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Beyond Asexualization: Narratives of Sexual Objectification of Persons with Albinism in Nigeria

Abstract: Often overemphasised, in most sexuality studies, is that persons with disability, especially women, face experiences of asexualization rather than sexualisation. Similarly overemphasised is the faulty monolithic assumption that economic deprivation is the causal factor in the objectification of persons with disability. This has unintentionally created an expectation that objectifying environments are the inevitable and immutable default to economic distress. This is often not the case within the socio-cultural space of persons with albinism (PWA) in Southern Nigeria, where their presence is obvious. As a departure, this study examined the sexual objectification of PWA in Nigeria. It was discovered that at some points in the life course of PWA, most especially among the women with the development and aging of their body, objectification added to mental health risks such as withdrawal syndrome, isolation and indolence. The study concludes that cultural attitudes not only creates and threatens PWA sexed and gendered body confidence in relationships but also for them to be labelled and misconstrued as sexually inactive.

Keywords: objectification, socio-cultural, expectations, assumptions, life-course

Introduction

Many a time it has become very common for women and girls to be reduced to objects for others' use. Thus the concept of objectification, as posited by Moffitt and Szymanski (2011), suggests that both women and young girls typically are prone to internalize others' observational view points as a primary view of their physical selves and exploitation by others. This outlook about women as object can lead to a number of issues such as body monitoring, which can increase the threats, opportunity for women to have anxiety, and be exploited in society. Events of molestation, rape, and abuses of the young girls (Izugbara 2004) reported and portrayed in the media and literature are numerous. These events have brought about the concept of 'sexual objectification' of women.

They reflect, replicate, and entrench societal unequal power-play over women (Gold 2002). Thus researchers have come to realise that we live in a sexually objectifying environment (Tiggeman and Boundy 2008; Vander Kolk and Bright, 1983; Wan 2003). In several studies, economic factors have often been linked to the objectification of women (Gold 2002; Moffitt and Szymanski 2011; Palmer 2007), whereby women's bodies are used for profit. However, many have failed to look beyond the economic analysis, undermining the pleasure content of objectification and the opportunistic environment in which women generally, and specifically persons with disability (PWD) find themselves in society. Similarly, economic analogy fails to capture the cyclical processes maintaining the objectification and exploitation therein, by so doing the exploitation of women's bodies owing to rewards built into the institutional structure. Nevertheless, findings from past research often depict the exploitation of women in society as if they are a homogenous entity, neglecting people who are differently classified as disabled or physically challenged.

Among albinos in Nigeria there are quite a number of unmet needs, such as the need for employment, schooling, housing; adequate protection from dangers generally. Social stigma increases on the basis of their physical appearance, which constitutes a serious problem for people with albinism. Yet very little research has been done on the social and emotional experience of people with albinism on sexually related problems. The physical anomalies of PWA most especially oculocutaneous albinism (OCA) have caused people with this condition to be stigmatized, discriminated against, and to be the object of violence, and unwanted sexual advances often not reported (Gold 2002; Palmer 2007; Vander Kolk & Bright 1983; Wan 2003). Research has shown that there are two types of albinism. Persons with OCA albinism are visually impaired to some degree and some are proclaimed formally (legally) blind, which means that their vision is at or worse than 20/200 (thus, a legally blind person must be as close as 20 feet to see what a person with normal vision can see at 200 feet). Persons with ocular albinism (OA) have their eyes affected but not the skin or hair, i.e. the person with OA may have normally pigmented hair and skin, but may have light blue or reddish eyes.

Therefore, myths and stereotypes about albinism have filled the void of knowledge of and exposure to the condition and have caused PWA to be treated as members of a stigmatized minority who are subjected to the same prejudice and discrimination as other minority groups. While rarely seen, albinism is highly visible. The rarity of the condition, coupled with the aberrant appearance of albinism, cause PWA to be viewed as strange, almost inhuman creatures, and to be treated as objects of fear and curiosity. Nevertheless, the curiosity about PWA has often brought about objectification and neglect in the event of pregnancy and sexual encounters with others, as evident in this study.

Research Methods

This paper draws information from qualitative research (in-depth semi-structured interviews and observations) among a cross section of 25 women and 20 men with albinism, selected from a larger data of 159 randomly selected persons with albinism (PWA), who took part in the previous study on albinism conducted over a four year period between the 2014–2018, across six states in South west Nigeria: Ondo, Oyo, Ekiti, Ogun, Osun, and Lagos (Ikuomola 2015; 2016). A purposive sample with a convenient population was utilised. Similarly, the grounded theory approach was employed, with research questions emerging from interviews (Wengraf 2004).Women were asked to narrate their life experiences with particular emphasis on their sexuality and sexual relationships from which themes of sexual objectification were identified. The interviews were conducted in Youruba and English languages with the interjection of pidgin. They lasted between 40 and 60 minutes, per individual. The data analysis is purely descriptive as a result of the qualitative method used to obtain information. The qualitative data was entered into themes from quotations, which represent the recorded explanations supplied by the respondents. Respondents' identity was concealed with the use of pseudonyms where necessary. This article is set out to investigate sexual objectification of persons with albinism in Nigeria. Through interviews with PWA, five themes emanated from their narratives regarding sexual objectification: (a) Persons with albinism: Sex and sexuality, (b) Sexual objectification and low intimacy among PWA, (c) Discriminated socialization processes and limited opportunities for sexual engagement, (d) Dynamics of sexual expression among persons with albinism (PWA), and (e) The stigma of disability.

Persons with Albinism: Sex and Sexuality

Though cross-cultural and historical comparisons are difficult about albinos' sexuality, the findings of this research shed light on past and current gender and sexual beliefs and behaviour. In this study, we also sought out persons with albinism, by asking them about related sexual mores, attitudes and practices that were acceptable generally and to albinos specifically, to examine contradictions and similarities from adolescence to adulthood. Their opinions were not farfetched as they viewed sexuality in a manner that is integrally related to a transformation of the social world narrating what it means to be human, and the stigma associated with exclusion as reconfigured by lesser opportunities for socially accepted intimate alliance (Butler 1990). Even the designation 'sexualities' begs the question of what constitutes this broad, mobile notion that presents semantic possibilities. The concept as used by respondents all through this paper

suggests an implied heterosexuality norm or culture within the law of the Nigerian constitution. Thus, narratives revealed that sexuality was a rather tabooed subject in the past as well as in some traditional household at present, and that in general the parents did not discuss sex with their children. For example, in some cultures girls did not learn about menstruation until it occurred, and boys knew nothing of wet dreams until they had them. If young people were told about sex, it was often put in a negative context – penises bite and premarital sex is lethal. Across the board, PWA and other respondents stated that due to the conservative nature of their homes and families, sex was not discussed. Simply put, "we didn't talk about sex". Many of the men said they learned about sex from their peers. Interestingly, most of the men relate their sexual prowess to being African. In some ways they have bought into the notion that as African men they are well-endowed. Remarks such as, "You know what they say about African men" illuminate a sort of African sexual pride.

Sex and sexuality issues were not discussed either in the public or among children. But at home there is always a way to tell the children who to and who not to play with and who to avoid as they grow up in life. In every family, the children were taught to avoid people perceived to be outcast and people perceived to be unclean especially those with specific long ailments, and families with history of casualties and short lives on earth. For albinos, the friendship with non-albinos was allowed, especially among the same gender, but in mixed-gender relationships, the community tended to make fun of the man that is not an albino. Thus, it was common to hear children or peers singing 'the love of an 'anyanri' is also the love of a white man (Onyoncha)* while in response another person or group will sing *'if you cannot get a white wife, then an anyanri is available, take the opportunity and wait for the consequences'.* The consequences, according to most interviewees, surround the inability of PWA 'to work hard in the farm during the day'. Life was all about farmhands and family support as labourers. Persons with albinism are seen as a shortage to the economy. As Okonkwo noted:

> ...the more the numbers of albinos a family has, the more likely they are pitied and disempowered economically. And this goes a long way in explaining why people will play with them and yet not take them seriously in business and other social engagement. Often than not female albinos are either not married or married out to men of poor background to avoid late marriage. Though there is no taboo in marrying an albino among the Igbo. It is often implied (Male/47years/Traditionalist/Oyo State).

A female respondent (PWA) noted:

> While growing up, my parents often will cuddle me and pray that one day I will group up and be lucky to find a husband that will take care of me. It took

me several years to read meaning to those prayers and words of luck. I have come to know now as a full-grown adult that they foresaw the future that getting a husband wound not be that easy. Here I am, at forty-two am still not married (Nkechi/Female/42years/Trader/Ekiti State).

Sexual Objectification and Low Intimacy among PWA

The internalization of an observer's perspective upon one's own body can be connected to relationships and interactions, which can also transform to either high or low intimacy as narrated among PWA. It was discovered in this study to be linked not only with the socio-historical interpretation of albinism, but also to the objectification of albino's bodily images for purposes beyond sex and sexual encounters. Within the traditional framework of objectification theory, sexual objectification experiences are thought to socialize girls and women to treat themselves as objects to be looked upon and evaluated based upon bodily appearance (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). However, in this study issues of sexual deviance and stigma are brought up through narratives of PWA, which mainstream theorists have failed to highlight beyond women's appearances. A reoccurring theme of sexual objectification and perhaps low-level intimacy among PWA narratives can be situated within the discussions of Fredrickson and Roberts's (1997) objectification theory, which highlights the lived experiences and mental implication of sexual avoidance and bodily objectification. This becomes an integrative framework, as used in this study, for understanding the sexuality dilemma that PWA, face from birth, through the cycle of socialization and experiences of sexual objectification.

In Abike and Chinyere's narrative below, objectification of PWA is well spelled out:

It is a wicked world seeing fellow humans taking advantage of albinos. My experience in the polytechnic, still leaves an impression, that some boys and men just want to get closer and experience what it is to have an albino girlfriend not only for the fun of it but also to acquire in quote a bragging right among male groups, for a topic of discussion, spreading the news of what it is to have an intimate relationship with a person with albinism. This has made me more careful with men generally (Abike/Female/27years/Oyo State).

It is not only among male partners or guys, even among females, they also ask the boys about the pleasure boys derived in having an albino partner. Question like how is it like the first time, do albinos enjoy it; how do they moan or squint, have you taken time to observe their body odour and colour during and after romance or sexual intercourse. After hearing from a friend, it became done on me that I once had a guy who was experimenting with me. Well all that is

history, but it is still the case with younger persons most especially with females (Chinyere/Female/24years/Ondo State).

The above narratives clearly explain the position of objectification theorists such as Bartky 1990; Moradi and Huang (2008), which states that:

> Sexual objectification occurs when a woman's sexual parts or functions are separated out from her person, reduced to status of mere instruments, or else regarded as if they were capable of representing her. To be dealt with in this way is to have one's entire being identified with the body. . . (Bartky 1990, 35).

It is not uncommon for PWA to be shy in discussing sexuality, to a large extent few who were open and down to earth, spoke and revealed the objectification of PWA bodily image. Going by the theory of objectification (Bartky 1990), which expressly portrays women's life experiences and gender socialization to events of sexual deviants which occur when a woman's sexual parts or functions are separated out from her person. In the life experiences of Abike and Chinyere, their status were reduced and portrayed as mere instruments for sexual manoeuvring. To be dealt with in this way simply implies that one's entire being is identified to the observable features of the body (Bartky 1990). A typical example of sexual objectification is the objectifying gaze expressed by non-albinos during interpersonal encounters, as well as the media representations of disability and women in advertorials, music videos and movies (Groce and Trani 2009; Fredrickson and Roberts 1997; Goffman 1979; Kilbourne and Jhally 2000). Diary studies support the routine occurrence of sexual objectification as a dimension of daily experiences of sexism, and, as posited in objectification theory, women report more sexual objectification experiences than men (Swim, Hyers, Cohen, and Ferguson 2001). As observed in this study, we can say albino men are relatively privileged over albino women in matters of sexual and bodily objectification. Worst experiences of sexual objectification were evident in the narratives of PWA (women) from poor background. This can be inferred from Aminat's experience thus:

> Though I have been in and out of relationships, some casual and others intimate, my experience is like that of a leper, you will see some family members of my boyfriends shunning me, others stylishly avoiding me whenever I visit. Name-calling is a major problem from friends and partners, once I overheard my boyfriend's younger sister telling someone that "the touch light" (referring to my skin) will be of help at night during a blackout (Female/31years/Fashion Designer/Lagos State).

Name-calling was also common among the few married PWA interviewed. This, a married woman said, was often common where there are financial difficulties or problems in the family.

> Being an albino calls for constant prayers for the family because whenever things are going wrong, I am often the first suspect. In the case of the death of our first child, it was not funny I was called all sorts of name, from being evil to being a witch. In-laws will say I have bewitched my husband and killed the child (Female/45yearsTrader/Osun State).

Mrs. Debora, a widow, noted that prior to her husband's demise, she had a supportive family. Her husband and children lived happily, there were no conflicts between her and her in-laws.

> My husband was discovered to be hypertensive and later became paralysed with stroke which lasted for over 2 years; before he eventually gave up the ghost. It was hell, accusations and counter accusations, unprintable and unimaginable names depicting me as evil. I was told that their son would not have died if he had listened to the family's advice not to marry an albino. That he was the first to marry an albino in the family, and that now he has not only brought stigma to the family but also early death and initiation of the family into the spirit world of albinos (Debora/Female/50 years/civil servants/ Lagos State).

In the analyses of men's (male albinos) responses, the use of albinos' body parts for ritual purposes were highlighted as another issue related to the objectification of PWA. This is well captured and implicative as Akeem noted below:
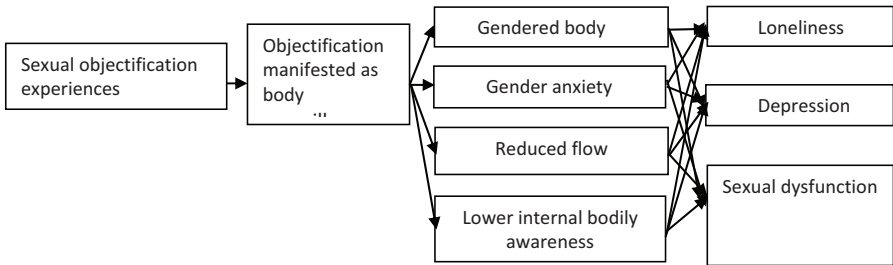
> For the fact that albinos are not many in society, really or imagined, it is in the news always that albinos are targeted and hunted for their body parts in making charms for wealth and rear opportunities (Male/34years/Ondo State)

Another reiterated his experience thus:

> I have been involved with a rich lady, who initially would provide me with all my needs and even take me out for vacation in Lagos and Abuja, and on one occasion to Cameroon, where I narrowly escaped from being used for rituals. On this particular trip, I was in the room and I overheard my partner discussing with some persons about me and how to become rich with albinos' luck. It was not too late that I discovered that she had some ulterior motives. I became scared after the trip across the border to Cameroon, seeing her business partners and some clandestine activities. I was warned by a prophet who told my parents that the ailment I was having at that time was not what medical doctors would cure. I was asked to be taken to a river for spiritual bath. After which I was asked to desist from the businesswoman and sexual partner (Onyeka/ Male/42years/Ekiti State).

There is no doubt that the above-mentioned issues of anxiety, body shamming, reduced and low internal self-esteem; depression, sexual dysfunction among other socio-cultural, biosocial or medical events, are eminent in the lives of PWA, in what Moradi and Huang (2008) referred to as objectification of the body. Below is a framework which highlights issues and impact of bodily or sexual objectification that PWA experience in their daily encounter.

A framework highlighting issues and impact of bodily or sexual objectification

Sexual objectification experiences	→	Objectification manifested as body ...		Gendered body		Loneliness
				Gender anxiety		Depression
				Reduced flow		Sexual dysfunction
				Lower internal bodily awareness		

Adapted from Moradi and Huang (2008)

The brightness of the skin colour a person with albinism no doubt often stands out in any gathering, thus it is not uncommon to see people without albinism gazing at them. Gazing thus becomes the first stage and experience of bodily and sexual objectification of PWA in society, as it is with women's experiences in a sexually objectifying environment (Moffitt and Szymanski 2011). It is through gazing that PWA are first and foremost disempowered from far mentally, and secondly, physically the generation of comments about PWA's body parts, and thirdly experiences of avoidance (socially and physically distancing), unwanted sexual advances or violence against PWA (for a more in-depth description and analysis see Frederickson and Roberts 1997; Kozee, Tylka, Augustus-Horvath, and Denchik 2007; Swim, Hyers, Cohen and Ferguson 2001).

A typical example of bodily cum sexual objectification according to Fredrickson and Roberts 1997; Goffman 1979; Kilbourne and Jhally 2000) is that bodily and sexual objectification are not only evident in interpersonal encounters but also in the representation of disability in the media. Similarly, diary studies support the routine occurrence of sexual objectification as a dimension of daily experiences of sexism, and, as posited in objectification theory, as well as in most of the narratives from women in this study. They reported more sexual objectification experiences than men with albinism. This is congruent to the findings of Swim, Hyers, Cohen and Ferguson (2001) on everyday sexism, where they assessed reports of sexual objectification experiences of women and found that internalisation mediated links of sexual objectification experiences with body surveillance, body shame, and eating disorder symptoms. In addition, body surveillance mediated the link of sexual objectification experiences with body shame, and body shame in turn mediated the links of internalization and body surveillance with eating disorder symptoms.

Within the framework of objectification theory, sexual objectification experiences are thought to socialize girls and women to treat themselves as objects to be looked upon and evaluated based upon bodily appearance (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). This internalization of an observer's perspective upon one's own body is called self-objectification. Self-objectification is manifested by persistent body surveillance or the act of "habitual monitoring of the body's outward appearance" (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997, 180). Appearance-focused self-objectification and manifest body surveillance parallel McKinley and Hyde's (1996) earlier conceptualization of body surveillance as a component of objectified body consciousness. Self-objectification and manifest body surveillance are posited to promote body shame and anxiety and reduce or disrupt awareness of internal bodily states and flow experiences (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). Body shame is the emotion that can result from measuring oneself against an internalized or cultural standard and perceiving oneself as failing to meet that standard. Anxiety includes the anticipation of threats and fear about when and how one's body will be evaluated. Peak motivational states, or what Csikszentmihalyi (1982, 1990) called flow, are "rare moments during which we feel we are truly living, uncontrolled by others, creative and joyful" (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997, 183). Awareness of internal bodily states is the ability to detect and accurately interpret physiological sensations, such as sexual arousal.

Discriminated Socialization Processes and Limited Opportunities for Sexuality Engagement

An excerpt from the life history interview with the Oyo State Chairperson of the Albino foundation showed clearly that there are limited avenues for persons with albinism (PWA) to express as well as show their emotions; and in becoming engaged. Such avenues, like going to parties and even to religious and social gathering, were marked with terrible experiences and expectations which bring about a withdrawal syndrome to persons with albinism:

> ...the home is the most important avenue for socialization but surprisingly the sexuality challenges even start at home. Family members keep examining you as if your organs will be quite different in colours as well as in sizes, sometime they peep atone to see if there are normal genital. It is embarrassing! Though family members accept one as he is, just because you are from the same womb, but they also sometimes make jest of one. Sometimes parents even distance or are alienated from one. So, we know these things. The way God created everybody, once someone discriminates against you; one will definitely know. One does not need to be told when you are in a place where you are not accepted; instantly you will know. So, we suffer all of these. These take a psychological toll on us (PWA) especially as one grows up into an adult (Male/22years/Student/Ondo State).

> I still remember some of the agonizing experiences I went through. I still remember when I went to a library to read and the lady besides me was uncomfortable and stylishly moved away to another section of the library. I had to look at myself again to see if I was properly dressed or had a body odour. Ordinarily, I am from a comfortable home, I had good clothes on and body spray to discountenance the false belief that PWA have body odour or smells in general (Male/36 years/Civil Servant/Osun State).

> I still remember I went to a party and was walked out of the party hall—saying 'we do not welcome albinos here'. I can still remember, I stretched my hands to shake somebody, and I was told 'don't touch me' because I was an albino. Sometimes in churches, people come in to have their seats close to you, they just suddenly leave you and leave a whole row of seat for you; ladies walk up to you and say 'I cannot sit, touch or talk to an albino'. I give another instance that is related to a journalist, I was invited by the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), to give a talk as a guest; the Newscaster, a lady was of the opinion that she does not see the discriminations I speak about in society. So, I looked her deep in her eyes and asked her if she would marry an albino? She lost her breath. After a while she eventually answered in the affirmative. I said to her 'I do not need to be a psychologist' to know that this is a secondary opinion' (Male/48years/Civil Servant /Lagos State).

With these perceived beliefs about albinos, there are quite a number of sexuality challenges in the available options any mature person with albinism (PWA) would want to take. Therefore a number of well calculated measures must be taken regarding first and foremost who their future partner(s) would be, as well as the option of constantly living in fear with intending partners, or husbands for fear of rejection by their in-laws, and later in life by their partners; becoming unattractive as a result of the susceptibility to moles, freckles or patches of skin that change in size, shape or colour. One woman discussed the situation:

> Even though the love for fair skin ladies is of high demand, most especially among Igbo in Eastern part of the country, it is quite different for an albino in adulthood, when moles are likely to be more visible and rejection and body shaming becomes the norm. Husbands' relatives start distancing themselves from one, and at best one is pitied like an object (Woman/55years/Trader/Lagos State).

Dynamics of sexual expression among persons with albinism (PWA)

In examining this objective the notion that the research is not talking to minors was re-echoed, as a prelude for the question 'how would an albino express his or her intension towards love, affection to the opposite sex be it persons with albinism or without albinism'.

In all the interviews made, there was an unanimous response and objection to the option of having a relationship with the female or male gender who is an

albino or even having the albino gene or traces of albinism in their lineage (if known). The males tend to find association with female albinos as disgusting. This was earlier noted and can be traced down to a certain belief system or culturally held stereotype against the female albinos as possessed and evil beings. In the discussion groups, this was a major cause of laughter. After about two minutes of laughter in a session, a lady described her past experience as a difficult one.

> (Divine wishes)
> For me as a girl growing up, I have no male friends, to engage in a relationship, even right now! I hope in future I should be able to get one, if God wills it, and then expression of love will come naturally, either from me or from the guy (Female/35years/Blogger/Osun State)

A married Albino man, with all confidence was of the opinion that there are many ways of expressing sexual intension or desires, he highlighted three ways: through friends, religious association and parental assistance:

> In my own case, when I started working with confectionery company, then in Lagos, as an assistant store keeper; it got to a stage, I have no female friends outside my siblings, I approached my pastor, informing him, that I am thinking of getting married someday. And he applauded me as if I have brought him gift! He encouraged me to pray over it and that he will talk to some of the single ladies in church. But a week later I returned to the pastor informing him that there is a particular girl in the church choir that my heart keeps beating whenever I set my eyes on her. And the pastors smiled and asked me if I have approached her before or know anything about her or her family. I responded in the negative, but later told him my mother and hers are both traders in the same market. To cut a long story short, my pastor did the follow up and told the girl's parents. With much education and enlightenment, my pastor was able to convince them that, if there is no albino in their family, there won't be any likelihood of the marriage bringing an albino into being (Male/47 years/Supervisor/Ogun State).

He concluded thus:

> I felt it was a bit easy for me and the pastor, because I was educated and have a relatively good job to cater for my wife and also to assist them....it could have been a friend or other family members doing the expression for a relationship and others will follow (Male/47 years/Supervisor/Ogun State).

Late marriage was common among persons with albinism. Worse affected were the women: Mrs. Ademulegun narrated how she got married and the challenges she is having with her husband who is not an albino:

> ...though I got married directly to my friend. We attended same church. We first got to know each other from a Spinster programme organized by the church way back 1999. After the programme we exchanged numbers, often times he

sends me short messages, we exchange pleasantries. These continued for about 8 years and in 2008 he called me telling me he is not getting younger, that many girls have disappointed him; and that he really wants to settle down and get married. I told him, that he should be prayerful; not knowing he actually wanted to propose to me. As the conversation continued, all of a sudden, he kept quiet for about a couple of seconds. When he got back to talk, he said "are you not thinking of marriage yourself?" In response I told him albinos are usually not the marriage freak type and that for now it has not crossed my mind, and that I have not seen anybody who wants my hand in marriage. The conversation ended. About three months, I did not hear anything from him, on this fateful morning, he came to my house asking me if the two of us can become intimate friends and get married later in the year. And I said "why not?" He was that blunt. In reply I told him if meant what he was saying, he should inform my parents, which he did. In about eight months we were married (Female/42years/Teacher/Ondo State).

The first part of her narrative was though interesting, not without some challenges she faced, and keep facing from her in-laws.

...the question came, why would my husband marry an albino girl? I must have charmed him! Another will say: He is just too nice to have gotten married to such a person in midst of many women in the country, what a wicked world!!! The most painful of all the insults was the one my sister in-law threw at me. When I was pregnant, she said 'I pray you won't give birth to another albino, one is already too much for my brother to handle'. Anytime I remember these words, I feel dehumanized (Female/42years/Teacher/Ondo State).

Moods and responses swing from high-pitched tone to a faint quiet tone as Mrs. Ademulegun concluded her point. This had a serious impact on the faces of the single (not married) females in the focus group discussion as their faces became reddish. One of them wept profusely. I (the researcher) could not but end the session, and have it continued in the next meeting, which was scheduled fortnightly.

In another session of group discussion, the lady who previously wept (as described above) was full of life and I asked her if she would like to share some of her experiences with us, knowing quite well that she is a single parent. The disparity between male and female albinos in life chances and challenges are entrenched in the cultural and structural environment which distinguishes Africa as a patriarchal society, where gender inequality is evident. Drawing on Sewell's (1992) theory of structure, Ridgeway and Correll (2004) identified widely shared gender stereotypes (Eagly, Wood & Diekman 2000) as the "cultural rules or instructions" that are essential for enacting social structure. The gender system implicitly constructs interactional outcomes even in the face of other salient identities (Ridgeway 1997). In studies of gendered interaction in the workplace, Ridgeway (1997, 221) found that "men's traits are generally viewed as more valuable than women's, and men are diffusely judged as more

competent." These status expectations implicitly affect behaviour in a gendered way, resulting in gender inequality, which favours a male albino compared to the female counterparts.

The Stigma of Disability: Loved at night dispersed by the day

> ...It was during my final year in the secondary school, I became pregnant after being deceived by a man who promised my hand in marriage. After I became pregnant, he ran away from Ibadan to Lagos. During the relationship period, he would not allow me to know his family members by getting too close to them; he would tell me to stay at home, that he would be visiting me at home and in school. He would say it is because of the sun – 'I do not need to worry'. Later, I suspected, he was not comfortable with me especially during the day, but prefer taking me out to some of his close friends. The day I told him I was pregnant he became furious and told me he couldn't have been responsible. Same response when my mum went to inform his parents 'our son could not have been the one, we know his girlfriend'. Literally, it meant that it couldn't have been an albino. It all happened about six years ago. With my parents and extended family support, I am coping with my daughter (Female/36years/Unemployed/Ondo State).

This was a pathetic case. She vowed never to get involved in any sort or relationship; which simply means she may not be interested in getting married again. The apathy quite understood was also the case of many who have failed relationships in the past. To embark on a new one was either difficult or not to be again. A case of once bitten and not just the normal response of twice shy, but many times shy. Also taking the strong cultural beliefs into account, where women are not expected to make the first move towards sexual relationships or friendships, a lady emphasized that this also contributes to the delay in marriage of persons with albinism:

> .... culturally if a woman is found making the first move by telling a guy he is handsome, or in a simple question can we become friends? It is seen as a taboo and can be interpreted as an obvious sign of waywardness and ill-mannered. Therefore, when a man fails to approach me, I would never descend so low to give myself away cheaply. It is something not to be discussed ordinarily; talk-less of being an albino. I wonder what a non-albino man or boy would feel (Female/33years/Nurse/Lagos State).

Other buttresses further:

> In such a case, most especially for an albino who is a girl, she may be accused of being a witch if the boy is not an albino. Or it may be seen as bad omen or a topic for the town or community to discuss (Female/39years/ Artist/Osun State).

Associated narratives of PWA regarding stigma, divorce, late marriages and never married cases, not only increase the rate of discrimination but also violence as can be implied in the possibility of not having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences (Poortman 2007). Similar experiences are commonplace among young people with disabilities (Chappell 2015; Löfgren-Mårtenson 2004; McKenzie and Swartz 2011; Pinquart and Pfeiffer 2012) with the capacity, knowledge and understanding of their sexual rights, they report that various social and cultural barriers exist to their being able to achieve a fully sexual life (Potgieter and Khan 2005). Some young women with albinism reported that disability and stigma foster the willingness to accept a partner who may maltreat them, out of a desire to have a partner. This has also been traced to unreported cases of sexual abuse and violence of persons with disability (Chappell 2015). The study of Wazakili, Mpofu and Devlieger (2009) on the voices of young South Africans with physical disabilities shows that the need to be loved and accepted took precedence and hindered them from reporting issues of sex abuse and unsafe sex. Reported cases of low sexual self esteem among young people with disabilities, in which they felt unsure of their role as a sexual partner, have been noted by Potgieter and Khan (2005), while a number of studies have also revealed the anxiety persons with disabilities faced in disclosing their disability or aspects of their disability that affect sexuality to potential partners for fear of rejection (See Hilberink, Kruijver, Wiegerink, and Vliet Vlieland 2013; Cheng and Udry 2002). The stigma and misconceptions about the concepts of disability and sexuality of persons with albinism impact more, and negatively on young people with disabilities in Africa. Studies have reported that adolescents with disabilities feel socially isolated (Cheng and Udry 2002) and have low self-esteem and sexual self-esteem, especially girls with disabilities (Czapla and Otrębski 2014; Esmail, Darry, Walter and Knupp 2010; Hilberink et al. 2013; Rueda, Linton and Williams 2014; Maart and Jelsma 2010; McKenzie and Swartz 2011; Yousafzai, Edwards, D'Allesandro and Lindström 2005). Young persons with disabilities, particularly girls, are more likely to be bullied (Eisenberg, Gower, McMorris and Bucchianeri 2015). The sexuality of people with disabilities is something which ignites fear and anxiety among many. Psychosocial disability theorists, drawing on social psychoanalytic theory, argue that for many non-disabled people, people with disabilities come to represent the unwanted and disavowed aspects of our humanity, such as our vulnerability, our imperfections and notions of 'damage' (Marks 1999; Watermeyer 2013). Shakespeare (1994) refers to people with disabilities potentially being 'dustbins for disavowal' by non-disabled people, who position themselves as opposite to this. As Watermeyer (2006, 33–34) puts it,

> By constructing and regarding disabled people as broken, damaged, defective and dysfunctional, members of the broader nondisabled society are able to reaffirm and reinforce an identity of being the opposite of those unwanted characteristics.

Nevertheless, studies have indicated that adolescents with disabilities have the same concerns about sexuality, relationships and identity, often overlooked or ignored by adults, because of their disability (Chappell et. al. 2014; Löfgren-Mårtenson 2004; McKenzie and Swartz 2011; Pinquart and Pfeiffer 2012; Rohleder 2017). Thus WHO (2015) report clearly highlighted the dangers of stigma and unpleasurable sexual encounters as violating the right to sexual health which must be all inclusive. It describes sexual health in the following way:

> Sexual health today is widely understood as a state of physical, emotional, mental and social wellbeing in relation to sexuality. It encompasses not only certain aspects of reproductive health – such as being able to control one's fertility through access to contraception and abortion, and being free from sexually transmitted infections (STIs), sexual dysfunction and sequel related to sexual violence or female genital mutilation – but also, the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence (WHO 2015, 1).

Apart from the WHO (2015), inclusion of 'not having pleasurable sexual experiences' as an issue often not taken seriously in society, especially with less focus on persons with disabilities, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (United Nations 2006) clearly highlighted issues such as *physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments as barriers capable of hindering pleasurable sexual experiences* in the definition of disability:

> Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (United Nations 2006, 4).

Notwithstanding the fact that there is no unifying definition of disability or the constituent characteristics, impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions beyond sexuality and sexual experiences are evident in PWD's narratives and literature (See Delaney 2008; Ikuomola 2015; 2016; The First Post 2009; Thuku 2011; Wiete 2011)*, Disability* is nevertheless a dynamic, complex, and contested concept (Shakespeare 2015; WHO et al. 2011, Iriarte 2016). In the World Report on Disability (WHO & The World Bank 2011), based on the International Classification of Functioning (ICF), of disability and health (WHO and The World Bank 2011), disability is described in the following way:

Disability is the umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations and parti-cipation restrictions, referring to the negative aspects of the interaction between an individual (with a health condition) and that individual's contextual factors (environmental and personal factors) (WHO and The World Bank, 2011).

The strength of the ICF concept is in offering a common language to study the dynamic interaction between health condition, environmental factors and personal factors and therefore enabling to define what can improve the life situation of disabled people (Hollenweger 2014). It looks beyond the medical condition and includes the social dimension of a person (Eide et al. 2011).

In the same vein the study revealed some specific cultural emphasis among the accounts of albino women. In particular, female sexual chastity and high educational attainment featured as two key sources of social capital, in contexts where marriage is highly valued and power and control is vested in the male in the making of a marriage. Among all the women in the study sexual intimacy or motherhood before marriage was depicted as forbidden among the Igbo, while among the Yoruba majority said it is frowned at. However, there is a general consensus that all religions do not give room for children outside wedlock. Most especially the Igbo women, irrespective of their religious attachment, referred to the legacy of their culture where 'dowry' exchanges at marriage, are still practised. Aware that a woman 'loses face' and 'loses value' in dowry or monetary terms on marriage if considered 'unchaste'.

The ladies spoke of the practice of 'hymen reconstruction' emerging as a way of managing such implications of sexual experimentation before marriage. Another issue featuring among the study group, particularly for single-ladies cum women, who had mostly lived with families, was that societal perception and family restrictions create the pressure and fear towards involving oneself in any premarital relationship as well as avoiding non-marital pregnancy. The meaning as suggested is that a young woman with albinism becoming pregnant is a greater 'failure' and 'stigma' unto the family. Hence, albinos tend to be docile in relationships, as well as the general expectation that they should constantly uphold and maintain the moral standards in society when issues of sexual relations are concerned. By implication it is taken as 'double victimization' or in what McRobbie (2009) termed 'double entanglement' for a female PWA to get pregnant outside wedlock alongside their 'perceived predicament' i.e. poor health. Thus, societal emphasis on strict surveillance of PWA relationships is not only ignited, but further threatens their sexed and gendered body confidence in relationships omen (PWA) in marital union discussed their perceptions of the challenges of motherhood specifically in trying to balance a mothering role with earning a living, as well as challenges peculiar to their cultural and ethnic backgrounds (as observed among the Yoruba and Igbo in this studies). Cultur-

al pressures cited include stronger gender differentiation of roles, which place the responsibility for childrearing and handling of domestic chores solely on women. The outcomes of these pressures were noted to be stressful, resulting in loneliness and isolation associated with the harsh weather conditions. In Ondo state particularly, among the Christians and Muslims faithful, greater responsibility was considered much on mothers with regard to parenting; described as persisting irrespective of religious boundaries.

Going by the view of Ridgeway and Correll (2004), this brings to the fore that gendered beliefs are capable of acting as "cultural rules or instructions for enacting social structure of difference and inequality. In the findings from this study, hegemonic cultural beliefs about, disability, primed by automatic gender categorization set in motion as well as heightened cultural beliefs of the notion that women are expected to be communal and pleasant, only men should initiate sexual advances. The general implication of this is that it creates limitation and encourages institutionalization of gendered system that interactionally prohibits women's access to heterosexual agency and pleasure, privileging men's pleasure and confirming their higher status irrespective of common discriminatory typology or circumstances as the case in question (albinism). The above narratives go a long way in creating as well as, in the build-up of what psychologists refer to as withdrawal syndrome among people with albinism. It also defines late life in adult personality and personhood. The concepts of personhood are also inevitably shaped by a number of institutions, such as culture, religion, the media and the family. This situation according to Ferguson et al. (1992), tends to portray and equate persons with albinism (PWA) as persons with disability negatively. They noted, for example, that stories, be they fairy tales or movies, tend to portray the villain as associated with abnormality, be it physical, psychological, or mental; and sometimes the combination of two or more of these features.

Conclusion

Our concerns centre on potential assumptions embedded in statements about person with albinism seeking out objectifying environments. Without coupling these statements with an analysis of interpersonal dynamics and institutional arrangements of power as the cultural backdrop of such choices, we position the problem in isolation, unintentionally creating an expectation that objectifying environments are the inevitable and immutable default to economic distress. We encourage scholars to weave analyses of power and context into discussions of social class, uncover broader social and political issues, identify strategies to resist systems of objectifications, oppression, and ultimately, dismantle structures that constrain PWA choices.

Economic analogy falls short of completely capturing the cyclical processes, which maintain the objectification of PWA, and by so doing the exploitation of mostly women's bodies owing to rewards built into the institutional structure. Furthermore, we advocate for illuminating aspects of diversity that are rarely, if at all, examined in the sexual objectification literature. For example, how might perceive disability status connect with sexual objectification. Given that appearance standards are unattainable for the majority of PWA, there may be exacerbated effects of this impossibility combined with an observable disability. Related, it is possible that some PWA face experiences of asexualization rather than sexualization, because of stereotypes about sexualities with disabilities (e.g., inability to form or maintain sexual relationships, lack of sexual enjoyment, issues of infertility) (Olkin 2003). In terms of age, this study suggests that the aging process guides PWA out of the objectification limelight that is congruent with sexual objectification theory (Fredrickson and Robert, 1997). Building on previous research (e.g., McKinley 2006), researchers exploring longer-term effects from accumulated sexual objectification over the life span may reveal unexpected consequences, including strategies for resisting objectification. For instance, differential access to and possession of power create a patriarchal landscape where control and entitlement manifest in the cultural objectification of PWA bodies and general low self-esteem in Nigeria.

Acknowledgement

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*Izvan aseksualnosti: narativi o seksualnoj objektifikaciji
osoba s albinizmom u Nigeriji*

Često je u većini studija o seksualnosti naglašeno da se osobe sa hendikepom, a posebno žene, suočavaju više s iskustvima aseksualnosti nego seksualnosti, što je slično pretpostavci da je ekonomska beda uzročni faktor objektifikacije osoba sa hendikepom. To je nenamerno stvorilo utisak da su objektifikovane sredine neizbežne i nepromenjive, kao posledica ekonomskih poteškoća. To često nije slučaj u socio-kulturnom prostoru osoba s albinizmom (eng. PWA, persons with albinism) u južnoj Nigeriji, gde je njihovo prisustvo očigledno. Ova studija je ispitivala seksualnu objektifikaciju osoba s albinizmom u Nigeriji. Ustanovljeno je da u nekim životnim momentima osoba s albinizmom, posebno među zrelim ženama, objektifikacija ide uz rizike po mentalno zdravlje, kao što su sindrom povlačenja, izolacija i indolencija.

Ključne reči: objektifikacija, socio-kulturna očekivanja, pretpostavke, životni tok

*Au-delà de l'asexualisation: récits sur la chosification sexuelle des
personnes atteintes d'albinisme au Nigéria*

Dans la plupart des études sur la sexualité on souligne souvent trop que les personnes avec un handicap, et notamment les femmes, sont plus fréquemment confrontées à l'asexualisation qu'à la sexualisation; de même, l'hypothèse monolithique selon laquelle la misère économique serait un facteur de la chosification des personnes avec un handicap est erronée. Cela a non intentionnellement fait naître l'expectative que les milieux chosifiés sont la conséquence inévitable et invariable des difficultés économiques. Ce n'est souvent pas le cas

dans l'espace socio-culturel des personnes souffrant d'albinisme (angl. PWA, persons with albinism) au Nigéria du sud, où leur présence est évidente. Cette étude a examiné, comme un exemple d'écart, la chosification sexuelle des personnes souffrant d'albinisme au Nigéria. Il a été constaté qu'à certains moments du cours de la vie des personnes souffrant d'albinisme, et notamment chez les femmes, lors de la maturation et du vieillissement du corps féminin, la chosification est accompagnée de risques pour la santé mentale, comme le sont le symptôme du retrait, l'isolation et l'indolence.

Mots clés: objectification, socio-culturelle expectative, hypothèses, cours de la vie