

The Stars Must Shine: Nollywood Talent Scouts' Influence on Theatre Art Students' Body Image in Nigerian Universities

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Abstract

This study examined Nollywood talent scouts' influence on theatre arts students' body image in selected Nigerian universities. Specifically the study investigated scouts' intrigues on the dynamics of cosmetic usage, bodily and behavioural adjustments of male and female students. Using the Wengraf's (2004) qualitative research interviewing and observation, in the collection of data from a cross section of Theatre Art students over a four year period, the study revealed key narratives such as the '*the stars must shine*', and '*you need to be seen first before others*' as metaphorical language and concepts often used by scouts to motivate, initialise and engineer the several processes involved in students' bodily adjustments, dietary behaviour, and cosmetic use. These words were taken at first to mean the need to look good and neat, but only for them to be introduced to various potpourris of cosmetic products and drugs. The study concludes that the influence of Nollywood scouts and talent hunters creates a diversionary atmosphere for learning and vulnerable lifestyles for students.

Key words: *Bodily enhancements, behavioural adjustments, dietary behaviours, deviant lifestyles*

Introduction

The Nigerian film industry, also known as Nollywood, is Africa's most prevalent movie activity in both the number of productions and value, roughly producing between 1,000 and 1,500 movies annually. Nollywood is making its mark in the film business. According to Moudio (2013,p.1) in her article, "Nigeria's Film Industry: A Potential Gold Mine", "Nollywood, produces about 50 movies per week, second only to India's Bollywood, more than Hollywood in the United States". Although its revenues are not at par with Bollywood's and Hollywood's, Nollywood still generates an impressive \$590 million annually (Moudio, 2013: UNESCO, 2009). This in turn assists the Nigerian government in employment creation and poverty alleviation. Similarly its snowballing effect has been found impacting on many Nigerian youths craving admission into the universities to study theatre arts. The wakeup call to improve scriptwriting, cinematography, and film direction in the industry, is a factor in both students and many institutions establishing departments of theatre arts (Ibagere, 2015). For instance in the first indigenous university in Nigeria (University of Nigeria, Nsukka), popularly referred to as UNN, the establishment and approval of the Department of Theatre and Film Studies came to be officially at the 138th Senate meeting held on July 6, 1983. From that time onwards, the Department began to award a degree in

Dramatic Arts. It then operated as a Sub-Department under the Department of English till the year 2004 when it achieved a full departmental status.

Correspondingly student admission rose from 10 in 1983/84 to 95 in 1989/90 academic year to 220 in 2016. Going by the same trend, graduation figures rose from 3 in 1986/87 to an expected figure of 62 in the 2015/2016 academic year. The current population of postgraduate students is over forty. The need for professionalism, in the Nigerian film industry and the increasing demand of youths to study theatre arts are some of the reasons the wide spread establishments of the department of theatre and performing arts across universities in Nigeria. Many of these institutions and movie directors are striving to reintroduce professionalism and quality to Nollywood, in order to elevate the quality of the film business; attracting more audiences and increasing box office returns. The need to produce more and more celebrities and also television personalities can only be achieved through these programmes. The university space thus becomes a fertile ground not only to breed but also to hunt for talents by film and movie directors; and also charlatans and touts in the business (Ibagere, 2015).

The university environment and the film industry are often synonymous with the expression of beauty and fashion sense in terms of social life most especially among youths and specifically among theatre

art students. Theatre art students offer more glamour to universities where they are present, they are expected to look good and display some forms of razzmatazz while rehearsing with different costumes which also affect their everyday dressing and fashion sense on campus. They are easily identified in comparison to other students. The university environment as a terrain for student is mostly dominated by adolescents in their teens, semi-adults and adults, characterised by diverse exuberances, youthful culture and sub-culture, for which many students (most especially the newly admitted students) are left to express themselves freely for the first time in their lives. The time spent in university is widely described as a time to explore and be explored, thus the vulnerability of students to mischief makers cannot be overemphasised and becomes imminent in several ways other than the primary aim of studying. There are instances of students getting carried away with the social life on campus, impressing and expressing of self through bodily display of beauty and talent emerged. Gradual whiteness of the skin is one of the several ways dark skinned students showcase their beauty as well as experimenting with different foreign fashions. One of the fashion senses is the whitening of skin and gradual changes to the physical appearances.

Changing the body complexion through skin whitening is perceived as an important sub-cultural element in

constructing beauty worldwide, most especially in sub-Saharan Africa, where the culture of bleaching is erroneously associated with the construct of beauty (Li, Min, Belk, Kimura, & Bahl, 2008; Naij.com 2016; Yousif, Ahmed, Idris, Elmustafa, & Ahmed; 2014). Quite a number of dark male and female youths have been found using skin whitening creams for beauty sake and for the purpose of getting attention by being attractive (Naij.com, 2016). Skin lightening creams alter the chemical structure of the skin by inhibiting the synthesis of melanin and are regulated as drugs not cosmetics in many countries (Yetunde, 2010). There are a number of studies on the use of bleaching creams among students and African women living in sub-Saharan Africa (Obuekwe & Ochei, 2004; Yetunde, 2010; Yousif, Ahmed, Idris, Elmustafa, & Ahmed (2014). In Nigeria, Yetunde (2010) examined the use of skin lightening creams in similar manner as Yousif, *et al.* (2014), in Sudan. Both studies focused on the use of whitening creams, awareness and consequence from the epidemiological point of view. Obuekwe & Ochei (2004) not only limited their study on female students to a Nigerian university but were interested in the presence of cancerous chemicals such as glutathione, mercury, tropical corticosteroids and hydroquinone in their soaps and cosmetics. None of these studies interrogated other factors beyond students' self need for beauty and the retrospective examination of

students' complexion over the duration of studies on and off the campus. Similarly with the rising popularity of Nollywood, there are several researchers highlighting the revenue generated annually, the number of films produced, as well as the themes and storylines of Nigerian films (Ebewo, 2007; Haynes & Okome, 1998; Obayiuwana, 2011). However, there are less emphasis on the deviance created directly and indirectly by the film industry on students bodily image in Nigerian universities through talent hunt exercise in various forms of recruitment of young students (artists in the embryo) who are still studying.

Research methods

This paper draws information from a qualitative interviewing (in-depth semi-structured interviews and observations) among a cross section of 34 theatre art students purposively selected from a larger data set of 279 randomly selected theatre art students who took part in a previous study on 'The intersection of the (re)making of bodies and the (re)making of aesthetics and aspirations in Africa'. The participants' age ranged between 17 and 25years (Ikuomola, 2016). The study employed the grounded theory approach where research questions emerged from interviews (See Wengraf, 2004). Students were asked yearly to narrate their life experiences on and off the university environment in respect to their contacts with Nollywood scouts and talent hunters, the effect these significant others have

on their self esteem, body image, construction of beauty and their personality as theatre art students. While the interviews were being conducted, participants' complexion and Body Mass Index (BMI) were observed, and questions asked on their dietary behaviours, weight gain and weight loss, fears, worries and factors predisposing their body image consciousness as theatre art students. The Interviews were conducted in English language with the interjection of pidgin. It lasted between 40 and 60 minutes, per individual. The data analysis is purely descriptive as a result of the method used to obtain information (qualitative). 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.

Empirical findings and discussion

Theatre students' encounter with Nollywood personalities and associates on and off the campus was narrated as being facilitated by Nollywood scouts, who regularly attend practical rehearsal and performance sessions, and sometimes in conjunction with lecturers in grading performance exercises on campus. It is at this point that students are gradually monitored and first hand contacts are initiated and sometimes sealed with students. From which they are informed of specific talent hunt

exercises on and off campuses within and outside the geographical locations of their universities. These contacts create the avenue for talent hunters to express comments, criticism and critiques which are not only on rehearsals and performances on campus (often formal), but also on personal attributes of students which are discussed extensively outside the campus. In trying to mentor and assure students of their status first as theatre art students, and subsequently as future and potential Nollywood and TV stars (celebrities), stories are told, of celebrities that they have nurtured and groomed into stardom, and how they were able to achieve several feats in the movie industry. It is from these narratives that students self esteem, consciousness and construction of beauty are ignited. Thus the analysis of data was discussed under the major subthemes of Nollywood talent scouts' influence on theatre arts students' body image, scouts' intrigues on the dynamics of cosmetic usage, bodily and behavioural adjustments of students.

Nollywood talent scouts' influence on theatre arts students' body image

In most Nigerian universities the second semester is often a time social events are regularly held within the campus premises. It is an annual celebration where town and gown are freely mixed (The Nation, 2014). The media, talent hunters and Nollywood scouts catch in on these events, as students associations and unions on

campuses showcase their talents, brands, traditional attires and peculiarities of their cultures and academic programmes. In similar manner, private individuals and companies also key into this tradition to organise social programmes and create awareness of their goods and services. Unlike other departments on campus, the theatre department stands out, as social activities are not limited to a semester. Events are organised in both the first and second semesters within and outside the university environment. Shows are organised for assessments, travels to locations where movies are being shot and premiered for practical experiences to be garnered, so also do talent scouts' organised parallel shows, sponsor several programmes and awards' ceremonies with the motives of scouting for talents. Theatre art students narrated how scouts often parade their departments, and go after students to feature in movies, pageantry, advertorials and other entertainment and media related programmes outside the university. They capitalise on their inexperience to exploit their services with little or no remuneration simply because students are oftentimes overwhelmed by being selected and their association with established actors and actresses raise their profile and statuses on campus. Respondents were thus carried away with immediate gratification and talent hunters' slogans 'I will make you a star in no time' and 'the stars must shine

depending on your cooperation'. These are key narratives that kept reoccurring in the interview sessions explaining the some of the reasons for the crazy rush, attractions and completion for scouts, of which many are held spell bound. Respondents interestingly explained:

Since I came in contact with scouts on campus, I have been keeping to their advice, I get regular messages from them on how to carry myself on and of the campus, tips on how to look good always, on how to maintain certain standards as a theatre art student. Often I am reminded that I am a star in the making. I have been assured that I will meet big time movie producers, directors, actors and actresses and that I will get major roles and go places if I adhere to their advice (Fabian/Male/22years/Year three/UNIBEN).

Similarly Miss Sumbo said:

They keep reminding me that it was not by accident that I am studying theatre art, that the Nollywood is where it happens; that I should maintain a balance and a distinguishing appearance to be seen and shine always like the northern stars. That is

why I spend a lot of time and money to wear my make-up and appear gallant on and off the campus (Female/18years/Year one/LASU).

With the increase in age, and years on campus, the natural tendencies for students like every normal human to grow in height and size, and to experience some forms of physical alongside biological changes. These changes were discussed as important issues scouts idealised and sexualised in their requirements and presentation of the ideal body image (Attenborough, 2011) For skinny and very tall students, they were told to eat more and to perform exercises that will broaden their chests (especially for boys). And depending on height, girls were told to maintain a X and figure 8 shape. By implication some are pencilled down to either to either add or lose some weight, to achieve the needed specification of scouts depending on their interest at a particular time and available shows. According to Adesuwa (Female/22years/UNIBEN/) 'I have been meeting my targets by performing exercise and eating the necessary food to move from the X shape to a figure 8 shape' The 8 shape she explains carries her weight at the high hip, just under the waist, on the bottom, rather than the low hip/thigh area which is where the X shape used to carry. Kunle explained:

In my first year in school I was naïve, just like every other newly admitted student, but one thing that made me different was my height. I was a 6 footer and very slim. Naturally I am easily identified. As time went by in my second year after rehearsal, scouts demanded for my contacts, they started taking interest in me. It was at this time I got to know that I was so skinny. I was advised to eat more fatty foods and to engage in exercises that will broaden my chest so that I can participate in roles that will make me more frightened as a bouncer in movies that will require such roles (Male/19years/Year Two/DELSU).

This narrative was born out of a rehearsal and the role Mr. Kunle played in the drama exercise, titled the 'The king's only jewel' exhibited in the school theatre. In the drama he played the role of a security guard to the princess. Further discussion revealed that Mr. Kunle was lambasted by a scout who has been monitoring him in the last 12 months, without his knowledge. 'I was scolded and was told I was not bold enough in scaring suitors away from the princess in play'. Thus he had to succumb to the above advice, which

according to him has helped him, but not without its consequences. Kunle, in his third year on campus noted: 'Now I spend more on feeding, I eat a lot and often become so lazy to concentrate on regular academic and dramatic exercises. It is not only affecting my grades, it is also making my stay on campus very expensive'. Seeing theatre students engaging in early morning jogging, press-up and tummy tuck exercises trying to keep to shape at all cost, is not a self imposed decision. Yemi/Female/ 24years/ LASU) corroborated saying 'most especially for higher level students in their third and final year, we easily become worried about the routine recommendation by scouts lose weight'. For students whose bodies were not responding to exercises, narratives of how scouts gradually introduced them to different potpourri of herbal products, such as Chinese herbs, local gin (*Ogogoro*) slimming tea, and pills to either maintain a certain statistics or to reduce body mass (fat) generally. For Halimat and Abel, (two friends) exercises were not working for them, so in their third year they discovered that they were adding more weight and that interactions and contacts with scouts were gradually reducing, while the scouts they had regular contacts with in preceding years in school were not doing a follow-up on them. So they had to walk up to one of the scouts, to know what was really happening. Halimat explained how she became aware and had to comply with the advice given

by the scout in order to remain patronised:

I was told my weight was affecting my performances and that I was not as swift as I used to be as a fresher and a second year student. 'The more you grow out of shape, the more we reduce our engagement with you'. 'You just have to keep to the standard'. Though my class teachers have never for once mentioned that to me, the scout said that I should combine exercises with a Chinese herbal drug to enable me lose some weight and to make me smart, if I am to make the exhibition list for a pageant coming up in Port-Harcourt, the following semester. It became done on me that I have to comply (Female/25years/Year three/UNIBEN).

For Abel (Male/25years/Year three/UNIBEN) it was his protruding tummy that was discussed as not too good and that he was losing his six packed chest. The following conversation ensued between him and his scout.

Scout: Do you know you are one of my best catch on campus?
Abel: Yes Sir.

Scout: you have lost the magic diamond which is the appeal people want to see on stage. Your tummy is protruding, the double u and six pack shape has gone. This was what gave you the role on the advertorial if you could remember.

Abel: What do I do now?

Scout: Avoid fatty foods and alcohol. Drink local gin and whiskey, these will burn the fat.

Students' narratives show that scouts and talent hunters' concerns were mainly on their bodily appearance, height, complexion and weight at first before talents and abilities. For another (Janet), she was often reminded to compare herself with popular Nollywood actresses and do a self appraisal to see how beautiful they are, and how the industry in turn has continuously supported and made their career gloomy and juicy. It was in her second year she was approached by a scout and was told that the industry is all about being 'bright and beautiful':

Scouts often tell me that I have got the height and that I only need to be bright and look beautiful just like the poem says 'all things bright and beautiful, all things small and big but God made them all'...so it is a slogan, that constantly

motivates me and my colleagues to look our best on and off the campus
(Female/20years/Year two/LASU).

Akpos revealed that scouts are not interested in brilliance and intellectually sound students:

You don't need to be too brilliant or outstanding in your academic work, to be scouted. Nollywood scouts are not looking for first class materials. They believe they can make a star out of any boy or girl. It is not the university degree that makes the star, but scouts do. So appearance is what matters and I have been advised to put up a bright face all the time, because stars must shine. That is why I spend a lot keeping my side beards, do jerry curls on my hair in order to always be at my best and be appealing
(Male/20years/Year four/UNIBEN).

The unrealistic idea and unattainable ideal surrounding scouts' portrayal of the image of beauty (what beauty is, of what sells and of what is appealing), push a number students to the extra miles of doing what ordinarily they were not doing prior to gaining admission into the university and their contacts with Nollywood

scouts. Respondents failed to realise that technology through digital imaging techniques often creates deceptions about media portrayal of celebrities that are far from real. What is particularly troubling about the construction of the digitally altered ideal is that many youths as well as scouts who accept and compare themselves to certain characters cum images do not realise the amount of computer-aided tinkering occurring behind the scene (Queen Victoria Women's Centre Trust, 2008).

Over two third of the students (22 respondents) noted that scouts are very much interested in glamour rather than talents. Scouts were described as business men and women who are looking for what is attractive to sell. A male respondent noted:

I keep a good look, I carve my side beards, I imitate some popular American stars. It is all about show business and that is why it is called showbiz, the industry makes star out of ordinary people. Majority of the scouts will tell you 'appearance matters first, irrespective of talents'. Talents can be worked upon during rehearsals. Individuals' complexion, size and height are very important to scouts. Light skinned and tall ladies are often sorted after, just like tall handsome guys with baby face. Short students

are often at a disadvantage except for comic roles (Isah/Male/25years/Year four/DELSU).

On the contrary, Njedeka illustrated that talent as a requirement matters to a reasonable extent only if there are serious deficiencies in height. Describing her height as not one of the best scouts run after:

All I have is my complexion; I have been told it is my selling point. Thus I spend a lot to make my skin lighter. My deficiency in height is complemented by my skin. 'The light must shine no matter the situation'. If not my complexion I would have been scouted for roles in scary movies or be at the wrong side of advertorials (Njedeka/Female/22years/Year two/LASU).

Appearances and body image in general are crucial in understanding scouts' expectations (just like the media) as well as audiences' appeal, in the same manner in which it affects self esteem and behavioural adjustment to suit expectations. In this study respondents' self esteem is affected by scouts' definitions and redefinitions of expectations from

students' body image. Thus in Halimat and Abel's narratives, low self esteem created a scenario in which they had to give in to scouts' onerous expectations and dictates, in order to keep having shows on and off the campus. Studies have shown clearly that body image plays a lot of roles in the entertainment industry (Becker, Burwell, Herzog, Hamburg, & Gilman, 2002; Richins, 1991; Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson, & Kelly, 1986; Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn 1999). Thompson, *et al.* (1999) study on exacting beauty revealed that body image is central to youths' self definition, while the role of the media and significant others socialisation were highlighted as impinging on younger ones believe that appearance is an important basis for self-evaluation and for evaluation by others (Richins, 1991; Silverstein et al., 1986). Indeed, perceptions of appearance and self-worth are inextricably linked, such that perceived appearance consistently emerges as the strongest single predictor of self-esteem. Low self esteem alongside the stereotypical belief about beauty, handsomeness and what appeals in general brings about a subjective situation in which scouts advice and intrigues are easily taken without much objections. One of such intrigues is the introduction of cosmetic and other allied body enhancing beauty products to theatre art students, to make them attractive and sellable to the industry.

Scouts' intrigues on the dynamics of cosmetic usage

The film industry in Nigeria has seen a number of actors and actresses advertising several cosmetic products, while others have been accused as heavy users of cosmetic products that have altered their body complexion over time on attaining stardom. Names and pictures are displayed on websites showing old and current looks of Nollywood celebs that have one way or the other toned, brighten or lighten their skin (Naij.com, 2015; Nairaland, 2015; Viviangist.com; 2015). This was observed as an emerging trend that is also common among theatre art students. The act of skin toning, brightening, lightening, whitening and several other related names are all synonymously used in place of skin bleaching. It is a phenomenon that has been in the Nigerian society, as in many black nations and Africans in the Diaspora for decades. This has turned a huge business for cosmetic industry globally, though much literature on the subject has always been biased towards women as culprits. According to World Health Organisation, 77% of women in Nigeria use skin-lightening products (Naij.com, 2016). It is no longer an issue among females as it were, as quite a number of youths in tertiary institutions are engaging in the act (Britton, 2012; Cash, Dawson, Davis, & Bowen, 1989). In this study students have been discovered making use of several cosmetics in order to remain handsome and beautiful based on scouts intrigues and most especially

for female students who become more desperate for roles in media-magazines, TV, films, advertising, and music videos. There are scanty studies among students in the performing art departments showing how significant others such as scouts and managers motivate students' use of bleaching products for bodily enhancement. By so doing, in an industry where self worth is often based on appearance, and which present a powerful cultural ideal of beauty that is becoming increasingly unattainable (Clay, Vignoles, & Dittmar, 2005; Richins, 1991; Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson, & Kelly, 1986), advices and deceptions are taken most times without knowing the consequences. Similarly fraudsters and pretenders alike are equally aware of students' vulnerability and aggressiveness to rise quickly to stardom. For talent hunters, theatre art students are often a target as it is a known fact that they are always eager and sometimes desperate as youths to quickly get to the limelight, thus many become vulnerable not only to exploitation, but to sexual assaults and rape (Dailypost, 2016; Woman.ng, 2015). From field observations theatre act students' activities are not regulated. They regularly attend late night gigs and private shows outside the university environment to achieve their dreams. In their quest for quick fame, they become vulnerable to the dictates, exposure and manipulation of scouts to using beauty products.

As a first year student I was just natural, from a suburb in Anambra State, I was not used to make up. It all started when a scout told me at a night club to get the pimples and dark spots off my face, so she gave me a lotion and advised that I could as well apply it to the rest of my body. After about two to three weeks the spots vanished and people started commending me but not without telling me that I now look lighter than how I was as a newly admitted student (Njedeka/Female/22years/Year two/LASU).

While bleaching is seen more of a feminine idea, male talent hunters were described as also encouraging dark male students to tone their skin, however from toning some respondents were caught in the web (most especially those who are not in any way light in complexion). Chima narrated how he started toning from the idea sold to him first by a scout and secondly from colleagues in the department:

I was shown the pictures of musicians and celebrities whose skin have been moderately changed overtime. Mr. Philip told me I have to mix a particular gel with petroleum jelly I was

using then as a year one student. I used it for about three months and when I noticed I was sweating a lot, I had to stop for a while. After discussing the side effect with a senior colleague in her final year, she advised me to change to another gel which she described as very cool on her skin. This happened to be real and subsequently I got used to other types and mixtures of gel and cosmetics from other friends in the department (Male/24years/Year two/UNIBEN).

The narrative shows that apart from scouts' influence as primary sources of knowledge to the use of toning and bleaching creams, co-students (especially higher level students) also serve as secondary influences to the use and patronage of assorted cosmetics. The knowledge however can still be traced from the contacts of earlier scouts, thus a domino effect from scouts to higher level students, down to their juniors, and to new students. The circle is established. In observing the noticeable features of respondents five of the 34 respondents have become lighter over the four year period the study lasted. It was discovered that their knuckles and knees were much darker than other parts of their skin. They were also very reluctant to grant interviews when the weather is very

hot, thus they were given preferential attention. Other narratives revealed instances where students were advised to mix several potpourris of creams to target particular shades of fairness. Jude and Simiat illustrate their sojourn in the journey of cosmetic usage:

I was advised to use creams and ointments that will bring out the beauty in me. I have two scouts who very much particular about my look, one of them told me to combine lime and ginger, for my hair, while the other bought me three different creams that I should mix to smoothen and tan my skin. They are really nice; a bit expensive, though, but I am just cool with using them (Jude/Male/21years/Year four/DELSU).

Simiat:

After several complaints about my skin, my scout, who also acts as my manager told me I have to tone my skin a bit. He bought me a whole lot of creams in very small containers, which. I do mix to achieve specific type of shades of tone. At first I was reluctant but he told me that he also makes use of them, and that it was not a bleaching concoction. But I

discovered it was not only whitening my dark skin, but I was also losing hair. I complained, but he told me I was looking much radiant and ready for the exhibition role he got for me. After the event he introduced me to another sets of cream which was much better (Female/25years/Year four/LASU).

The need not to be left out by scouts, (as younger and newly admitted students are often more scouted for), creates a competitive situation whereby older students cling more to scouts' dictates. This has led to students becoming anorectic as well as making use of suppressing medications to quench hunger, in order to remain slim and smart:

Apart from competing to be seen by scouts, there is also the competition from younger students, who are fresh, young and more attractive to scouts. We are confronted with the challenge of looking good always. So when we are asked to use a particular make up, hairdo, sometimes sliming drugs to reduce weights, it becomes too difficult to resist because some of us are sponsoring ourselves and we just have to compete, using cosmetics, assorted creams and gel

that are well mixed
(Linda/Female/23years/Year four/UNIBEN).

must not dull yourself'
(Raymond/Male/25years/Year two/UNIBEN).

The sincerity about scouts informing students about the components of these creams was in doubt. A probe revealed that students often got to know about the chemical components of these creams only when the side effects started manifesting. Only for them to be trapped with the options of making enquiry about cosmetic products that have lesser side effect, thus they become more exposed to varieties of bleaching creams and related beauty products. One of the respondents noted in his statement that he was informed about the level of hydroquinone and mercury content in the cream recommended by his scout after it burnt her cheek:

I started using the creams recommended by a scout in my third year. It was so hot and harsh on my skin, I almost cooked my cheek. She only told me they contain some level of hydroquinone after the incidence. It was then I was told I did not mix it properly. It was meant to make me look lighter, but not with the intention of bleaching my skin. Whenever we get paid for shows, my scout will often tell me that we need to save some money for beauty products, 'you

'You must not dull yourself' as echoed by Raymond, literally means he should keep shining like the star he is made off. Apart from scouts getting roles for students in movies, they also engage in getting roles with advertisement companies and in modelling firms. For students who are scouted to participate in advertorials and modelling, the recommendation to make use of cosmetic and specifically lightening cream is higher than those for movies. This was discussed as very common and unavoidable:

I have had course to experiment with creams several times because the scouts after me often get me roles with advertisement firms and beauty product companies. They are often obsessed with fair and very light skin models. So I had to comply to their demands, because the pay is often mouth watering and less stressful unlike having several rehearsal schedules involved in doing a cast for a movie. The advantage however is that it gives one the opportunity for bigger scouts and better chances of getting good and bigger roles in the movie industry

(Shalewa/Female/22years
/Year four/LASU).

For five of the 34 students, (obviously bleaching) it was very glaring that they have graduated from toning their skin to some level of bleaching as compared to when they were in their first year. As expected, respondents often result to silence and a sense of guilt comes to play when discussing issues pertaining to bleaching, instead the use of cosmetics and creams was substituted for bleaching to garner a high level response. Cynthia said:

I started using cream as a second year student; scouts were willing to pay for my services, introducing me to actors and directors, in Lagos and Port-Harcourt, and Enugu. My look, height, slenderness, narrow nose, and wide eyes.... they say 'is uncommon', that I needed to add fairness to it to become a big time player in the industry. The same year I came in contact with a scout who got me a role in a not too popular movie, before then he handed me over to a beautician who told me I need to look lighter to make me look like someone who has just arrived from Europe or America, since the role has to do with a daughter of rich man returning

from studies overseas. Ever since, I have not stopped using the sets of creams given and recommended (Female/21years/Year three/DELSU).

One of the easiest ways theatre art students become vulnerable to scouts in manoeuvring how their appearances should be, is for them to be enticed with bogus promises such as 'there are bigger and better opportunities of becoming an active player in the industry through our services and advices'. Thus students engage in behaviours capable of altering their appearances and body image to suit scouts demands. Apart from the lower self esteem linked to alteration and construction of the self and body-image, eating disturbances prospectively predict increases in anxiety and depressive symptoms among youths (Harter, 1999; Stice & Bearman 2001). Awareness of scouts demands were linked to eating concerns (bulimic symptoms) and body dissatisfaction among older students in their third and fourth year and this has been attributed to the increasing discrepancy between how they look and how they would like to look (Irving, 1990). These perceptions triggers behaviours ranging from simple cosmetic usage, skipping of meals in order to control body fat and weight and hair losses; to complex bodily adjustments which involves the intake of drugs and food supplements, while few others go the extra mile in

applying harmful chemical products to achieve speedily acceptance from scouts. The effect of some of these cosmetics were observed in the final lap of this research on final year students, as many (over half of the respondents) have toned their skin, while five of them have obviously bleached in an attempt to be relevant and constantly showcase themselves as university celebs. The idea of showcasing the theatre art students' body as an art for patronage is seen as a market strategy employed by scouts simply as business men and women, with no other intention but to make profit out of them. In the Nigerian film industry which is one of the largest in world, scouts capitalise on this reality of the available markets and students vulnerability using the maxim which states that 'what appeals sells' (Becker *et al.*, 2002; Richins, 1991; Silverstein, et al., 1986) to exploit their agencies as students. Thus a number of students had to adjust to the demands and expectations from scouts and fellow students. This goes beyond appearance and talents to behavioural adjustments, secrecy, and competitiveness among students.

Behavioural adjustments, secrecy and competition

Exposure to unrealistic media images is one big contextual factor which explains and predicts individuals' perception of aesthetics and in turn behavioural adjustments towards one's body image. Many studies often lump and fail to disaggregate 'media

images' as concept in explaining and predicting behaviours towards bodily adjustment (Clay *et al.*, 2005; Fouts, & Burggraf, 2000; Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002; Halliwell, & Dittmar, 2004; Harrison, 2001). There are other chronic individual variables such as 'the influence of significant others' (Nollywood agents and celebrities) and 'self aspirations' that shape individuals behaviour in the (re)constructing of their body image. In this study, the media image was emphasised less by students as against the reoccurring narratives which showcase the influence Nollywood talent scouts have on students disposition towards the (re)making of aesthetics and aspirations. The influence scouts have on students' body image goes a long way in explaining the aura, arousal and implantation of celebrity status mentality on theatre arts' students. From several observations among theatre art students, it is very common in most universities where there is a Faculty of Art hosting a theatre or dramatic art programme to see the powerful influence of the media and media personalities acting upon the behavioural disposition of students. One of the distinguishing characteristics is the razzmatazz displayed by theatre art students. These features explain students' bodily and behavioural adjustments on campus. While boys engage in weight lifting to build up some muscles and other exercises to reduce belly fats, female students are constantly watching their weights, to make

clothes fit better on them. There were narratives of how fat and busty students make use of girdles to achieve a figure 8 shape to look smart and agile by compressing their upper/central body, and also to reduce and compress the ribs and chest bones in order to allow the buttocks to be more protruding. This was a practice among fat and fairly fat students, while artificial breasts and buttocks were used by skinny students. These narratives were echoed by female students in their third and fourth year.

At these levels we try to impress, we are no longer new to the manipulations of scouts, we know what they want and we are ready to give them what they want anytime. I was naïve for two years on campus not knowing what scouts actually wanted. My friends later told me they are not interested in scholars of theatre arts, but students with features and futures in the entertainment world. I had to get some artificial fittings for my boobs and buttocks; assorted bags which I put on these days with high heel shoes, sometimes crazy hair styles, because of my height and skinny frame to get the necessary attention

(Nichole/Female/23years/
Year four/UNIBEN).

For Simiat, the use of artificial buttocks is sometimes discomforting as it affects movement and heat up the body, thus she is left with the option of sleeping with a girdle all night continuously as well as making use of very strong body spray to avoid unpleasant body odour, emanating from the mixture of sweat and applied cosmetics. According to her she is known for her heavy spray which is a mark of her presence in the department. 'Once my spray is perceived they know I am around'. Theatre students are attention seekers; they have been found from their narratives to be easily identified through their behaviours on campus and also highly sorted after by scouts. By so doing they are very cautious of their movements, their makeup, hairdos, dressing styles on and off the campus. For students with altered skin, they wear heavy powder all the time to cover up, some wear apparels with long sleeves to cover stretch marks resulting probably from excessive use of bleaching creams and avoid hot weather condition and injury prone environments. Thus their lifestyles on campus are not only expensive, but also affect their behaviours:

We spend too much money on ourselves buying clothes, taking care of our skin, applying makeup and trying to be among the hottest students on campus and also to catch the attention of big time scouts. In

doing these we also apply our own craftiness the same way as the scouts (Jude/Male/21years/Year four/DELSU).

Apart from being crafty and smart in dressing to appeal, theatre art students were also very secretive in disseminating information about scouts to other students. This was discussed as some of the reasons why there are constant quarrelling and conflicts among theatre arts students. The statements below revealed how students keep information about talent hunts competitions and scouts' activities away from one another in order to reduce competition and avoid displacements:

Everyone wants to be a star and gain recognition first before the other. By so doing, everybody sees the other as a threat and opponent in competition. That is why information about talent hunts are kept secret from others especially when it is not publicised, in order for the competition to be favourable to the information bearer. When it comes to scouts and Nollywood opportunities secrecy is like an acceptable behaviour (Jumoke/Female/18years/Year two/ LASU).

We quarrel a lot, as a result of students' double

dealing with scouts. Imagine a friend going behind to negotiate with one's scout, that he or she will be better in a role which is being discussed and possibly take lesser amount for the role. Some colleagues even go behind castigating others. We have often witnessed cases of students fighting on campus because of scouts (Okoro/Male/19years/Year four/DELSU).

Running after scouts was interrogated and issues relating to female students dating scouts for money and roles in advertorials and fashion exhibition emanated. This was one of the ways female students maintain their expensive lifestyles in their quest to financially maintain a celebrity status on campus. Students have been found to be exploited and female students raped by scouts and managers in the same way upcoming and desperate actors and actresses looking for roles to play in the Nigerian movie industry (Dailypost, 2016; Woman.ng, 2015). Respondents concurred to the exploitative tendencies of scouts.

Theoretical analysis of findings

This study is anchored on the theory of Blumer's (1969) *Symbolic Interactionism*, which explains and explores how individuals use their capacity for agency to bring their feelings in line with what is expected

of them. Thus Interactionists fix their analytical attention on social conventions and norms that shape behavioural outcomes (Cahill 1995; Denzin 1984; Franks 2003; Hochschild 1990; Scheff 1988). In this study, feelings were captured and expressed in the areas of fashions, beauty, emotions and deviance from students and scouts' narratives. As Hochschild (1979) puts it, people can *work or be told to work on* their self and personality through their body image, actions and inactions, trying to create within themselves the proper response to a situation (scouts and talent hunters' dictates). It is in this regard Interactionists study the influence and constraints of individuals in different cultural environment as well as how people use their agency to navigate influences and constraints in society. Thus the concept of the self (through individual behaviours) and society are taken as two sides of the same coin, because behaviours are reflections of the dictates of significant others in any society. In this study the respondents (both the theatre art students and scouts) were found using their agency to navigate constraints. The dictates, needs and demands of scouts are spelt out, while the theatre art students were also willing to meet up and manoeuvre constraints regarding numerous expectations from scouts. Thus continuous interaction is established and sustained, which is the focal concerns of the Interactionists perspective. Scouts and talent hunters are found in the narratives encouraging

students to be innovative in fashion, dietary behaviours exercises among others to become marketable and then maintain identities that make them feel good, or at least better, about themselves, individually and collectively, with less emphasis on outcomes that can be described sociologically as deviance in nature. Similarly, respondents' narratives clearly depict the unequal power play existing in the ongoing interactions with scouts. Similarly the interactions between the two parties revealed how social inequality and emotions are embedded in the day to day realities (conventionally and unconventionally) on and off the campus environment.

Conclusion

This study is not in any way meant to generalise events around scouts, (talent hunters) and theatre students, however it has exposed some of the antics therein through narratives (interactions). From the Symbolic Interactionists' perspective this study shows clearly that through interactions, behaviours and agency are motivated and shaped. These have impacted very much on theatre art students' self-control, social control, and bear the traces of systemic disadvantage and power play in favour of Nollywood scouts and talent hunters. The implication of this study is enormous with regards to the vulnerability of theatre art students who are predisposed and easily influenced by the dictates of Nollywood talent scouts. Students'

narratives clearly reveal some of the intrigues Nollywood talent scouts embarked upon in capturing their attention, explaining beauty, and in the manipulation of their body image for easy entrance into the Nigerian movie industry. Scouts manipulations expose theatre art students to various 'beauty' enhancement products, dietary behaviours, drug use; and by so doing, diverse deviant behavioural adjustments and outcomes towards bodily enhancements are ignited. The consequences of these exposures are capable of creating a diversionary atmosphere for learning and expensive lifestyles for theatre art students. In conclusion this study recommends that proper monitoring mechanism should be place on campus to check the activities of scouts and talent hunters in academic disciplines that are geared towards the entertainment industry specifically in the theatre art departments and generally in the university community.

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