Portrayals of Socio-Structural Issues in Homosexuality by the Social Media in Nigeria: A Theoretical Discourse

By Ejimofor Raphael Opara, Kelechi Kenneth Osayi, Nwankwo, Ignatius Uche PhD & Oli, Nneka Perpetua PhD

Nnamdi Azikiwe University

Abstract- The anti-homosexual stance of the Nigerian government has provoked intense debate and threats from some parts of the West (especially the pro-homosexual parts). However, this campaign will remain a hoax if left at its current level without a deeper look at the socio-structural issues giving impetus to the growing homosexual community around the world. Thus, this paper examines the social and structural indicators of homosexuality in certain Nigeria educational institutions and the contra-cultural elements stemming from the social media. The single sex educational institutions and the unrestrained pluralization of the social media are implicit enablers of this social phenomenon. The social learning theory and the post-modernity theory aptly provide the theoretical framework for understanding the subject-matter. It argues that homosexuality, is socially learnt and a product of a post-modernizing society.

Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:

Portrayals of Socio-Structural Issues in Homosexuality by the Social Media in Nigeria: A Theoretical Discourse

Ejimofor Raphael Opara α, Kelechi Kenneth Osayi σ, Nwankwo, Ignatius Uche PhD ρ
& Oli, Nneka Perpetua PhD ω

Abstract- The anti-homosexual stance of the Nigerian government has provoked intense debate and threats from some parts of the West (especially the pro-homosexual parts). However, this campaign will remain a hoax if left at its current level without a deeper look at the socio-structural issues giving impetus to the growing homosexual community around the world. Thus, this paper examines the social and structural indicators of homosexuality in certain Nigeria educational institutions and the contra-cultural elements stemming from the social media. The single sex educational institutions and the unrestrained pluralization of the social media are implicit enablers of this social phenomenon. The social learning theory and the post-modernity theory aptly provide the theoretical framework for understanding the subject-matter. It argues that homosexuality, is socially learnt and a product of a post-modernizing society. It is therefore recommended among others, that the policies establishing single-sex education need to be re-visited and an improved regulation and re-designing of social media contents in the country.

Keywords: *socio-structural, homosexuality and social media.*

I. Introduction

The anti-homosexuality law passed by the Nigerian legislature has provoked intense debate and threats from some parts of the West (especially the pro-gay parts). The response of most African leaders to this intellectual battle has circled into shells of aspersion, which obviously may not be enough to clarify the scientific basis of the discourse to the "man on the street". The anti-gay law will remain a hoax if left at its current level (inhibiting homosexual activities) without incisive look at the social and structural context giving impetus to the budding homosexual community around the country. Cherng (2012) averred that scholars are yet to agree on the best way to identify homosexual individuals, particularly in large-scale surveys. Recognizing this ambiguity, scholars like Black (2000) define homosexuals based on sexual behavior history and co-residency with same-sex partners. Some researchers, however, have used definitions based on sexual orientation and attraction in attempting to identify homosexuals (Albelda et al. 2009; Russell and Joyner

2001). Ruse (1988 cited in Stein, 1999:105) defines a homosexual as, "a person whose erotic yearnings and fantasies are directed toward his/her own sex and whose activities are influenced by such yearnings." However, Homosexuality technically refers to the actual or implied sexual interaction between persons of same sex.

One may argue that there are certain benefits that encourage members of this growing homosexual community. For instance, the hunch holding sway within the cultural and religious circles in some African countries, argues that the involvement of certain members of the elitist class as both accomplices and financiers of the homosexual community in the country (Kukah, 2011); drawing strength from the pool of formidable support of their foreign western allies, who are propagating the biological rationale of being gay and have entwined it with the web of fundamental human right, makes the phenomenon appear normative. Irrespective of the biological underpins of the individual homosexual disposition, the human being is far beyond a mere biological entity driven by impulses; the impact of the socio-structural environment is immense and cannot be over emphasized. For example the views of the Greek philosopher Plato according to whom homosexual behavior did not occur in animals, re-enforces this claim (Stein, 1999).

Ruse (1988) and Murphy (1997) argued that despite objections to socio-biological theories, they are scientific and potentially helpful in understanding homosexuality. Ruse further argues that psychological, hormonal and socio-biological hypotheses may be complementary rather than in conflict with each other. Beyond the biological analysis that gives impetus to ones propensity of becoming homosexual, lies the very significant droplets of socially acceptable conditions for becoming a human being with diverse albeit distinct roles; which are more so justified by the very science of sex differentiation. The debate becomes interesting when agreeably we come to the realization that being a homosexual is not fundamentally a function of our biological impulses, but a conscious outcome of our seeming socio-structural susceptibility to negative idealism, engendered by adventurous and curious individuals who are constantly longing for the possibility

Author α σ ρ ω: e-mails: ejimoforopara@gmail.com, kelechi_osayi@yahoo.com, iunwnkwo@yahoo.com, nnekaoli@yahoo.com

of a new thing irrespective of the norms and values they violate.

This yearning gap is not explainable by the myriads of biological experiments, as captured by Wardell (1972:76) on the rigorous experiments by Dr. Kinsey of the Institute of Sex research, New York; "By the end of 1940 he had recorded more than 450 homosexual histories, enough to convince him that the psychologists were making matters worse by starting with the assumption that homosexuality was an inherited abnormality which could not be cured simply because it was inherent. Kinsey was convinced that there was absolutely no evidence of inheritance." John Locke in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* restated the importance of the experience of the senses over speculation and sets out the case that the human mind at birth is a complete, but receptive, blank slate (tabula rasa) upon which experience imprints knowledge (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). Locke argued that people acquire knowledge from the information about the objects in the world that our senses bring. People begin with simple ideas and then combine them into more complex ones. Sociologically, this presupposes the potency of the socialization process of imbuing the human being with cultural values that endears him to group members. This process ultimately thrives on the structural pillars of the society – family, education, economy, government and the mass media (Egbue & Edokobi, 2002). Thus, this paper presents a narrative of some socio-structural predictors of homosexuality, the complicity of the social media in entrenching same, and the need to adopt effective strategies in addressing homosexuality, which has become a major source of love-lost and cold war between the West and some developing countries of Africa, Nigeria especially, and a major cause of dissent among locals.

II. Single-Sex Schools and Homosexuality

According to Sullivan, Josh and Leonard (2012), the United Kingdom has a long history of single-sex education; they further noted that traditional British secondary schools were single-sex. This explains the presence of similar educational structures in most of their former colonies, Nigeria inclusive. Giving that traditional African society had distinct socialization patterns for boys and girls respectively; this was exclusively found in the "role-teaching", with appropriate role models co-existing in similar milieus. Role learning and structures for disseminating same, remains integral to the socialization process. Society's intention to intensify *role adaptation* through the formal education collectives represents the rationale for the establishment of single sex schools. As these individuals are prepared for their primary roles and responsibilities in the society

in a special kind of setting different from the ideal social milieu, the tendency to via into role conflict is imminent. The basic nature of life comes to play - contrast. Thus, homosexuality may be a perfect exemplar of this contrast emanating from an intensified *role adaptation.* Dale (1973 cited in Sullivan et al, 2011:137) asserted, "mixed-sex schooling was more 'natural' and provided protection against homosexuality". He presented evidence suggesting that boys and girls in mixed schools had more positive and friendly attitudes towards one another, and that as adults they were more likely to believe in the equality of the sexes and to have happier marriages than graduates of single-sex schools (Sullivan et al, 2011).

Ebing says in his most well known work *Psychopathia Sexualis* that same sex schooling is one of the ways to "create" a homosexual for just the reason that humans have a basic need for sexuality (Wally, 2007); if a young heterosexual boy is placed in a place where there are no women around to release his need for a sexual relationship than he will turn to those who are around him, other boys in the same predicament. Wally (2007) observed that these feelings of homosexual attraction (using that term loosely) are only defined by availability. In a single-sex school, homosexual feelings and attitudes might develop, but may not last as the students are injected into a heterosexual society. The problem with Wally's supposition stems from the increasing demand by homosexuals for recognition in the larger society, pointing to the structural deficiency of single-sex schools. The single-sex education remains a veritable accessory structure for the sensory process of becoming homosexual and results in the ultimate formation of the perception of the same (seeing oneself as homosexual).

Alvarez (2005:1) reveals a somewhat interesting experience as a young lad in a single sex school, he recounted;

I was at Oundle in the mid-40s and it was tough. There were cold baths every morning and the food was awful. As far as I can see, the point was to produce people to run the British empire: if you could survive five years at public school, there was nothing the Kalahari desert or Antarctica could throw at you. Sex was part of the culture of the school, but it was all pretty ingenuous. It wasn't a culture of gang rape; it was boys getting crushes on other boys. It was like a ghastly parody of courtship, more to do with adolescent yearning than lust. Imagine it: 650 adolescents with nothing on their mind but sex who had to try to sublimate it all into playing rugger.

Similar encounters abound with many young students in single-sex schools; this adolescent mischief grows into strong habits that subsequently shape their adult personality. The end result is the emergence of persons who are dislocated from the normative ways of

the society and daring to super-impose an alien way of life on the overall outlook of Society.

Some studies on sexuality and growing up show that when a child reaches the adolescent stage they may have romantic feeling to the opposite sex or the same sex even. However, Musaalo (2007), a psychologist, says that people will have a stronger attraction to people of the opposite sex. The issue of attraction to the same sex is not mandatory or scientifically proven as a fact. He adds saying that unlike poles will attract, and that has been proven whereas like poles will not. Furthermore he says that some of these practices in schools may come about due to peer pressure, when students stay together they learn from each other depending on the factors prevailing. The environment that we live in usually might influence the lifestyle that we choose to live. Musaalo (2007) also says that some students can be forced into such behavior, for instance when some students join a school in senior one they might encounter older students that are already involved in this kind of lifestyle; With the naivety at this age one can easily be influenced because they are seeking acceptance and can easily be oriented into these practices. What the issue might be is, as time passes children have become more widely exposed to this kind of lifestyle. This is somewhat a common occurrence in single-sex school. For girls, a close relationship may not seem too suspicious though, they can hold hands and hug each other for an extended time; share a bed without anyone necessarily raising eyebrows. However with the increased popularity of the trend, in single schools this has started to be questioned.

III. Homosexuality and the Social Media

The media is not only a source of information and entertainment; it also shows the social perspectives and behavior of society. Through television and social media, people learn social norms, social behavior, and how to interact with others. The media can also influence people, like their personal perceptions, views, and values. Therefore, media has a large influence on how people view others, situations, or events. Homosexuality is one such topic. It is talked about throughout society from developed to developing segments. Everyone has an opinion about homosexuals, their life style and equal rights. Some agree, some do not, and some could care less. How the news and social media interpret current events relating to homosexuality and the lifestyle has a significant influence on society and public opinion.

Homosexuality stands against most Societal values, beliefs, and is considered to be taboo among various cultures and subcultures (Reilly, 2012). Homosexuals and their lifestyle are faced with many challenges including discrimination and violence.

Society continues to struggle with the homosexual issue because of social values and is considered taboo in some cultures and subcultures. Something that is taboo is known to be a "sacred prohibition on certain things or acts", ("sociologyguide.com", 2012). For people with strong religious and cultural values, like Nigeria, homosexuality goes against social beliefs and is the reason why people are against homosexuality and do not accept this lifestyle. Researchers admit that, "sexuality is related to some of the most difficult social problem", (Tyler & Anderson, 2008:12). Despite this, homosexuality has moved closer to social acceptance. Steps are being taken by some developed societies (USA and some parts of Europe) against homophobia, gay bashing, and have created laws against sexual orientation discrimination. Some Celebrities in the United States of America keep "coming out" the closet and letting other people aware. For instance, news broadcaster Anderson Cooper and actress/comedian Rosie O'Donnell are famous and gay (Robinson, 2014). Western Societies are slowly accepting and tolerant of homosexuality. Social media has continued to shape and influence society and public perceptions. Through the proliferation of cyber activism for homosexual rights despite its rejection in the society some individuals have utilized the instrumentality of the social media to advocate social acceptance of homosexuality.

According to Nyirenda (2015), homosexuality takes an advanced stage on social media as some men on social media have taken up the issue by storm as mass romantic messages have been leveled in different facebook inboxes. Some individuals have taken to social media for the glorification of homosexuality with excessive publicity, and having done so, has been successful in promoting the homosexual lifestyle. Homosexuality has been hyped in the social media in a manner that presents absolutely no negative connotation, with only positive viewpoints that would encourage an undisputable acceptance (Butler, 2012). This act of deification involves heavy emphasis on positive aspects of a concept, while toning down or eliminating the negative traits of said concept altogether. This is exactly what has been done through the social media platform with regard to the topic of homosexuality.

Homosexuals in the media are portrayed as affluent or otherwise prominent individuals in order to elicit a positive perception from the audience, when in reality, this is not the case, (http://inplainsight. Nbcnews.Com/_news/2013/05/31/18581353- the -truth about-gays-and-money?Lite). Butler (2012) observed that the process of making the homosexual population seem "affluent" to the population is a technique that is tried and proven by social media. He further argued, that by believing someone is from a higher class background, we are more likely to admire them for who

they are, more so than someone of an impoverished or otherwise average background. As an example, he pointed to the normalized obsession with the lives of Hollywood celebrities. Thus, by glorifying homosexuals in a similar manner, they receive respect easily from a populace that actively seeks information from social media outlets.

The health afflictions associated with the homosexual lifestyle (beyond AIDS) are completely ignored. There are health risks that are "SPECIFIC" to this population, which are washed out to the fullest possible extent by the media, leading us to believe that homosexuals have a singular, clear intention of "love," and nothing more. In reality, of course, sex is a frequent but disregarded factor. As such, it presents many unique health risks involved in the required sexual acts (Butler, 2012). The social media has shown a promotion of homosexuality that is highly disproportionate to the actual homosexual population in the world. Homosexual television prevalence directly promotes homosexuality. Straight from the horse's mouth: "Among the 19% who reported that their feelings toward gay and lesbian people have become more favorable in the past 5 years, 34% cited 'seeing gay or lesbian characters on television' as a contributing factor," (Harris Interactive Firm, 2014). Glorification of homosexuality exists in the social media, ss a result they have led to the promotion of the homosexual lifestyle.

Isayev (2009) observed the online posts of 29 school teachers in Russia; he found "incriminating" evidence of homosexual advances, in his words, they are "disseminating the gay propaganda". For example, Isayev recently posted photos of an openly lesbian school teacher to his VKontakte, Russia's largest social media network page, publicizing her sexuality and the school where she worked. He compiled screen grabs of her likes on VK, drawing arrows to pop-culture items he believed were indicative of lesbianism. This clearly shows the pervasive role of the social media in modern societies, where influences (negative and positive) are rapidly exchanged. The arduous task of regulating what streams into the cyber space has become increasingly imperative for the sustenance of societal values and norms, as the social media has the potential to seamlessly overrun the popular culture with contra cultural elements that will generate disequilibrium in existing socio-structural arrangements.

IV. Theoretical Framework

Tripp (1975) expounds a social learning theory about the development of sexual orientation arguing that heterosexuality and homosexuality are the result of societal expectation: people are homosexual or heterosexual because they are taught to be that way. Grey evidence abounds on the mutual influencing that results in homosexuality amongst students of single-sex schools. Tripp argues that physical attractiveness is the most important determinant of sexual desirability, while social class and status are relatively unimportant. The single-sex schools are largely made up of young children in their formative years; here the quest to explore the terrain of adult life accompanies the discovery of a natural instinct for sexual satisfaction and the desirability of readily available medium.

This is further executed in the disaggregation of heterosexual roles in a homosexual environment, unlike in mixed schools or co-educational settings, where the ideal environment is available for what may be termed, "illicit" sexual activities - so much so because of the involvement of minors in what is exclusively reserved for adult life. The socio-structural evolution of the individual social actor begins with the identification of the primary group together with the values and mores of the group. The transition into other social structures comes with some level of re-socialization, mostly involving the unlearning and relearning of social patterns – positive or negative. Homosexuality represents, negative social [re] learning in the educational structure of society, especially within the single-sex schools. Posner (1992) credits Tripp with providing the clearest articulation of the social learning theory of sexual orientation. However, Hamer (1994) finds the theory implausible, and rejects it on numerous grounds, arguing that it is inconsistent with anthropological evidence and human evolutionary history, and fails to explain the existence of homosexuality.

Some authors, such as Lyotard (1984) and Baudrillard (1984) believe that modernity ended in the late 20th century and thus have defined a period subsequent to modernity, namely postmodernity. Lyotard (1984) and Baudrillard (1984) posited that postmodernity has gone through two relatively distinct phases the first beginning in the late 1940s and 1950s and ending with the Cold War (when analog media with limited bandwidth encouraged a few, authoritative media channels) and the second beginning at the end of the Cold War (marked by the spread of cable television and "new media" based on digital means of information dissemination and broadcast). The second phase of postmodernity according to Albrow (1996), is defined by "digitality" - the increasing power of personal and digital means of communication including fax machines, modems, cable and high speed internet, which has altered the socio-structural framework of society dramatically: digital production of information allows individuals to manipulate virtually every aspect of the media environment. This has brought conflict in entrenched value systems and led to the creation of new values; this dramatic twist of events has brought about a fundamental alteration in society's sexual orientation with homosexual adherents championing their course via the social media – enabled by digitality. The

proliferation of information through the social media, with little or no regulation creates a cozy ambience for the propagation of the homosexual agenda as evidence of homosexual chat sites abound together with a growing online Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community. Thus, as a major correlate, postmodernity represents the fluidity of social life, an unholy co-mingling of values, a rapid growth in contra-cultural elements and the gradual collapse of the ideal socialization process, with gender roles blurring seamlessly.

V. Conclusion/Recommendations

Attempts have been made to move a largely social malaise into the biological domain, albeit with little or no success recorded. It is important to note that the human, as a higher animal, is guided not just by instinct but a robust web of social expectations which must be met and sustained. Homosexuality may have been delisted from the list of psychological disorders, but it remains a social problem as it has led to the emergence of social misfits who are laden with socio-psychological concerns the society has decided to overlook. Social problems, such as this, are the outcome of a dysfunctional social structure. Single-sex schooling and the social media are socio-structural arrangements that seem to fan the ambers of this on-going predicament and thus, must be revisited. Society is not a static reality; however, it is necessary that the aspect of its evolution that revolves around social actors be placed under check.

The policies establishing single-sex education may have to be re-visited as it may be a veritable accessory structure for the learning process of becoming homosexual and the ultimate formation of the perception of the same. Emphasis must be placed on co-education, a setting that depicts the ideal social milieu where boys and girls, will not only learn their unique roles, but also have a grasped of their mutual co-existence. The social media and its contents must be domesticated to be in line with acceptable social standards. To achieve this, a social media regulation policy must be developed and implemented to ensure greater cyber security and monitoring. Sexuality education must be re-introduced in secondary schools and made an integral part of the curriculum. Prophylactic sensitization parleys must be organized by civil society organizations for secondary school students and their handlers, with special emphasis on single-sex schools. Corporate Nigeria must partner with the government to provide funding for the academia and civil society to build a socially acceptable content for the social media. Finally, the family as the most threatened social institution in the face of this emerging problem, must brace up to effectively monitor the activities of young children in other to detect asocial tendencies and nip them in the bud.

VI. Ethical Approval

Author A declares that he has no conflict of interest. Author B declares that he has no conflict of interest and author C declares that he has no conflict of interest. This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors. Neither does it contain any studies with animals performed by any of the authors nor any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

References Références Referencias

1. Albelda, R. Badgett, M.V. Alyssa, S and Gates, G.J. (2009) Poverty in the Lesbian, Gay, And Bisexual Community. The Williams Institute: California. http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wpcontent/uploads/Albelda-Badgett- Schneebaum-Gates-LGB Poverty-Report-March-2009.pdf
2. *Albrow, Martin (1996). The Global Age: State and Society beyond Modernity. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.* ISBN 0-8047-2870-4
3. Alvarez, A. (2005) "when I was at school ..." the Guardian, Wednesday 12 October, 2005, 01.08 BST. https://www.theguardian.com/education/ 2005 /oct/12/publicschools.schools
4. Anderson, M., & Taylor, H. (2008). *Sociology: Understanding a diverse society.* (4 ed.).
5. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth Corporation. Retrieved from http://books. google.com/ books ?id=UILcQZS6Bi4C&pg=PA20&lpg=PA20&dq=socological Baudrillard, J. (1984). *Simulations* New York: Semiotext(e)
6. Black, D. (2000) Demographics of the Gay and Lesbian Population in the United States: Evidence from Available Systematic Data Sources.‖ Demography37 (2): 139-54 *BMC Public Health* 2012, 12:259 http://www. biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/12/259
7. Cherng, Hua-Yu Sebastian (2012) "What are Gay and Lesbian Populations? Definitions, Stability over Time, and Implications of Different Conceptuali zations of Sexual Minority Status." An unpublished Mimeograph
8. Dale R. (1974) *Mixed or Single-sex School? Volume III*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
9. Egbue, N.G. & Edokobi, A.C. (2002) *Introduction to Sociology.* (Eds.). Oktek Publishers. Enugu, Nigeria
10. *Hamer, D. (1994) The Science of Desire: The Search for the Gay Gene and the Biology of Behavior. New York, New York: Simon & Schuster* ISBN 0-671-88724-6.
11. Herrnstein, R. J. and Murray, C.(1994) *Crime and the Bell Curve* Encyclopedia of Criminological Theory: SAGE Publications, Inc. City: Thousand Oaks Print ISBN: 9781412959186 Online ISBN: 9781412959193

12. Lyotard, J. (1984). *The Postmodern Condition: A report on knowledge. Manchester*. Manchester niversity Press

13. *Murphy, Timothy F. (1997) Gay Science: The Ethics of Sexual Orientation Research. New York: Columbia University Press.* ISBN 0-231-10849-4

14. Mussalo, R.K. (2007) Why are cases of homosexuality common in single schools? Dailly Monitor Newspaper, December, 3 2007

15. Nyinrenda, M. (2015) An investigation of factors associated with the health and well-being of HIV-infected or HIV-affected older people in rural South Africa

16. *Posner, Richard (1992). Sex and Reason. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.* ISBN 0-674-80279-9.

17. Reilly, M. (2012, July 8). Jan brewer asks supreme court to overturn ruling allowing benefits for same sex partners. *Huffington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/08/jan-brewer-supremecourt_n_1657805.html?utm_hp_ref=most popular

18. *Ruse, Michael (1988). Homosexuality: A Philosophical Inquiry. New York: Basil Blackwell.* ISBN 0 631 15275 X

19. *Stein, Edward (1999). The Mismeasure of Desire: The Science, Theory, and Ethics of Sexual Orientation. Berkeley: Oxford University Press.* ISBN 0-19-514244-6

20. Sullivan A, Joshi H and Leonard D. (2012) Single-sex and co-educational secondary schooling: what are the social and family outcomes, in the short and longer term? *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies 2012 Volume 3 Issue 1 Pp 137 - 156 ISSN 1757-9597*

21. *Tripp, C. Arthur (1975). The Homosexual Matrix. New York: McGraw Hill Book Company.* ISBN 0-07-065201-5

22. *Values.* (2012, June 8). Retrieved from http://www.sociologyguide.com/basicconcepts/Values.php

23. Wardell B. P. (1972) *What Causes Homosexuality?* Archives of Sexual Behavior New York: Harper & Row, 31(2): 155–156