanism, a concept in cultural phenomenology which overturns the predominant euro-western reading of Africa (Mbembé & Nuttall, 2004, p. 352). The concept of Afropolitanism has continued to gain popularity, this is amidst the controversy which trailed its pros and cons when Taiye Selasi virialized it in 2005 (Morales, 2017, p. 223).

At the core of the Afropolitan aesthetics is the subject of travelling, relocation or poetics of mobility of the African from Africa to other cultural spaces but such would not have been possible without a recourse to the neoliberal sensibilities at work in African economies. Afropolitanism also takes postcolonial discourse to a new level and vistas of understanding due to its laisser-faire out lock. This is noteworthy because travelling adumbrates and re-enforces a semiotic pattern in Afropolitan

discourses and novels. It has assumed a sign system, a poetic of mobility for the Afropolitan feminist signature of action. We see this in *Ghana Must Go*, *Travellers*, *Homegoing*, *foreign gods, inc.*, *Second Class Citizen*, *We Need New Names, Americanah* among others. In those texts, travelling or relocation is a common motif. And beyond that, travelling points to an ideologically motivated action with which Afropolitan writers instigate Afropolitan consciousness.

What we mean by travelling as an ideologically motivated act, is that it serves as a type of semiotic system, an anti-language of resistance against patriarchal expectations from women and the institutionalised conditions of unemployment and poverty in Lagos which makes it difficult for Chisom (Sisi), Ama and Efe to live the type of life they want to live, a life of meaning. As an ideologically motivated action, relocation is a performatory action which signals a change of social status, and the emergence of a new form of subjectivity which they hope to enjoy in Antwerp.

The figural implication of travelling is its metalinguistic transposition of meaning from a denotative sense to a metaphor of that which triggers a status change through movement from Lagos to Belgium. We see the changes in the translations of Chisom, Efe, Ama when they arrived Belgium. Even after Ama and Joyce came back to Lagos to establish some enterprises after they had paid for their freedom, they arrived in Lagos, transformed (by experiences in other climes) just like Ifemelu the protagonist in Americanah. They became self-individuated being who have become translated into Afropolitan by their experiences, knowledge of the world and other cultures in their journey and travels.

The new identity conferred on them by their travels marked their break away from the normalisation which comes with the conditions they find in Lagos which the likes of Chisom's mother, Mama Eko, and Titus' wife have come to accept. It is a postmodernist break with tradition and norms. The four characters—Sisi, Efe, Ama and Joyce—are therefore symbolic representation of post-modern African women who are dissatisfied with patriarchal orthodoxy with it essentialized framing of women as a weak, passive, and a subservient other. These postmodern African women are willing to break free from such framing by any means necessary. They also fit into the frame of deviant modern bohemian African women. They are deviant in that they chose not to conform to the desires dictates of the society in Lagos, or the exertion of patriarchy. Importantly, they are free from ethnocentric or racial biases in the solving of their predicaments themselves.

Of all the benefits of travelling to Efe, Sisi, Joyce and Ama, the new sense of female consciousness, self-awareness and individuation stand out. They are availed with the opportunity to encounter other cultures and Africans like them. We see this in the party Efe held in honour of late Iya Ijebu, a woman she took as her granny while she was in Lagos. In this party:

> There would be lots of Ghanaians; those people were everywhere. Nigerians, of course, went without saying. A sprinkling of East Africans—Kenyans who ate samosas and had no traditional clothes and complained about the pepper in Nigerian food, not really African. The three Ugandan women she knew who stumbled over their words, *brackening* black and *renthening* long. And the only Zimbabwean she knew, a woman who shuffled when she danced (Unigwe, 2010, p. 9).

The foregoing excerpt apart from the fact that it speaks of the attendants as guest also alerts a reader to the naming of the nationality of the guest. This opens another vistas of meaning which we can draw from the excerpt. By naming each guest by their nationality, Unigwe calls attention to the distinctive nationness of the various linguistic grouping that make up Africa as a continent. A continent with humans of distinct geographical spaces against the generalisation of such distinct people as if they are without a distinct identity, but just Africans. This is one of the ways colonialism universalises the African identity. The foregoing presupposes that Africa is not a country as has been projected in colonial discourse of Africa, but a continent with unique linguistic forms and people with different nationalities, identity and should be seen and addressed as such. While Unigwe did not bother to tell her readers about the lives of these women who attended the party hosted by Efe, it is obvious that Unigwe confers them with a sense of nationness in spite of the fact that such women are in the diaspora and they share a sense of collective effervescence as Afropolitan females with diasporic identities.

Travelling as a Signature of the Afropolitan Feminist Quest for Existential Subjectivity

Sisi, Efe, Ama, and Joyce, who had, had to leave Lagos for Antwerp due to the limited options Lagos offered them (p. 114) through the help Dele are encumbered by the realities of life. These women are from different social groups but got to meet in Belgium by virtue of their relocation.

Their relocation also translated them into Afropolitans as they encountered new cultures and geographies. It sheds light on how a change in geographical location redefines the rights, privileges, options available to an individual. We see this in the statement made by Sisi (Chisom) when she came to Belgium "I'm very lucky to be **here** (Antwerp in Belgium), living **my dream**. If I'd stayed back in Lagos, God knows where I'd have ended up" (Unigwe, 2010, p. 15).

The words, "here" and "dreams" serve a socio-semiotic function as a deixis for location and with a paradigmatic substitute "there" which points to Lagos, a troubling memory Sisi would not like to dredge up (Unigwe, 2010, p. 15). What Antwerp offered Sisi is a new life which smiled at her (2010, p. 2). This new life translates as new subjectivity, akin to the word agency which is drawn from the word agent and also speaks of a self, "the active subject marked by particular qualities in virtue of which a distinct, persistent identity is had" (Oshana, 2010, p. 15). The four characters gain a new life or agency by their ability to make their own decisions which altered the course or trajectory of their lives on their own freewill after considering their available options.

Each of the characters are not without a motivation in their quest for a new life or existential subjectivity. For Sisi, it was the desire to control the options life offered her and her family in Lagos, since Lagos did not offer her much. Chisom (Sisi) is a university graduate of Finance and Business Administration of Unilag, and one would expect that her life would have better promises to offer in the city of Lagos, but that was not possible. She lived with her parents (Godwin and his wife) in a Flat at Ogba (p. 17). All her teenage and young adult life in Lagos was lived to fulfil the desires and expectations of her parents and they weighed heavily on her young shoulders. She was always mindful of her father's hope for her (Unigwe, 2010, p. 20) and her father who never had a formal schooling due to circumstances, unconsciously projected his dreams into Chisom.

The declining economy of Lagos as reflected in *OBSS* made it difficult for Chisom to fulfil her father's desires and goal for her. This made Chisom conclude that, "Lagos was a city of death and she was escaping it" (p. 98). So much so that, when she got the offer (from Dele) she did not turn it down" (Unigwe, 2010, p. 23). She went ahead like someone "heading into the light of her future", for "she was ready to set forth bravely into her future." (Unigwe, 2010, p. 48). One sentence which summarises her tenacity is "I must escape" (p. 30).

Her arrival in Belgium demonstrates her relocation. She saw her new life stretching out like a multi-coloured vista before her eyes. Belgium thrilled Sisi such that she knew that she would make it here (p. 98). In Sisi's travel, and quest is a desire to get away from the haunting memory of pain, of a life not lived or expressed in the city of Lagos and which the name Chisom reminds her of. She had to change her name from Chisom to Sisi, for to her, her Nigerian name was dead. Snuffed out. A nobody, swallowed up by the night (p. 102).

Ironically, Chisom in Igbo means my Chi goes with me. Chi here means a life force, a personal kindred spirit in Igbo mythology Achebe has mentioned succinctly in *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God*. But in this case, it appears nothing seems to work for her in Lagos with that name Chisom, thus, the need for a name change even as she embraces her new job, and identity in Antwerp, "the place to be when your dreams died" (p. 105). Sisi imagines the quality she could bring to the life of her father for:

> With the amount of money, she imagined she would earn, there would be no limit to her purchasing power. She would even be able to buy her father a chieftaincy title in their village. Buy him some respect and a posture that belonged to a man his age (Unigwe, 2010, p. 172–173).

On the other hand, Efe's quest for a new subjectivity is motivated by the need to provide a better life for her son Lucky Ikponwosa. Efe, like Chisom is also from a home ravaged by unemployment and poverty, a consequence of failed institution. Her family lacks a proper house and bathroom which makes Efe fantasize over a proper house with a tub and two taps which she saw in magazines (Unigwe, 2010, p. 55). Efe also lacked parental care which made her discovered sex at the age of sixteen (Unigwe, 2010, p. 49). Her father, after the death of their mother resort to drinking while a bulk of the responsibility of taking care of the children—three siblings—fell upon the young shoulders of Efe (Unigwe, 2010, p. 58). This is because the money her father gave her every month was barely enough for food" (Unigwe, 2010, p. 58).

The only way Efe could make some money to take care of her siblings was to accept the sexual advances made to her by Titus which for Efe "Dat one na small price to pay" (Unigwe, 2010, p. 58). Contained in the expression "Dat one na small price to pay", speaks deeply of an uttered opinion of Efe, about life and existence. One of the meaning such expressions presupposes is that she (Efe) has been paying prices much more than that, even

if it was not in form of having sex with an older man. It is in the context of Efe's situation that one can fully grasp the full weight of Efe's statement and its existential import—that she is willing to do anything necessary. All Efe desired was a good life (p. 55), but Lagos offered her little opportunity, coupled with the fact that her life got complicated when she gets pregnant for Titus. This comes with a certain amount of social stigma as people look at her as dirt (p. 65) particularly from her fellow women.

Worthy of note is the conversation between Efe and her younger sibling Rita "where Rita states that if the baby is a boy his father (Titus) will definitely want him (p. 65) since men wanted sons no matter how many they had, sons were trophies they had collected to carry on family names. This goes to a large extent to reveal the masculinist sensibility which guide gender perception. And importantly, the sociocultural dent associated with a young girl who gets pregnant outside wedlock as we see the statement made by Efe, "Which kin' man go marry woman wey don get pikin already?, because she would never be a perfect wife". (Unigwe, 2010, p. 75–76).

The only way Efe could gain back the meaning of her life is to travel to Belgium. She gets the blessings of Rita her younger sister in form of a hug and her request for a Mercedes (p. 85). And in Europe (Belgium) she quickly assimilates with other cultures (p. 104). One of the reasons women like Sisi and Efe can be called Afropolitan females is because of their travels to other geographies such as Antwerp. A place Madam acknowledges changes a person (p. 177), not necessarily because of the nature of their job as sex workers, but because of the cultural tapestry of Belgium, the freedom that comes with it, and the individuality Belgium offers. The existential subjectivity the characters seek would be one which will require all four to make tougher decisions such as not asking much questions and doing as they were told until they are able to pay back the money which Dele invested on them to get to Belgium, as madam got to let Sisi to know.

> My dear Sisi, it's not your place to ask questions here. You just do as you're told and you'll have an easy ride. I talk, you listen. You understand? Three days ago I gave Joyce the same instruction. She did not ask me questions. She just listened and did as she was told. I expect the same of you. Silence and total obedience. That is the rule of the house. Be seen, not heard. Capeesh (Unigwe, 2010, p. 120).

Ama, one of the four, grew up in Enugu with a troubled childhood. She was not allowed to have many friends by an overprotective, dotting, religious fanatic and rapist: brother Cyril, the man she assumed was her fa-

ther (Unigwe, 2010, p. 123). Brother Cyril, an Assistant Pastor literally locked up Ama, in a cage of rules and regulations on what to listen to, what to drink, the type of magazine to read (Unigwe, 2010, p. 129), such that Ama's only friend was "a pink wall" (p. 123). The wall was the only friend Amah could complain to.

> Over the next days the walls heard how he ignored her when she said that he was hurting her inside. They heard of how she tried to push him away when he lay on top of her, but he was a mountain, and she did not have the strength in her to move a mountain. She told of the grunting and the sticky whiteness like pap that gushed out of him. "It's warm and yucky," she complained to her walls. "I'll never eat pap again!" The walls could sketch her stories. They could tell how she wished she could melt into the bed. Become one with it. She would hold her body stiff, muscles tense, as if that would make her wish come true. When she did this, her father would demand, "What's the Fifth Commandment?" "Honor thy father and thy mother," she would reply, her voice muffled by the collar of her nightgown in her mouth. And then she would relax her muscles, let him in, and imagine that she was flying high above the room. Sometimes she saw herself on the ceiling, looking down at a man who looked like her father and a girl who looked like her. When the pain made this difficult, she bit on her lower lip until it became numb (Unigwe, 2010, p. 132).

The wall, apart from being Ama's confidante also speaks of a wall of obstacles before women and how talking to the wall was not an effective solution since no action to either pull down the wall or walk away from it was engaged. It speaks of the caged subjectivity of Ama and her mother. They were mere objects influences by culture and social expectations.

Ama was expected by Cyril to "follow in her mother's footsteps and become a model wife for a good Christian man someday (Unigwe, 2010, p. 131). But Ama never wanted to live like "her mother [who] allowed herself to be subjugated" (p. 146). The word silence which describes Ama's mother resonates with being subservient, passive and docile in order to fit into the essentialized subjective framing of women particularly from the Igbo society. And we see this silence crystalize when Ama tells her mother that Brother Cyril raped her, and how her mother reaction in terms of silence towards Cyril. And as the violation continue, Ama a girl of 8 years old at that time, told the wall her closest friend that she wants to go abroad (Unigwe, 2010, p. 134). What abroad implies for Ama was that she wants to get free. But Lagos was still not enough for Ama. Though it offered a better life than Ama had in Enugu, "its predictability, its circular motion that

took her from the small flat to the tiny Empire and back to the flat, nibbled at her soul, which still yearned to see the world (Unigwe, 2010, p. 159). And Ama wanted better and more from life.

What connects Sisi, Efe and Ama is this same quest for a better life. For Ama, even as she makes up her mind to travel to Belgium, knowing fully well that she is going there to become a commercial sex worker, "her thoughts already on a new life far from here, earning her own money so that she could build her business empire. And once she was a big woman people would respect her, even brother Cyril. It was this dream that spurred her on in Antwerp" (p. 169). Thus, even against the wishes of Mama Eko, Ama remained obstinate. She was willing to do whatever it takes to get a slice of the beauties of life, in Belgium. What makes Ama's travel less a dilemma like Efe and Sisi is evident in the fact that she never had an existence in Lagos what she calls "life behind" (Unigwe, 2010, p. 177).

Joyce, a Sudanese, whose real name is Alek is one of the four girls. She is the daughter of Nyok, and she seldom thinks about her past, "preferring to concentrate on the future, on what her life will be once she leaves Madam's establishment" (Unigwe, 2010, p. 180). Not until Efe harassed her with questions to open up about herself did she finally opened up. But the death of Sisi that made her had some time to think about herself and life generally. And her memory was not a pleasant one as what stayed tucked within Joyce is the memory of a fifteen-year-old girl who witnessed the gruesome murder of her father, mother and brother in the hands of militia men who repeatedly raped her. (Unigwe, 2010, p. 192–193).

Polycarp was the opportunistic soldier who helped Joyce leave the refugee camp, and he took her to Nigeria. Polycarp offered her another view to live through the travels he made with her to Lagos Nigeria. But Polycarp was not willing to stand for her and beside her, it appeared Polycarp was a friend. In fact, it appears Polycarp betrayed her and sold her into chattel slavery as a commercial sex worker since he is a good friend of Dele. It was Polycarp who offered her to Dele, who changed her name to Joyce. The loss of family, the rape and troubled life as a refugee, the betrayal from Polycarp, her experiences in Belgium, made her resolved from now on, she would never let her happiness depend on another's. She would never let anyone hurt her. She would play life's game, but she was determined to win (Unigwe, 2010, p. 231). Importantly, Joyce was able to buy back her freedom and live the life she wants.

Of the four women, only Sisi met a sad end. While Efe pursued a life as a pimp living her life the way she wants, Joyce would go back to Nigeria

with enough capital to set up a school in Yaba. She would employ twenty-two teachers, mainly young women, and regularly make concessions for bright pupils who could not afford the school fees. She would call it *Sisi's International Primary and Secondary School*, after the friend she would never forget. Ama, ironically, would be the one to open a boutique. She would make Mama Eko its manager. Mama Eko would tell her she always knew Ama would make it. They would never talk about Ama's years in Europe (p. 279).

Conclusion

We have argued in this paper that travelling constitutes a poetics of mobility with which Unigwe projects her Afropolitan feminist consciousness and neoliberal rationalities. In addition, *OBSS* challenges the negative essentialism of African women in fiction through the character of Efe, Sisi, Ama and Alek via their quest for subjectivity which crystalizes as travelling. While this essay does not seek to make a final note on the debate on subjectivity as imagined in Africa's feminist discourse, it projects travelling as a way of subverting the perverted imagination of African women in modern fiction. A salient point in this essay is that beyond the notion of African women as exported commodities in neoliberal sex market in Europe, their travelling also translated them into Afropolitans while exposing them to new forms of agency and neoliberal cultures. In addition, Unigwe's handling of characterization through her creation of characters with troubled childhood in Africa who later travelled to Antwerp in Belgium before returning to Africa is a type of Afropolitan poetics of mobility and encountering new spaces. The transformation which the characters undergone speaks of the capacity of travelling to map new identity, a type this essay sees as fluid, Rhizomatic, emancipatory and existential subjectivity for the African women. And we believe that the thoughts shared in this essay we spark other new ways of re-reading Unigwe's *OBSS.*

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Directing gender equality
in Ahmed Yerima's *Altine's Wrath*

ABSTRACT. One of the functions of the theatre director is to develop a concept that would appeal to the audience in the process of his interpretation. This paper textually evaluates the issue of gender equality as the directorial concept in Ahmed Yerima's *Altine's Wrath*. The paper adopts the sociological, literary and artistic methods to interrogate the directorial implications of the text as it will be demonstrated in the performance. The paper notes that a thorough understanding of gender theories and principles would guide a director's realization of the identified concept. The paper, therefore, calls on directors to support the issue of gender equality by developing concepts in this regard and as such promote a peaceful society.

KEYWORDS: directing, gender, equality, *Altine's Wrath*

Introduction

Directing for stage, screen or audio/radio depends on the effective harmonization of the inputs of different collaborators aimed at protecting the developed concept in the script. The directorial concept of a performance is the metaphorical statement that drives the message to the audience. The essence of a performance is to identify or support in solving societal problems in order to better the society. In the manner the playwright would express his thought through a theme that may be intentional or a creative accident, the director consciously develops a concept that may support the thought of the playwright or refute it. In this era of revolution and change, theatre directors have consistently developed directorial concepts that will support the changes in the society. The play understudy as crafted by Yerima addresses the theme of gender discourse upon which the director has crafted his concept of gender equality.

Gender is a term used in describing the behaviour and character traits expected of an individual on the basis of biological peculiarities or differ-

ences. Scholars have observed that there are attributes or certain respon-
sibilities attached to men or women on sexist basis which some radical
scholars have deconstructed. In this way, some problem solving skills and
subjects are arrogated to males, while others are said to be female-domi-
nated and most recently the transgendered. In most African traditions, the
girl-child, from birth, is restricted to the role expectations approved by the
society relating to domestic and supporting roles while the man is given
dominating roles and superior responsibilities. As a result of this cultural
practice, girls are discouraged from developing their individual potentials
in various ways and disciplines whereas men are encouraged to be strong
as leaders of the future. However, through theatre experience which mani-
fests by way of the ingenuity of the director, issues that are textually placed
are exposed through directorial processes. The expressive nature of man
through the theatre platform makes, Arnold Stephanie (2001, p. 2) to ob-
serve that:

> Into theatre performances we pour our dreams, our myths and stories, our
> struggles and fears. The conflicts that divide us and the laughter that makes
> whole take their place on the stage. We make a journey through space and
> time that is limited only in our imagination.

Premised on the above, apart from the efforts of Nigerian playwrights,
theatre directors have also consistently championed gender equality
through their development of directorial concepts that support such the-
matic thrusts in plays. Such play directors as Ola Rotimi, Henry Bell-Gam,
Emmanuel Emasealu, Ojo Bakare, Ayo Akinwale, Abdulrasheed Adeoye, Ef-
fiong Johnson and Olympus Ejue among others are prominent in support-
ing the efforts of Nigerian playwrights through the graphic presentation of
the fight against gender inequality.

This paper evaluates the directorial interpretation of gender equality
as the intended meaning for the Nigerian audience with a view to redi-
recting the psyche of the Nigerian citizenry using Ahmed Yerima's *Altine's
Wrath*.

On directing and directorial concept

Directing involves the processes of interpreting a text or scenario
through the application of composition, picturization, movement, rhythm

and pantomimic-dramatization. In directing, the director communicates to his audience through the use of visual and auditory elements. Robert Cohen (2003, p. 492) is of the view that: "directing is not simply a craft; it is *directing* in the dictionary as well as in the theatrical sense: it is to lead, to supervise, to instruct, to give shape. In other words, it is to do what is necessary to make things work."

From Cohen's definition, the term involves distinctive experiences such leading, supervision, instruction, shaping and making things work. The concept of directing therefore requires extraordinary skills for effective delivery of the intended thrust of the text or developed scenario. This may have prompted Harold Clurman's (1972) description of who the director is in terms of qualities. According to him:

> The director must be an organizer, a teacher, a politician, a psychic detective, a lay analyst, a technician, a creative being. Ideally, he should know literature (drama), acting, and the history and above all, he must understand people. He must inspire confidence. All of which means, he must be a "great lover".

These essential qualities are further extended by Hugh Morrison (1973), when he notes that "the director must be intelligent, deductive, reflective, curious, and rational ... with passionate interest in plays and the creative processes that lead to performance" (p. 13). The interpretation of a text is determined by the director's understanding of the script after considering the cost of production, availability of cast, topicality, thematic implication and the audience factor. In developing the directorial concept, Emasealu (2010, p. 72) observes that:

> The directorial art involves the ability to peruse a playwrights script thoroughly, discover the intended message for the audience and be able to communicate such a message to the actors and actresses who, ultimately constitute the conduit between the text and the audience [...] it is the task of the director to fashion the way of achieving expressive and communicative movements, gestures, appropriate verbal nuances, songs, dance, music, stage business(no matter how minute) and effective use of 2011eloquence silences.

Similarly, Wilson and Goldfarb (2011, p. 61) note that the director must critically examine the script to understand dramatic purpose and subsequently ask the following question to achieve a believable interpretation of the conceived concept:

What is the playwright's intention: to entertain, educate or to arouse strong feelings in the audience, what is the playwright's point of view towards the characters and events of the play: does he them as tragic or comic? How has the playwright developed the action in the play: in other words how is the play constructed? Such considerations are crucial because the director is the one person who must have and overall grasp of the text, in order to guide the performance and making it come alive. If an actor or actress has any question about a character or the meaning of a scene, the director must be able to provide an answer.

These fundamental questions will definitely generate the hidden ideas that will guide the director in his interpretative effort. Irrespective of the intention of the director, the director must thoroughly understudy the play to achieve his mandate.

Briefs on feminist criticism

The emergence of feminist movements across the world has influenced the position of women within the public spheres. Similarly, scholars have also developed theories to promote the place of women in the development of the society. Tracing what appears to be the role of philosophers and national laws as cannons to the subjugation of women, Julie Okoh (2012, p. 57) notes that:

National law, philosophers in particular, claimed that the inferior status of women was due to their "inner nature", with the exception of Plato, they all believed that women had powerful emotions and inferior brains with an IQ lower than that of male children. Hence, women could harm themselves as well as others.

She advances her argument further stating that Aristotle developed the widely adopted idea of rationality, arguing that man was a "rational animal" and, as such, has a natural power of reason. Woman, he opined was deficient of rational faculty therefore, "the courage of the man is shown in commanding of a woman in obeying" (p. 58). This serious analogy justifies the commitment of society who sees the women as inferior to her male counterpart. Defining feminism as an ideology that centers on the conscious liberation of women from all forms of oppression tendencies, Barbara Berg (1984) declares thus:

[...] the freedom (for a woman) to decide her own destiny; freedom from sex determined roles; freedom from society's oppressive restrictions; freedom to express her thoughts fully and to convert them freely into action. Feminism demands the acceptance of woman's right to individual conscience and judgment; it postulates that women's essential worth stems from their common humanity and does not depend on the relationships of her life (p. 24).

According to Julie Okoh (2012), feminism

is first and foremost a collective term for systems of belief and theories that pay special attention to women's rights and women's position in culture and society. On personal level, it is a state of mind, a way of thinking, an alternate perspective from which to understand the world. It means a woman becoming aware of a distortion in her social status as a woman. Seeking to correct this distortion, the woman moves in a new direction in search of autonomy, self-assertion and empowerment (p. 7).

Indeed, issues of acceptance, freedom and social rights of women have continued to preoccupy the different strands of feminism such as liberal feminism, radical feminism, separatist and lesbian feminism, cultural feminism, socialist feminism, eco-feminism, black feminism, transfeminism, womanism, stiwanism etc. In the opinion of Harriet Taylor (1983) feminism is a protest against the institutionalized injustices perpetrated by men, as a group, and advocates the elimination of that injustice by challenging the various structures of authority or power that legitimize male prerogatives in a given society (p. 41). Susan James (1998) describes feminism as:

Grounded on the belief that women are oppressed or disadvantaged by comparison with men, and that their oppression is in some way illegitimate or unjustified [...] the label 'feminist' thus arose out of, and was in many ways with the sequence of diverse campaigns for female emancipation fought throughout the 19th century.

For Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the earliest scholars and feminist critics whose interest was primarily to vindicate the rights of women opines that:

Women were believed to be emotional rather than rational; they were expected to cultivate superficial traits such as beauty rather than inner qualities such as virtue. This dehumanization of women stems mainly from the educational

system (designed by men), which does not offer to females the same opportunities for the development of their minds as it does to males (cited in Stumpf & Abel, 2001, p. 530).

Sadly, in terms of superiority, Bracton states that women are inferior to men based on a few factors: they have no status except when widowed, they have no legal rights, and they are somewhat less physically strong. Additionally, women are seen as incomplete men because it was believed that women were not fully developed in the womb. Wollstonecraft again further states that:

> Men have thus, in one situation, at least an opportunity of exerting themselves with dignity and of rising by the exertions which really improve a rational creature. But the whole female sex are, till their character is formed, in the condition as the rich–for they are born [...] with certain sexual privileges [...] (cited in Stumpf & Abel, 2001, p. 536).

From the issue of rights and freedom, dramatist and theatre scholars have devised several means of confronting the oppression and dehumanization of women. It is against this backdrop that the study investigates the relationship between the director and the playwright as co-partners in promoting social ideals and supporting equality of both sexes.

Synopsis of *Altine's Wrath*

Set within the ambiance of marital unfaithfulness, victimization, abuse of office, corruption, and oppression Ahmed Yerima's *Altine's Wrath* reveals the story of Mr. Lawal, a corrupt permanent secretary in government who is seriously into bribery, awarding of illegal contracts and denial of worker's and community rights married to Altine. To flaunt his ill-gotten wealth, he engages in extramarital affairs with different women and brings in Mariam one of his concubines to push Altine out of the house. In the midst of this collective oppression of Altine, Audu and Onene visit to protest the non-payment of their compensations for a piece of land that Mr. Lawal acquired from them in an earlier meeting. The dramatic action takes a different turn as Altine confiscates the entire savings of Mr. Lawal's ill-gotten money which he has been saving in her name.

Directorial concept: genderequality in *Altine's Wrath*

Exposing the directorial concept of gender equality, the director through his actors and other production elements must consider the thrust in Yerima's *Altine's Wrath.*

Delivering the directorial concept of gender equality, one must evaluate the characters of Mr. Lawal and Mrs. Altine who both represent the different biological genders in most third world countries. As deduced from the his actions, language, comments by other characters and usual physical appearance, Mr. Lawal is a high ranking civil servant that has risen to the rank of permanent secretary in a state ministry. He is a fantastically corrupt and fraudulent character who hides under the government's land use decree to exploit and dispossess indigenous land owners of their land so he can sell it to the higher bidders. He is very treacherous, deceptive, pretentious, and inconsiderate and practically wicked. To demonstrate his superiority and subjugation over his wife Altine, he denies her access to his room for over three years, even when both of them reside under one roof. This action is revealed to Miriam, his mistress as he boasts in the lines below:

> Lawal: Look, there is no need for all this. Altine has her own there, at the back of the house. And I've not allowed her to step into my room for over three years now [...] (Yerima, 2000, p. 4).

Lawal's wicked disposition is further exposed in his dialogue with Aina where he charges the latter never to waste her pity on Altine since she does not deserve it. He is pompous, arrogant and extremely proud. He is often irritated at the sight of peasants. He orders Onene and Audu out of his house and when Aina insists that they stay, he responds, thus "well, well… okay for your sake. But not on my chairs! They can use the poufs, or sit on the floor (Yerima, 2000, p. 5).

In spite of his oppressive tendencies, especially to the poor and vulnerable, he is cowardly in the face of danger. He refuses to eat when he discovers Altine's boldness and use of the English language. He represents the rich set of underdeveloped Africans who are conscious of class in anything they do and do not have respect for the place of women in the development agenda of the society.

Altine on the other hand represents the self-assertive and freedom-fighter woman as discovered in the play through her actions, language and

thoughts. She is the heroine; adventurous, persevering and very determined to change the negative perception and image of women. Her creative effort in disguising as a stark illiterate before Lawal and absorbing all the insults which Lawal rains on her just to extract information about Lawal's fraudulent practices is highly ingenious. It further demonstrates the powerful nature of women if they are willing to capture their rightful position in the society. She pretends to be dumb even when Lawal insists on using her thumb print to secure some of his ill-gotten properties in her name. To demonstrate her superior wisdom she appears in action and words at the point that Lawal and his business associate, Alhaji Maikudi are celebrating their envisaged business successes, thus:

> **Altine** (Striding about haughtily) I said, did you call, master? It's time for me to go, isn't it? Time to leave your house for the new bride? Is that what you've called to tell me, dear Master? (Yerima, 2000, p. 29).

Her character is that of a woman that is highly industrious, resourceful and a helper as demonstrated through the assistance she rendered to Mr. Lawal paying his bills while he was a student. Understanding the role of education as a weapon of social empowerment, she quietly enrolled in an adult education programme across her street so as to acquire formal education without her husband's knowledge and consent. She represents the voice of the oppressed and intimidated in the society who are willing to empower themselves and fight for their rights.

A reading of the play will clearly expose the issue of gender inequality which is demonstrated in the family of Mr. Lawal and Altine his wife. Examining the character of Mr. Lawal, one sees a bully with high chauvinist dispositions who lives in a world where women should be permanently silenced. His perception of women is obviously demonstrated in the following dialogue:

> **Altine**: …You men can be terrible, I know now from experience. You all think marriage is the modern version of the slave trade.
> **Lawal**: Ah, a feminist!
> **Altine**: Are you telling me! Why do you think I took to medicine? I am not a combatant. I heal, and that compensates.
> **Lawal**: For what?
> **Altine**: For everything. Healing the sick compensates. I no longer miss, for instance, the affection which I thought men alone could provide.
> **Lawal**: I see. Is that perhaps because you're sick yourself (laughs) (Yerima, 2000, p. 13).

The conversation above raises the issue of gender inequality with both characters representing the male and female genders and expressing their individual opinions in defence of their respective genders. Lawal through his lines represents a strong unrepentant chauvinist who sees women as objects of mockery and must not engage in decision making or even attempt fighting for the protection of their rights. He sees the woman as an individual that is sick if she attempts to deviate from the societal constructed roles for her. He asserts his superiority by insisting obedience to him by in an attempt to be in total control. For Altine, the only template for women to champion their rights and free themselves from the sickness inflicted on them by a society ruled by men is through the feminism platform. She believes that the affection women give to men is useless since they don't reciprocate in this regard.

For the theatre director to propagate the concept of equality, the use of costumes, makeup and the appropriate movements on stage must clearly showcase gender disparity with each of the actors delivering their lines with precision. The blocking of the actors should be through the presentational approach to enable the audience identify the struggle by each of the characters to assert superiority over each other.

Mr. Lawal does not only oppress and showcase his superiority through his conversation with Altine in their domestic quarrels but also recounts the circumstances that led to his marriage to her. In his view, based on the circumstances under which he married Altine, she is her perpetual slave who must obey him irrespective of his actions. After bringing his concubine Mariam to their matrimonial home he cast aspersions at her not minding her presence. For him, she is his slave who must do his bidding and must not react to his amorous engagements with Mariam. He sees women as weaker and empty vessels in terms of rational thinking and contribution to the development of the nation. From the very beginning of his marriage to Altine, he sees Altine as an individual without a thinking cap not just because she is an illiterate but because she is a woman. His concubine Miriam tries to question the rational for his maltreatment of Altine as a piece of furniture and he responds thus:

> **Lawal**: ... during the riots... Her father was killed in the riots which followed the first military coup that led to the civil war. So my father brought her mother into our house, to protect her. And that was how the relationship began... Then... then you know how these things happen. She got pregnant... and that was it (Yerima, 2000, p. 9).

Mr. Lawal position is a clear indication that he does not have marital affection for Altine but accidentally married her as a favour due to the pregnancy for which he was responsible. For him, marrying Altine is abominable but he has to accept her as one of the furniture in his home. His impression of women generally is that of sex objects and commodities that can be bought and even sold to the next buyer. He boastfully declares; "… we snap our fingers, and women far more important than you and better than you kill themselves to get into my bed"… (Yerima, 2000, p. 18).

Altine on the other hand observes that the only way to empower herself and liberate herself from the machinations of Mr. Lawal is through education. In one of their rough moments, she exposes her decision and long endured pains thus:

> **Altine:** Yes, my name is Altine, Master. You bought me nine years ago, remember? I was just a slave whom my father had put in the market for the highest bidder, you remember? So you bought me to bear your children, and scrub your floor, and wash your clothes. I cook your meals and bow meekly when you exercise your lungs by barking. Or when it's your muscles you feel like testing, I lay down meekly and take the blows. Look at me; the memories of slavery are here in this bundle!

This effective communication skill perplexes Mr. Lawal who can't believe that the slave and 'empty brain' Altine can suddenly transform to a self-assertive and liberation-conscious woman. In an attempt to register her displeasure and to prove to him that the male is not better that the female folk, she resolves to quit the marriage. In her own wisdom, Mr. Lawal feels the only interest of a woman is to be commodified as a wife and nothing else. Her decision to quit the marriage to a large extent demonstrates the effort of women in refuting the ideology that marriage is the ultimate for the woman. However, the fact that Altine is married does not add to her personality rather it diminishes her womanhood and by extension dehumanizes her as a living creature. She further recounts her experiences in her marriage with Lawal to fully justify her termination of the union. She requested him to account for her financial assistance that made Lawal who he in the following lines:

> **Altine**: … tell her, Lawal, how you were when I met you. How I tended you and served you together, always sacrificing myself, always bowing my head, refusing to listen to the screams of my own inner needs! … (Yerima, 2000, p. 31).

It is from this point that Lawal realizes his wisdom is more of foolishness to the reality of existence. His idea that Altine is a slave turns out to be that he is the slave in question rather than his victim. Upon the realization that his victim is more rational than he, he pleads for mercy with Altine, thus "... you know you can't do that! Please! I beg you, that's my entire life you're taking away! My whole...!" (Yerima, 2000, p. 33). However, Altine refuses to accept his plea but rather goes further to reveal her ordeal in the early years of their marriage in the following words:

> **Altine**: A slave, isn't that all you wanted? Remember, all those years you went to the university, and I had to slave to pay your fees, and maintain the children, as well as your aged-mother-all preserve, her memories, the good woman! She was the one who first called me, months after you came home with your degree. She sat me down one evening to discuss it, how you had changed totally, and how she could no longer recognize you (Yerima, 2000, p. 33).

It is pertinent to state that Yerima's *Altine's Wrath* raises contentious issue of gender inequality as it reveals the derogatory degradation which most men give to women on account of their blind followership of patriarchal values. On the other hand, the play, through the characters of Altine and Aina portrays the dogged and desperate nature of women in their resolve to fight for their rightful place in the society. In the play, the playwright tries to give a balanced view of gender disparities contending that women are integral part of the social process and therefore should not be oppressed, marginalized or subjugated in the name of patriarchy rather they should be seen as partners in progress, complementing each other.

Lawal's inability to acknowledge the important place of women in the society propels his downfall. It is his maltreatment of Altine and by extension the entire women folk that makes Altine in connivance with Aina (another woman) to pull him down as he is forced into losing all his properties and life savings.

Conclusion

The relationship between the playwright and the director; the script and the performance; the thematic thrust of the script and the directorial concept cannot be overemphasized. Although they exist at different levels with different names, each is influenced by the other at any given

point. This informs why the performance is derived from a script or an idea that may be documented or improvised or devised. From the analysis of the play understudy as a requirement of the interpretative process, one sees gender inequality dominating the story with a resolution that showcases gender equality. The study therefore observes that all humans are equal irrespective of their gender and as such the interpretation of *Altine's Wrath* should be interpreted along the line of gender equality. This interpretation must be achieved through the effective manipulation of what Alexander Dean and Lawrence Carra refer to as the 'fundamentals of play directing.' These fundamentals include composition, picturization, movement, rhythm and pantomimic dramatization. The director should also creatively cast actors with the required gender, voice level and other physical and histrionic nuances of the different characters. This will support his interpretation of the concept of gender equality as will be accepted by the audience. This acceptance will support in the fight against gender discrimination prevalent in most human societies especially in the underdeveloped countries.

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Torturing the helpless: A review of PCOS induced infertility from a gender perspective

ABSTRACT. This paper reviewed the abuse of infertile women suffering from Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) from a gender perspective. Infertility is a prevalent, presenting feature of PCOS with 75% of women experiencing infertility due to anovulation, making PCOS the most common cause of anovulatory infertility. Increased awareness of PCOS, its causes, and its symptoms may help the process of early diagnosis, appropriate care and mitigation of violence arising from infertility hence, this study. In many countries' infertility among married couples especially for women is a sentence to stigmatization, loss of social status, marital conflicts and violence. All this stems from prevailing socio-cultural norms and gender inequalities inimical to women. PCOS is a syndrome without much public awareness and PCOS patients often do not seek care. Where they seek care, they are often not immediately diagnosed with PCOS. Due to some prevailing cultural norms and general lack of awareness they are often tortured and abused. Outcomes from this study shows that there is need to intensify public awareness on the various factors contributing to infertility such as PCOS which has been identified as a major contributing factor. Also, harmful socio-cultural norms and practices that encourages gender inequalities and violence against infertile women should be eradicated with strong policies put in place and perpetrators severely punished. Early diagnosis and a multidisciplinary approach to the treatment of PCOS is also crucial. Finally, proactiveness by implementing working strategies that will help improve treatment and mitigate violence against women suffering from PCOS should be embrace by all.

KEYWORDS: PCOS, gender, gender based violence, infertility, gender inequality, torture

Introduction

Infertility is a major factor that underlie domestic violence against women (Poornowrooz et al., 2019). Due to gender-based inequalities arising from socially constructed norms and values, women are often discriminated against and bear the burnt for infertility (Patel et al., 2018). Generally, infertility causes a variety of psychosocial and cultural problems for women as they are often humiliated and violently abused as a result (Akyuz et. al., 2013; Ozgoli et al., 2016; Tazuh & Tosam, 2016). In male-dominated societies, such as is found in sub-Saharan Africa, the woman is consistently

singled out and blamed for a couple's infertility, she is often severely punished socially and economically and made highly vulnerable to violence (Ibisomi & Mudege 2014; Tazuh & Tosam, 2016). Fortunately, most cases of infertility in which women are humiliated and abused for, is treatable most times when the cause is identified early and adequately attended to. Unfortunately, a lot of people are unaware of this and still go ahead and violently abuse women for these.

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) is a major cause of infertility and unintentional childlessness among premenopausal women (Bellver et al., 2018). PCOS is generally defined as hyperandrogenism associated with chronic anovulation in women without other underlying disease (Brady et al., 2009). At any age, PCOS can be devastating to women, especially during the reproductive years as it is a leading and major cause of female infertility (Costello et al., 2019). Infertility is a prevalent presenting feature of PCOS with 75% of these women experiencing infertility due to anovulation, making PCOS the most common cause of anovulatory infertility (Brady et al., 2009; Costello et al., 2019). As a matter of fact, the prevalence of infertility in women with PCOS is between 70 and 80% but many women are often not immediately diagnosed with PCOS, which makes them to suffer long for infertility which can be treated to vindicate them (Melo, Ferriani & Navarro, 2015). In many countries, it represents the leading cause of female infertility (Matta, 2017). PCOS also represent a major stress factor in the life of the female gender (Tan et al., 2008; Damone et al., 2019) and women suffering from PCOS reportedly suffer from marked reductions in quality-of-life, violent abuse, emotional distress and increased incidence of depression (Damone et al., 2019). Several studies (Aduloju et al., 2015) have shown that infertile women (PCOS inclusive) are highly susceptible to some underlying factors such as depression, anxiety and stressful events that predispose them to domestic violence. Thus, given its prevalence PCOS represents a major risk factor for violence against women.

Although PCOS is a major public health problem (Soni, 2017; Kirthika et al., 2019), referred to as one of the most common endocrine disorders in premenopausal women, yet it is a condition the public is largely unaware of and health care providers do not seem to fully understand (Azziz, 2016). Similarly, a lack of awareness about the disease and associated infertility predispose a lot of women to violent abuse, torture and unwarranted suffering, especially in sub-Saharan Africa where children are seen as status symbol. Due to lack of public awareness majority of PCOS patients often do not seek medical care (Sanchez, 2014). This pose a challenge for the sufferers as they

are prone to violence, torture and various psychological disorders such as sadness, anger, depression and humiliation. Due to ignorance and lack of adequate information some people do erroneously believe that women with PCOS can never conceive (Sharma & Mishra, 2018). However, doctors think differently towards this statement, because, in some cases, women with PCOS do get pregnant even without any medical assistance and in some cases, just a little medical assistance has proven to be helpful (Sharma & Mishra, 2018).

While men and women are assumed to have equal probability of being infertile, in many societies of Africa the problem of infertility is seen mainly as a woman's problem (Bayouh, 2011). In such societies, women suffer severe stigmatization and violence since they are presumed to have failed to conceive. A woman's infertility may lead to violence, rejection by her partner, social exclusion, and loss of access to resources (Agbontaen-Eghafona & Ofovwe, 2009). Women without children are considered not to be fully adult and are presumed to be of minimal economic and social value in terms of household wealth or lineage continuity. All these are due to prevailing socio-cultural gender constructs. Gender used in the context of this study refers to social cultural norms or traditions that shape our behaviors, preferences and knowledge. Deconstructing prevailing gender norms through public awareness and education is crucial in mitigating violence against women due to PCOS induced infertility.

Given the high prevalence of PCOS (Matta, 2017), and the fact that infertility is one of the main implications of the diagnosis (Costello et al., 2019), examining the associated socio-cultural consequences with the objective of increasing awareness and proffering solutions from a gender perspective certainly deserves further study. This paper is a review of PCOS induced infertility among women from a gender perspective. This is with an aim to increase awareness on PCOS induced infertility thereby mitigating gender-based violence against women as a result of PCOS induced infertility. In addition, the outcomes from this study are relevant to policy makers in sub-Saharan Africa and other developing countries who are interested in addressing gender-based violence, human rights issues and public health consequences associated with PCOS.

Prevalence of violence associated with infertility

Gender-based violence, though under reported, affects the lives of millions of women and young girls worldwide notwithstanding their socioec-

onomic or educational backgrounds (Ozturk et al., 2017). Violence against women, especially against the more vulnerable infertile group must be handled as a public health problem, which negatively affects the reproductive and sexual health rights of women (Eka, Swende & Hembah-Hilekaan, 2019). The prevalence of violence ranges between 15%–71% worldwide (WHO, 2017). Global estimates published by WHO showed that about one third (35%) of women worldwide had experienced either physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime (WHO, 2017). Violence affects women of all ages, races, and backgrounds (Ozturk et al., 2017).

Implications of infertility in sub-Saharan Africa

In sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), approximately 1.9% of the population are confronted with primary infertility which occurs when a woman is unable to bear a child, either due to the inability to become pregnant or the inability to carry a pregnancy to a live birth (Dierickx et al., 2018). Also, there continues to be a high rate of secondary infertility which occurs when a woman is unable to bear a child, either due to the inability to become pregnant or carry a pregnancy to a live birth following either a previous pregnancy or a previous ability to carry a pregnancy to a live birth (Dierickx et al., 2018).

Existing research on infertility in SSA suggests that it has important implications for mental health, economic and social well-being, marital quality and stability (Fledderjohann, 2012). However, it is vital to note that many of these findings are likely to vary across the different cultural and social settings. Reproduction is a natural yearning and an important human need and generally considered to be the most important element for enduring marital relationship (Sami & Ali, 2012) especially in some cultural settings. The desire to have children is strong and compelling, so infertility can be devastating for couples who are unable to conceive. A woman who gives birth to a healthy child is highly valued in her society. Consequently, infertility is not only a gynaecological illness but also a socio-cultural health challenge (Harzif, Santawi & Wijaya, 2019). Infertility also poses as a social stigma (Harzif, Santawi & Wijaya, 2019). Several studies have shown the negative effects of infertility from the social point of view, this negative social problem affects the lives of millions of women worldwide (Harzif, Santawi & Wijaya, 2019). Various anthropological and sociological research have also shown that due to prevailing cultural and

gender norms towards childbearing and infertility, women in SSA countries are often more negatively affected and prone to violence (Dierickx et al., 2018). In SSA societies with high levels of gender inequality, regardless of diagnosis, women are blamed for failing to bear children (Dierickx et al., 2018). They do suffer from stigma, social isolation and ridicule within their communities as a result of infertility. Fertility problems are also a potential source of marital tension and violence between partners (Dierickx et al., 2018). When a marriage remains childless, the woman is more prone to verbally or even physical violence. They are prone to exhibit feelings of anxiety, lack of self-esteem and a general sense of powerlessness. This is mostly common in patriarchal societies, where the role of women is determined according to their capacity to give birth, thus making infertility a major threat to marital life stability (Inhorn & Patrizio, 2015). This has serious consequences for a woman's total well-being as a result of the fact that motherhood in patriarchal societies, is a confirmation of a woman's feminine as well as maternal identities.

Furthermore, in such patriarchal societies infertile women are highly vulnerable to various forms of violence especially domestic violence. Where parenthood is considered as a master status by the individual or by the society, inevitable distress as a result of infertility is the consequence (Hess, Ross & Gililland, 2018). Women for whom motherhood is defined as a major life identity experience, do, significantly have higher levels of psychological distress when they remain childless (Hess, Ross & Gililland, 2018). In most SSA countries, social discrimination and domestic violence against infertile women by their spouses and spouses' relatives are widespread (Dierickx et al., 2018).

Prevalence of PCOS induced infertility

The true prevalence of PCOS is generally unknown (Cutler, 2019) as nationwide data is scanty especially in SSA. Reports vary depending on the diagnostic criteria used and the population studied. Worldwide estimates report between 6 to 18% of women have PCOS (Cutler, 2019). While PCOS affects women worldwide, some evidence suggests higher rates in specific ethnic groups (Wolf et al., 2018).

As noted earlier, prevalence depends on the diagnostic criteria being used. For example, the 2003 Rotterdam criteria are the broadest and therefore yields the highest rates of PCOS while the 1990 NIH criteria are the

strictest (Cutler, 2019). According to Cutler 2019, a systematic review and meta-analysis comprising of 13 studies where ethnicity was categorized as follows: African American, European White, Chinese and Middle Eastern; was carried out. In this meta-analysis, prevalence using the Rotterdam criteria was 5.6% for Chinese women and 16.0% for Middle Eastern women (Cutler, 2019). Using the NIH criteria, results for prevalence rates was 5.5% for European White women, 7.4% for African American women and 6.1% for Middle Eastern women (Cutler, 2019). Meanwhile, estimated prevalence was 12.6% for Middle Eastern women using the 2006 Androgen excess (AE-PCOSS) criteria (Cutler, 2019). These prevalence rates point to African American women having the highest prevalence of PCOS while Chinese women having the lowest (Cutler, 2019).

Infertility and PCOS: interrelations of gender roles and sociocultural expectations

Infertility is socially constructed in many SSA cultures, that is, men and women are viewed and perceived to become parents and women are specially socialized to become mothers in society (Chimbatata & Malimba, 2016). This is an unambiguous contrast to other societies in the west and the affluent world where individuals or couples could choose not to have a child or just to have them by adoption. Infertility has psychological and social aspects as well as being a medical problem (Kazandi et al., 2011). It is a problem in social contexts because in most societies of the world, womanhood and manhood are generally associated with childbearing (Tabong & Adongo, 2013). PCOS as a condition has an effect on virtually every aspects of a woman's life. Although the health aspect is being extensively worked on since the past few decades, little has been done to address the social cultural aspects of the condition especially from a gender lens. In many SSA countries where the socio-cultural environment is patriarchal in their approach, there are serious social-cultural consequences in the life of a woman with PCOS induced infertility.

In most SSA countries in general, women enjoy less status than men. Sub-Saharan African culture is majorly pronatalist and choosing voluntary childlessness is rare (Reed, 2010). Most men and women place a great deal of importance on having children especially in SSA where the high infant and child mortality rate motivates couples to have as many children as possible (Reed, 2010). Across SSA infertile women are subjected to public

derogation and violence (Reed, 2010). Infertility due to PCOS make women more vulnerable to violence due to inherent social cultural norms and gender inequalities that predisposes them to such. Unfortunately, majority of women affected by PCOS are unaware of their situation and the level of societal awareness is still quite low. Aside the violence, the societal perception of infertile women is negative especially in SSA. They need help and societal support thus, inherent negative perceptions and violence towards them is akin to torturing the helpless.

The way forward

Increased awareness

Awareness is the first step in protecting women from violence due to PCOS induced infertility. Little is known about the specific fertility concerns and information needs of women with PCOS or their preferences for how and when to receive information about the effect of their condition and its treatment on fertility and childbearing (Holton, Hammarberg & Johnson, 2018). Women with PCOS want to be better informed about the impact of their condition on their reproductive capacity but find it challenging to access reliable, relevant and timely information (Holton, Hammarberg & Johnson, 2018). The primary cause of PCOS is still unknown but awareness and lifestyle modifications are known to be an effective therapy route to ameliorate the symptoms of this syndrome (Cutler, 2019; Rao, Broughton & Lemieux, 2020).

Furthermore, the lack of public awareness results in many not seeking healthcare or going undiagnosed (Rao, Broughton & Lemieux, 2020). In many SSA countries, the lack of public awareness of this disease has contributed to its low clinical diagnosis rate as most patients do not seek adequate and proper health care (Cutler, 2019). Increase PCOS awareness (both among physicians and patients) should result in more women seeking medical evaluation specifically because PCOS is suspected (Rao, Broughton & Lemieux, 2020). According to Dr. Ilana Ressler, "PCOS goes undiagnosed in 50%–70% of women who have the condition" (Levinson, 2019) and PCOS is one of the most underserved women's health issues today due to lack of sufficient public awareness (Cutler, 2019). Thus, efforts to heighten the profile of PCOS among the general public remain critical, as "minimal awareness" or "no awareness" of PCOS is prevalent.

More studies on the socio-cultural impact of PCOS

Only a very few studies have highlighted the socio-cultural impact of PCOS induced infertility especially pertaining to violence against women in sub-Saharan Africa. This is particularly alarming given the need to improve women's health in the region and the great need to address health disparities globally (Mariani et al., 2017). The negative impact that PCOS has on fertility will be particularly harmful for African women in low socioeconomic settings. Many are affected by psychosocial effects such as intimate partner violence, anxiety and depression, stress, and divorce (Zangeneh et al., 2012). There is need for more efforts to create more public awareness on PCOS especially in sub-Saharan Africa as this will also motivate more studies to be carried out in this direction.

Multifaceted approach to treatment

Solutions for improving care for women with PCOS need to be multifaceted (Teede et al., 2018; Wright, Dawson & Corbett, 2020). A multidisciplinary and multilevel approach for managing PCOS is necessary. Women with PCOS should receive empathic, supportive care that speaks to all aspects of their condition. This should be incorporated as a policy while treating women with PCOS induced infertility. Women suffering from PCOS should be given appropriate and wholistic care, rather than being consistently tortured and humiliated.

Policy and societal reorientation

Infertility is wrongly seen as a woman's issue in many SSA settings with its disruptive power towards women (Chimbatata & Malimba, 2016). If the fight against PCOS induced infertility is to be won, then all concerned must take responsibility and act appropriately. This requires more vigorous public awareness and educational campaigns especially at the grassroot level. The society's over valuing of children and projecting those who are childless as useless in society needs to be critically reexamined (Chimbatata & Malimba, 2016). It is such traditional perception that puts more pressure on concerned infertile individuals and encourage violence against woman. If care for women with PCOS is to improve, there is need for policy change that would break the traditional norm of viewing infertility as solely a woman's issue.

The perception of infertility as something that would deny individuals communal rights also requires to be changed (Chimbatata & Malimba,

2016). The society should give equal respect to individuals regardless to whether they have children or not (Chimbatata & Malimba, 2016). This will encourage positive acceptance of infertility as a reproductive health problem and not a punishment (Chimbatata & Malimba, 2016). This will go a long way in reducing violence against women due to PCOS induced infertility.

Relieving the economic burden

The economic burden of PCOS is significantly large especially for women in developing countries where the poverty rate is high. Thus, early diagnosis and intervention is crucial to reduce the financial burden and ensure good health. This is important as it will ultimately reduce incidences of violence against women and ensure increased economic productivity.

Conclusion

The current state of awareness and knowledge regarding PCOS induced infertility is quite low especially in SSA. Some existing societal norms and gender inequalities increases the vulnerability of women suffering from fertility problems to violence. Outcomes from this review shows that there is a great need for more advocacy and increased awareness on PCOS induced infertility. Furthermore, harmful socio-cultural practices and gender inequalities that make infertile women more vulnerable to violence should be eradicated through advocacy and appropriate legislations. Also, early diagnosis and a multidisciplinary approach to the treatment of PCOS is crucial. Finally, government, traditional institutions and the society in general need to be more proactive by implementing evidence-based strategies that will help improve treatment and mitigate violence against women suffering from PCOS.

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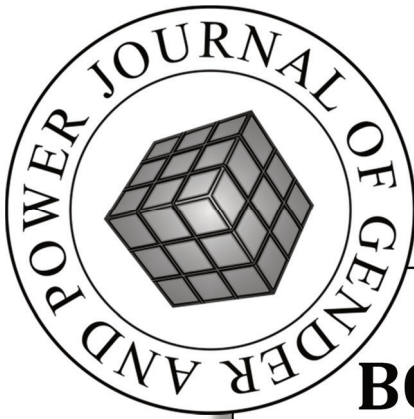
BOOK
AND JOURNAL
REVIEWS

Susan W. Woolley, Lee Airton (eds.). *Teaching about Gender Diversity. Teacher-Tested Lesson Plans for K-12 classrooms.* Toronto 2020: Canadian Scholars. Pp. 334.

Without any doubts, we live in different times with still quite closed-minded approach towards teaching about gender diversity. In Poland no less, this particular topic is paved over in course books and ministry guidelines for primary and secondary schools. That is why, as teachers and academics we can benefit by reading this unputdownable publication published by Canadian Scholars Press in 2020. An attractive aspect of the book is that the authors focused not only on a theoretical perspective but also in collaboration with several scientists they managed to create lesson plans suitable for children in K-12 classrooms.

Teaching about diversity is one of the few books that was written by openly queer and non-binary transgender teachers and academics. The editors are not only the members of the local community members but also teacher education who mainly focus themselves in preservice teacher education programs across Canada and the USA. The publication is deeply embedded in Indigenous lands history and those people's devastating life experience as some of the authors are currently living and working on the traditional lands. According to the writers the main idea of this publication is not only to educate but to „create a book grounded in a contextually specific, historicised, and non-binary conceptualisation of gender diversity because beginning (but not only beginning) teachers must recognise that the gender-based oppression, in institutionalised education on the land where we live" (Woolley & Airton, 2020, p. 8). Besides, by this book they thirst for „gender diversity curriculum" which could be the answer for the visible lack of basic information about transgender people in modern society. But, first and foremost, to teach about gender diversity through proposed lesson plans that aim to do both of these things.

The title is divided into three sections targeting different grade levels: Elementary (K–5), Middle Years (6–9), Secondary (10–12). Each of them apart from the useful theoretical and scientific compendium on the important topic which is gender itself. The second component, lessons plans were designed to support learning and teaching about diversity which might be a concept that some of the teachers are not familiar with. Teaching materials cover a wide range of topics, texts and innovative approaches to educating about gender diversity. To provide for the teachers high quality of this academic source, all of the plans were subjected to a double-blind review process and went through multiple rounds of re-

visions based on the reviewers' feedback. The whole bit was done to pay careful attention to the pedagogy and the audacious topics that were handled.

The wide introduction to teaching about gender diversity written by Lee Airton and Susan W. Woolley is just much more than the book opening. From the first page to the last one in this part, we can read why this volume matters and how to use it in everyday teaching practice. The reader will not only have the grasp to understand the meaning of gender diversity but what is more, get the idea of how to create a positive classroom climate for this work. Moreover, the authors managed to present theories that are major contributions to their understanding of gender: poststructuralism, transgender studies, postcolonial theory as well as black feminist thought.

One of the most important parts of this publication is the first section dedicated to the elementary level. The major topics touched on are gender stereotypes, categories and identity. Interestingly authors prepared a series of lessons that by read-aloud early literacy picture books with gender-neutral language engage students and teach them gender terminology. An exception is a lesson plan particularly intended for Catholic elementary school teachers which present gender diversity as congruent with aspects of Catholic doctrine.

The second part underlines the crucial role of puberty and illustrates the middle years' students reflection on their experiences of gender. The lessons plans include the use of visual arts in exploring gender representation in popular culture and challenge categories of gender presented with ways they are used in data collection and analysis.

After these first two chapters, the book takes a topical organisation to features lesson plans encouraging teachers to perceive gender at a variety of levels (ex. personal, historical, structural and cross-cultural). Again, the main idea is to critically discuss the representations of gender and gender stereotypes but this time with a deeper sense of understanding. The editors cover a broader range of content and introduce new topic focused on transgender people across time and culture. All of this is a treasure of practical suggestions presented with remarkable insight and creativity of authors.

The Teaching about Gender Diversity does an excellent job in describing, explaining and relating the research literature to actual teaching practice, and it does so in ways that are both innovative and transparent. Overall, the editors did an admirable job of achieving goals set up and presented at the beginning of this book. The most important message of this publication is that gender diversity should be integrating and thought within the curriculum on daily basis, rather than „a prescription for the classes in which such lessons should be taught" (Woolley & Airton, 2020, p. 10).

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