

## TRANSACTIONAL SEX AND THE ‘ARISTO’ PHENOMENON IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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**Abstract:** ‘Aristocratic’ transactional relationships are widespread in Nigerian universities. Nigerian cultures positively sanction repressive sexual activities among single unmarried adolescents until the wedding night. Modernity has confronted this cultural prescription, as youths, particularly girls, engage in transactional exchange in different contexts. However, the literature on transactional sex in the ivory towers is not rich enough on client recruitment and management among female undergraduates in Nigeria. This study utilised in-depth interviews to collect data from 30 purposively selected female undergraduates. Findings show that the prostitution label is substituted for ‘runs-girls’, as a distinct social category. Clients are recruited on and off campus through mastery of routine activities of ‘aristocrats’ on campus, connection and referrals. The ‘aristos’ include wealthy postgraduate students, politicians, business men, and military personnel, among others. The sex work is undertaken on and off campus, in hotels or in the private residences of ‘runs-girls’. ‘Aristocratic’ transactional sex is sustained by erotic capital, including dexterous bed skills, such as sucking and romance. Luxury possessions, such as cars, BlackBerry phones and social security (job placement) after school life are the perceived derivable benefits of the erotic association. Provision of part-time jobs for vulnerable students could positively reduce transactional sex in ivory towers.

**Keywords:** aristocrats, transactional sex, erotic capital, Ivory tower, Nigeria

### Introduction

‘Runs’ is the act of exchanging ‘sought-after’ emotional needs, as collateral, with the social capital of *Aristo*. *Runs girls* are a distinct social category involved in transactional exchange with aristos. This relationship is complex but symbiotic in nature and contextually transactional. It may end abruptly if both parties do not see the need for continuity after the first date (payment after sexual acts) or it may extend into a social relationship. Modernity and the battle for survival have made adolescent girls’ devise many coping strategies. The *aristo* phenomenon, which we investigate, is widespread in Nigerian tertiary institutions. ‘Aristos’ are wealthy, married or unmarried men, with the wherewithal to meet the needs of ‘runs-girls’.

Studies have shown that, all over Africa, transactional sex, defined as the exchange of gifts or money for sex, is common among adolescents (Bledsoe, 1990; Castle and Konaté 1999). In Nigeria, sex commodification serves as quid pro quo among female undergraduates in Nigerian universities. Transactional sex in citadels of learning creates tensions in the

survival of the collective shared norm of the 'sanctity' of sex in the cultural milieu. As the hub of knowledge production, ivory towers are to chart a path for societal development and develop mechanisms for correcting social ills. The ontology of the transactional sexual relationship, its interpretation by the actors, as well as client recruitment and sustenance hold the key to our understanding of the structure of transactional sex in Nigerian universities.

In 2005, the Sero-prevalence rate among young people aged 20-24 was 4.7 per cent and 4.9 per cent among the age group 25-29 while the national rate was 4.4 per cent (Federal Ministry of Health 2006). These cohorts are sexually active and indulge in transactional sex. It is worrisome that, despite the possibility of contracting sexually transmitted infections, induced abortion, and the possibility of secondary infertility, the practice of transactional sex continues unabated in ivory towers. Young people who are forced through circumstance to have sex for money or 'survival sex' (Muir 1991; Preston-Whyte, Varga, Oosthuizen, Roberts, Blose 2000) are, likewise, exposed to greater risk (Haley, Roy, Leclerc, Boudreau, Boivin 2004). However, the same evidence presented by these authors tends to demonstrate more complex motivations for sex than merely money (Nobelius et al. 2010). However, an appreciative stance is a necessary condition for any true understanding of a phenomenon from the perspective of the actors. Hence, this study contributes to existing knowledge on transactional sex among university students by investigating clients' recruitment and sustenance. It also explains the rejection of 'prostitution' as a deviant label and its replacement by 'runs' among selected female students at the University of Ibadan.

## **Review of relevant literature**

The literature is rich in debate on transactional sex. Nwokocha (2007) asserts that sexuality and sexual behaviour are important issues that affect human activities and relationships. Accounting for the reasons behind transactional sex among young girls in sub-Saharan Africa, Poulin (2005) states that gender inequality exacerbates the poverty and vulnerability of women and girls, contributing to the spread of HIV. Studies show that African women and young girls, in particular, have sex for money in order to meet their basic needs (Maticka-Tyndale et al. 2005; Mufune 2003; Nzyuko et al. 1997). This argument is critical to understanding the sexual behaviour of young people in Africa. To Poulin (2005), poverty in sub-Saharan Africa is gendered, with women being poorer than their male counterparts.

Young people are often considered to be at particularly grave risk when struck with poverty. Evidence suggests that gift-giving has an insidious impact on the sexual behaviour and negotiation ability of girls, and, to a lesser degree, boys (Kaufman, Stavrou 2004). It may be argued that gift-giving is usually valued and expected in relationships in most societies. Research in the African region, however, tends to ignore the normalcy of this practice and the possibility that it is not always necessarily linked to sexual favours. Helle-Valle's (2004) interrogation of 'transactional sex' is instructive, providing insight into perceived differences in the conception of sexuality between the 'West' and 'Africa'. According to her:

Many Africanists with a 'Western' background, including myself, feel that there are significant differences between sexuality in 'the West' and in Africa. Perhaps it is not so much a question of African permissiveness, or people's preoccupation with it – we certainly find similar traits in certain social groups in 'the West.' The regional difference may be more a question of sexual

mores than sexual practice. Perhaps the most significant difference is the Western strictness about sex and motivations: romantic love and/or personal pleasure (physical and psychological) are the 'proper' motives for engaging in sex, while strategic, materially oriented uses of sexuality are strictly tabooed – being forcefully embodied in our image of 'the prostitute' (Helle-Valle 2004, 204-206).

In fact, Western civilisation is attributable to the erosion of culturally prescribed sexual constraints in most African societies by its characteristic permissiveness of sexual expressions (Williams 1985). By awarding positive sanctions for the sexual behaviour of its members, societies show how sexual issues are considered. For instance, Olutayo (1997) notes that adolescents in Africa were, in principle, expected to repress their sexual desires until marriage; virginity before marriage was rewarded and an incest taboo was created around premarital sex. However, the sexually expressive nature of contemporary youths continues to threaten this cultural expectation.

Among the Igbo in Nigeria, adolescent and young adult sexuality is more distant from biological and social reproduction today than it was in the past (Smith 2000). Nevertheless, restraint toward contraceptive use in this context is paradoxically rooted in social reproduction concerns. Thus, while sexual intimacy and romance are seen by young people in Igbo as a means of creating a desirable 'modern' identity, these concepts are simultaneously in competition with 'traditional' models of sexuality received from parents.

Examining the social meaning of monetary exchange in sexual encounters between young people in Malawi, Poulin (2005) reports a highly nuanced picture in which money transfers, seen as both symbolically meaningful and instrumental, take place in emotionally committed relationships. Furthermore, the sexual autonomy of young Malawian girls at different phases of their intimate relationships was unveiled. Spronk (2005, 273) provides a similar interpretation of relationships in urban Kenya. She comments on the receipt of gifts by young women in sexual relationships:

This should not be interpreted as material reciprocity, instead appreciation was symbolized materially. Since women learn that men are financial providers, notions regarding a loving and supportive boyfriend are partly defined by financial support.

Mass poverty within the youth cohort and subsequent adjustment activity have aggravated several adolescents' antisocial behaviour, particularly indiscriminate and clandestine social involvement. Female adolescents have to contend with the allurements of financial gratification and sexual overtures by relatively richer peers and adults. Consequently, poverty or the need to survive is the driving force and motivation behind the sexual activity of adolescent girls (Isiugo-Abanihe 1993).

Booyesen and Summerton (2002) observe that in South Africa, poverty increases the vulnerability of women to HIV infection by resulting, among other things, in unsafe sexual practices, often as a result of a lack of knowledge, a lack of access to means of protection, and an inability to negotiate condom use with sexual partners as a result of entrenched gender roles and power relations. In this respect, attention has been drawn to the 'sugar-daddy' syndrome, whereby schoolgirls enter into sexual relationships with older, wealthy men who can assist them with school-related expenses or the purchase of material goods (De Bruyn 1992; Gorgen et al. 1993; Isiugo-Abanihe 1993; Schoepf 1994). Gift-giving has become a

vital component in everyday relationships. It fuels everyday sexual relations between men and women (Castle and Konate 1999; Stavrou and Kaufman 2000; LeClerc-Madlala 2001 and Standing 1992). Hunter's (2002) analysis of "sugar daddy" relationships established the link between gifts and sex. He notes, however, that such relationships fall outside both local and Western definitions of "prostitution". Standing (1992) picks holes in the application of the concept of prostitution to the study of non-marital sexual relations in Africa.

The rising level of adolescent female sexual activity is also a result of the need to achieve or maintain an upscale lifestyle or for the longer-term objectives of establishing contacts with wealthy or prestigious people, and of obtaining assistance with finding a good job (Meekers and Calves 1997), some people use sex as a bargain for marriage or to prove their fecundity as a prelude or prerequisite for marriage (Isiugo-Abanihe 1993).

Indeed, as Nyanzi (2006) observes, the true meaning of exchange in sexual relationships is complex and depends on the social and cultural context within which it occurs. Luke and Kurtz's (2002) appraisal on cross-generational and transactional sexual relationships in sub-Saharan Africa shows that motivation for financial rewards is complex, ranging from economic survival to desire for status and possession. They also found that "extreme household poverty as a motivator of sexual activity was less often described" (p. 48). It is assumed that exchange is likely to be under-reported in the sub-Saharan African literature reviewed because of the stigma associated with exchange (Luke, Kurtz 2002). Gift-giving has become common and a symbol of a girl's worth, which, if not offered, would offend young women (Luke 2003). Other studies report that gift-giving in relationships is the norm, specifically for adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa (Ankomah 1992; Moore, Biddlecom, Zulu 2007; Nyanzi, Pool, Kinsman 2001).

From the above, it is evident that transactional sex may be seen as an offshoot of the expectations (which may be in cash or kind, material or non-material and other securities) for a meaningful relationship to be maintained. This linkage between sex and gifts is what Hunter (2002) sees as a central factor driving multiple-partnered sexual relationships. Transactional sex has a number of similarities to prostitution. In both cases, non-marital sexual relationships, often with multiple partners, are underscored by the giving of gifts or cash. Transactional sex, however, differs in important ways: participants are constructed as "girlfriends" and "boyfriends" and not "prostitutes" and "clients", and the exchange of gifts for sex is part of a broader set of obligations that might not involve a predetermined payment. Indeed, sex, like all embodied practices, is always simultaneously material and meaningful in complex ways. Hunter argues that transactional sex is sustained by three inseparable factors. The first is the privileged economic position of men, rooted in their access to the most lucrative segments of the formal and informal economy and resources, such as housing. These provide a material basis for transactional sex. A second factor is masculine discourses that place a high value on men having multiple sexual partners, instead of seeing these masculinities as demonstrating some kind of innate African "promiscuity," as some accounts on AIDS imply. Hunter (2002) argues that sexualities are unstable and are produced through men's and women's practical engagement with shifting economic, cultural and spatial conditions and relations. He argues that women approach transactional relations not as passive victims, but in order to access power and resources in ways that can both challenge and reproduce patriarchal structures. This is possible because, in Nigeria, men's control over productive resources is much greater than women's (Aderinto 2001).

Some economic analyses see nothing iniquitous in prostitution. According to the neoclassical economists, peoples' actions and decisions in all areas of life, including marriage, sex and love are scaled on market inspired cost-benefit calculations (Becker 1991). Sexual activities, such as prostitution are determined by commodification, rational, utility-maximizing individuals who conduct cost-benefit analyses in making decisions regarding their sexual choices (Posner 1992). In a similar vein, Reynolds (1986) presents an economic theory of prostitution where rational agents maximize their profit and utility (by supplying and demanding sex in the market) subject to constraints. In these perspectives, the decision on sexual choices and relationships is the outcome of economic logic, rational choices, and free-market mechanisms. Since it is merely economic logic that determines the individual's choices to buy or sell sex as a commodity, prostitution is seen as a "natural" outcome of various factors—that is, the various costs and benefits entailed in the supply and demand for sex (Van der Veen, 2001).

Industrialisation, de-industrialisation and migration have created acute gendered inequalities, producing an extremely vulnerable group of low paid or unemployed female migrants, the majority of whom live in informal settlements. The marginalisation of these women comes together with masculine discourses to fuel transactional sex, often for subsistence needs. In the township, different dynamics operate. Here, most of the large youth population is able to secure subsistence from their parents or guardians. In the urban spaces of the township, fashion is highly valued and young women invoke discourses of "rights" to justify their freedom of movement, thus facilitating relations with men that include sugar daddies. Typically, it is gifts of cash, or consumption goods, such as cellphones, that sustain these (Hunter 2002).

Anderson (1993) has countered the neoclassicals' rationalization of prostitution by criticizing the spread of the market into a terrain that, in her view, should remain untainted by commodification. She posits gift-giving as a superior alternative to commodification. For Anderson, prostitution is the classic example of how commodification debases a gift value and its giver, as it destroys the kind of reciprocity required to realize human sexuality as a shared good and the mutual recognition of each partner's needs (1993, 154). A prostitute sells her sexuality, which is embodied in her person, while the client's cash payment provides him with sexual pleasure without having to yield any power over himself to her and without any obligation to meet the needs of the prostitute. Radin (1996) explored what is wrong with the commodification of things that are so close to "personhood," such as the selling of sex in prostitution. She presents an argument why some things should just be "not for sale," owing to the transformation in meaning and value when such things are treated as commodities.

Ilesanmi and Lewis (1997) associate prostitution among students with negative changes in the economic systems from the 1980s. Some girls see commercial sex as a major instrument for overcoming poverty (Vickers 1991) both at the individual and the family levels. According to Olutayo (1997) and Nwokocha (2000), prostitution could be caused by broken homes, general assistance from patrons, sexual orientation in the family, unemployment, breakdown in spousal communication and dwindling traditional and sexual values. Before acquiring master status as a prostitute, the prospective prostitute undergoes an apprenticeship where the nitty-gritty of the job is inculcated. Subsequently, as reported by Nwokocha (2000), the 'initiate' vigorously scouts for clients, given the competitive nature

of the business. Getting clients can be very tasking; hence, the services of pimps become crucial in the early life of the initiate.

The consequences of transactional sex among female undergraduates are detrimental to the personal, moral, and health development of actors. There is ample evidence to suggest that the rates of HIV/AIDS infection are higher in urban areas and among young people aged 15-24 years. Thus, urban young people constitute a significant risk group (Adedimeji, Omololu and Odutolu 2007). As we will show later in this paper, the 'aristo' phenomenon operates within the context of social exchange obligations by parties and does not erode the possibility of multiple partners from the lady and the aristos. To the lady, keeping more than one 'Aristo' increases the chances of coping with exigencies in different contexts. The aristocrats dating female undergraduates have a social standing among their colleagues. Dating undergraduates is seen as a 'crude' form of security against sexually transmitted diseases/infections. The aristos see their selecting university girls as 'neater' than risking coital affinity with town prostitutes.

## Method

The research was conducted in the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo State. The University of Ibadan was founded in 1948. It is the first federal university in Nigeria. Of the eight undergraduate halls of residence in the university, two are designated for females while one is unisex. The study was carried out in these female halls. We adopted qualitative research in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of transactional sex in the ivory tower. A pilot study had indicated the existence of transactional sex. Information regarding the recruitment of 'aristo'<sup>1</sup> and the maintenance relationship was obtained from female undergraduates involved in transactional sexual relationships. The criterion for inclusion was involvement in transactional sex with the privileged class, also known as aristo. Participants were selected through a process of purposive or snowball technique. In all, 30 active 'runs-girls'<sup>2</sup> from the female undergraduate halls (Queen Idia Hall, Queen Elizabeth II Hall, and Obafemi Awolowo Hall) in the university were interviewed. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 28. Ten were sampled each from these halls through the snowball method. The respondents were reached through an undergraduate student who is an ally of some runs-girls. This familiarity allowed the researcher to assess the needed information. This follows Sarantakos (1998), who claims that researchers purposely choose subjects who, in their opinion and thinking, are relevant to the research topic.

The researcher employed a female field assistant to collect the data within 4 months. The research assistant was versatile with the operation of campus 'runs'. After the identification of each respondent, through the help of their close ally, in-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted with the respondents. The data were analysed using codes developed from

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<sup>1</sup> This refers to a social category of the privileged class who possess the sufficient material, social, political wherewithal to meet the needs of runs-girls.

<sup>2</sup> Female undergraduates involved in erotic association with aristocrats. This identity sets the undergraduates apart as a distinct social group from full-time prostitutes. They rely on the human capital of the aristocrats in the actualisation of their goals.

the raw data. The codes were collapsed into themes emphasised by respondents during the interviews. Additional interviews were conducted for member-checking and to fill the gaps in any missing data. The interviews were jotted down verbatim. This is because the respondents objected to recording their voices. They expressed fears that their voices could be easily identified if played and they might be sanctioned by the university authorities. Owing to this, the researcher repeated questions in order to get a correct transcript. This was done by asking the questions again. The interviews were conducted in the English language. The reproduced interview then went through peer debriefing to enhance accurate interpretation as well as boost the credibility of the study. The data were content analysed and reproduced verbatim in their areas of suitability to thematic discussion.

## Results

### *'Runs' or 'prostitution': rejection of a deviant label*

Respondents were unanimous in the rejection of the label, prostitution. However, they substituted prostitution with 'runs' and the actors, 'runs-girl'. 'Runs' is the redefinition of the act of transactional sex in ivory towers by negating prostitution seen as a negative label. Rather than seeing themselves as prostitutes, these female undergraduates categorized themselves as a distinct group from prostitutes. Runs-girls, as they call themselves, is conceived as a social group of educated, classy, choosy female undergraduates who rely on their erotic advantages to cope with economic, social, political and labour market strains. Their view is predicted on the notion that 'female runs' in the ivory tower is selective of clients, the privileged class whom they call 'aristo'. They do not see transactional sexual relationship as a lifelong career but as a part-time coping strategy and anticipate ceasing after graduation. They date high profile people and insist on condom use owing to their level of education on the health implications of unprotected sex. However, some reported that unprotected sex may be waived for better pay. In their eyes, prostitutes ply their trade on the street; they are not educated, not choosy, and cheap and take prostitution as a career. According to Plummer (1979), deviance or criminality is not objectively given; it is subjectively problematic. The labelling of deviants proceeds from negative labelling (prostitute), stigmatization (condemnation of the act), a new identity formed in response to negative labelling (runs-girl) and commitment to the new identity based on the available roles and relationships (insistence on the runs-girl identity as a social group). Labelling has important consequences on the labelled. It may affect the way they are perceived by the society and the way their clients treat them. Hence, the runs-girl identity was developed to counter societal rejection and condemnation of ladies engaged in prostitution.

Deviancy is a conferred status, and not an inherent property of behaviour. According to Becker (1963, 9), the impact of social reactions to certain types of behaviour or particular categories of people is crucial to explaining the criminalisation process:

Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labelling them as outsiders. From this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an 'offender'. The deviant is one to whom the label has been successfully applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label.

We, therefore, refer to female undergraduates involved in transactional sex as 'runs-girls' in the context of this paper.

*Transactional sex: pull factors*

Dating 'aristos' is influenced by a number of factors. Principal among these is economic insecurity and heightened vulnerability among female undergraduates. This insecurity may be a factor of family disorganization. Where there is little economic support from family members, dating the aristocrats may be a form of security. Traditional African families place a premium on morality, honour and character. Parents took time to bequeath the same to their children during their formative years. There were injunctions and a periodic denial of basic necessities for doing things that impinged on the family name. Economic exigency has obliterated this, as 'runs' among female undergraduates has become a coping strategy. Financially weak families enjoy remittances from this. Some 'runs girls' return home with expensive items, claiming that they were engaged in entrepreneurial activities in school. This is, often, not queried by parents owing to their economic vulnerability.

In this age of globalization, there is an increasing urge to possess global products. Some of these products, including BlackBerry phones, and I-Pods, among others, have made some undergraduates join the group of university runs-girls (RGs). For this category, dating an aristo is all they need to have comfort and show off on campus as 'big girls'<sup>3</sup>. They also, in the course of this exchange system are well connected.

The university environment provides an avenue for exploration and association with groups in which a student thinks her interest is best protected. Engaging in this transactional relationship cuts across social classes. Girls from rich homes are also involved in this transactional relationship. The drives are greed, and appetite for freedom and socials. Others are in it for sexual fulfilment. Aristos organize social outings for the girls and may even take them along when travelling within or outside the country. Without considering the health implications of this act, RGs also keep undergraduate males as boyfriends. These boyfriends benefit not only materially from the returns of 'aristocratic' relationships, but are also obligated to satisfy the RG with sex. This happens when the male is 'good in bed':

Ordinarily, one would not expect a student from a rich home to be involved in campus runs, because they have everything they want at their door step. But because of greed and desire to achieve more than others at all cost, they engage in campus 'runs' (Runs-girl/IDI/24 years/300 level).

However, a runs-girl from wealthy family may get into 'runs' for sexual pleasure. Most of the time, the notion is that sex is to be enjoyed. As a result, when sexual pleasure is not attained with the Aristo, they may have an undergraduate male who could function in that capacity. In return, he can access money and connections apart from sex.

I am from a rich home, my father is even a major, and my mother a nurse, but I'm involved in campus runs because of sexual satisfaction, although nothing goes for nothing, because sex is for enjoyment. I have a guy that I help financially, and on the long run he pays me back with sex (Runs-girl/IDI/24 years/ 200 level).

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<sup>3</sup> Code used to describe female students who are connected to an 'Aristo' and possess material and social connections that set them apart from others.



The digitalisation of transactional sex on university campuses in Nigeria has made possession of 'BlackBerry phones' a luxury. 'BB', as it is called, is a tool for connecting with clients and obtaining information from cohorts and pimps. Among university students, not having a BB is indicative of the socio-economic status. Those with it have a higher status. Possession of BB is a luxury on campuses and those who possess it have a social identity as 'big girls' or 'happening babes'. Through this device, agents or female students create picture albums for clients to choose the lady they want. An Aristo can then ask his runs-girl to get one of her friends for his friend. In doing this, she must get the taste of the prospective man. This may be in the areas of body type, complexion, height, sociability, and other erotic capital<sup>4</sup>. The prospective aristo makes his choice from the pictures on her BlackBerry phone. She would be called to meet them at a joint on or off campus. She can then be introduced by her friend to the Aristo. The experienced runs-girl influences others who might have benefited from their human capital connection in solving academic, financial and other problems.

An extract from an interview reads thus:

I'm involved in campus runs so that I can afford my bills and make myself comfortable and happy. This is because I am challenged when I see my friends wearing things that are highly expensive especially accessories. So for me to have support of others and have a sense of peer belonging, I have to join in campus runs (Runs-girl, IDI, 21 years, 200 level).

Apart from the money which girls get from their aristos, gifts are important drivers. A 23-year old respondent mentioned Blackberrys as some of the gifts they receive besides money. Identifying and meeting the needs of aristos may yield more benefits, as recounted by this respondent.

At times, when we meet some men that are not sexually active, the only thing we do is that we suck and kiss them. This will at least make them reach orgasm and pay us our money and even more at times and even give us gifts like Blackberry (Runs-girl/23 years/IDI).

#### *The ideal 'aristo'*

Not all men fall into the category of ideal aristocrats. RGs consider the socio-economic status of the aristo before dating. They may, however, withdraw should the person fall short of their requirements. They do this by refusing to answer the calls or by barring the incoming calls from a particular number. There are two types of runs. The first is purely formal, involving delivery of sexual services at an agreed sum of money on or off campus. The second type of relationship is carved out of the first contact. This happens if the Aristo is pleased with the delivery of sexual services when they first met. He may build this into a social relationship in which the runs-girl can be called upon when she is needed or for an outing. However, when this relationship develops, prices are no longer fixed for the services. The RG can even ask the Aristo to send her some money whenever she is broke. Some reject any prospective client if they are not sure he would be able to pay the desired bill.

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<sup>4</sup> See Hakim (2010) for details on Erotic Capital.

The way we package ourselves differs, and this determines how much we are paid. For me, I don't just meet any client because I want to achieve sexual pleasure; I usually weigh my clients and see what he would probably offer me (Runs-girl, 22 years, IDI).

Thus, an ideal aristo is one who makes RGs feel satisfied and secure materially, socially, emotionally and, to certain extent, politically. For others, investing in such relationship may guarantee them a job when they graduate. While some aristos may not be extravagant at spending, the relationship may still not be broken off for other anticipated future gains, such as employment. Above all, monetary consideration is an issue tied to aristo recruitment. To the runs-girls, an aristo who does not assist in relieving their economic burden is not worth the name. Such a person is dispensed with. His phone number is deleted or the business card thrown away after the first meeting. However, the aristo who 'treats' the runs-girl to ecstatic thrills is retained and sustained via diverse erotic skills.

The factors considered in establishing a lifelong heterosexual relationship are less important in a transactional aristocratic relationship. RGs could be in a relationship with anybody irrespective of religion and ethnicity. These two factors have, over the years, become important in defining social relationships in Nigeria. Fundamentally aristocratic transactional sex is not designed as a career by undergraduate female students. It is a major life phase and may be an adaptation to strain, a coping strategy and/or a social engagement. Each runs-girl measures the worth<sup>5</sup> of an aristo. The occupation or profession of the aristo is an important yardstick for consideration. The argument here is that the status of an aristo is connected with his position in the workplace and, to a large extent, with his connection within the society. For instance, those who work in oil companies hardly have time for social trips and are likely to pamper RGs more. Arranging social trips and paying bills may not be difficult for such a person. A respondent observed that:

I actually offer my services to anybody as long as they can pay my charges either during the day or in the night. But most times, I render my services to any formal high-profile person either lecturer, businessmen, politicians and even oil-workers. The economic status or the kind of business a person does will determine whether he can settle the bills or not (Runs-girl/IDI/300 level/24 years/).

In her own response, another respondent maintained that:

Level of wealth of your client is very important. The first thing I need is money and not connection, because some people are popular but they do not have money. How many rich men can someone know? Once we agree on the price, the scenario starts. Even some girls that perform very good on bed are given additional money by the Aristo daddies. Had it been they are not rich, how will they settle<sup>6</sup> us (Runs-Girl/IDI/200/23 years).

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<sup>5</sup> The Value of the Aristocrats is measured in terms of economic and political connections which could be of benefit to the RG.

<sup>6</sup> Informally used to mean payment for the services rendered.

### *Locating the aristocrats*

After an initial induction tutorial into 'runs' by the experienced runs girls, the new initiate relies on the existing structure or connections of the experienced RGs to get 'aristos'. Other strategies include hanging out at night, attending parties and positioning themselves where postgraduate students take their classes and/or recreate. This category of students includes professionals, corporate heads and personnel of organizations. It also includes politicians<sup>7</sup>, government functionaries, military personnel on promotional courses. Owing to the generational gap (in age and status) RGs coined names to refer to their clients to any third party. Such coinages have semblance with cultural roles. These include friend, uncle, daddy and, lately, 'aristo'. All these refer to the social status and roles expected of the person, which may literally mean succor-mates. A respondent said:

I started the business; I have been meeting my clients through a friend and some agents. Any time there is a deal, I can just be called upon to meet customers and afterwards we fix appointments either within the school area or outside the university premises (Runs-girl/IDI/24 years).

Another respondent also submitted thus:

I meet my clients through different means. One can meet a client anywhere in the faculty, most especially among the big master's students. Our clients could even be undergraduate students, especially the yahoo guys, or even among the so-called lecturers in the school environment. Although, I will say the truth that we meet better aristos in any clean and neat place, probably hotels (Runs-girl/IDI/23 years/200 level).

### *Time of operation*

Notwithstanding the definition of transactional sex by our respondents, the expressive nature of adolescent sexuality within Nigerian culture is still abhorred, despite modernity. Hence, the RGs schedule their time of operation to covert areas on and off campus. Runs are transacted and rendered on and off campus. Sexual services are rendered at any pre-arranged hotel, the personally furnished residence of the RGs located off campus, or at a secret place on campus or in clients' cars. Using private residences may be deliberate. Rendering sexual services in private apartments gives the RGs control over the transaction (feeling secure) and more money. It affords the RG the opportunity to show material deficiency in the apartment. This indirectly means that in no distant time the Aristo is expected to furnish such an apartment partially, if not fully. However, with better arrangements and the anticipated benefits from an outing, transactional sex could take place at any time of the day but preferably at night. A respondent opined thus:

I meet my clients at club, party, along the road or even in the lecture room. Any time I have a client, I usually take them to my private apartment (well furnished) off campus and hereby collect the money meant to be paid for the hotel room. Sometimes, when it is a big politician, we can use big hotels located in safe areas (Runs-girl/IDI/300 level/22 years).

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<sup>7</sup> This is a special category of aristo. Investigations revealed that the protocol office of government arranges girls to entertain government guests in the state. They are recruited through pimps.

### *Benefits in undergraduate prostitution*

Are there any benefits derivable through aristocratic runs among female undergraduates? The majority of our respondents answered in the positive. They see runs as an investment, whose dividends could be short term or long term. Some reported benefits include economic returns, contacts for future job placements, investment in business, status enhancement among peers, unlimited leisure, recreation and sexual satisfaction.

A respondent claimed that she uses the money made from runs to pay her school fees, buy drugs to replenish and ward off possible infections and train younger ones. This is as a result of economic inequality. She claimed to also spend it on her looks. This entails buying new clothing to stay attractive and enhance her erotic capital:

Most of the money I get from my clients are used to either pay for my school fees, help my younger ones or used to maintain myself, because in Aristo business one needs to always look good so as to look attractive (Erotic capital) (Runs-girl/IDI/24 years).

Not all runs-girls see money as ultimate in aristocratic relationships. Since 'runs' is not a career, the essence of dating influential people, such as politicians, may be to get future jobs. A businessman may set up a business outfit for the runs-girl while the lecturer may help her solve academic problems. Dating influential persons may be helpful in influencing a lucrative state and organization for the mandatory, one year National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) programme.

The type of connection I have with politician, lecturers, and military men cannot be purchased with money. At times, when I have problem, all I do is to make a call, depending on the nature of challenges. Most of the big girls that connect us to clients are called "big mama", because they feel like controllers because of their connection and level of influence (Runs-girl/IDI/23 years).

In Nigeria, where the level of youth unemployment is alarming, connections with highly placed persons may be a ticket to employment.

One of my client who happened to be a commissioner connected my senior sister to get a job at immigration even without any much stress, my sister is married (not even to the commissioner) (Runs-girl/IDI/23 years).

### *Challenges of 'runs'*

Despite its inherent benefits, female undergraduates who engage in campus 'runs' (prostitution) averred that there are risks in the business. Listed among the dangers are sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and poor academic performance. Others are the risks of having transactional sex with a total stranger, whose identity and life activities are not known. Availability whenever called upon is important in maintaining an aristo for a flourishing relationship. Hence, 'runs'-girls who have to leave school to meet their aristos risk poor academic performance. However, some of them reported using the connection already established with some lecturers to solve academic problems. This explains why some of them date their lecturers.

There is no time I don't go for runs, but it depends mainly on the amount and the calibre of people that take me out. I have once been out of school for 2 weeks when I went to Abuja.

In this case, I do miss classes and later when I come back I do copy note (Runs-girl/IDI/23 years/200 level).

Solving academic problems is what a respondent called 'lobbying' the lecturer. This may involve the purchase of gifts and recharge cards to 'bail' themselves out of the academic problem. A respondent said:

I read whenever I have the chance, mostly during exam period. I have missed series of test, but I have never missed exams. Sometimes I buy gift and recharge cards to my lecturers as a form of lobby whenever I want to bail myself out (Runs-girl/IDI/24 years/Idia Hall/400 level).

Other challenges encountered include gang rape mostly by strange clients. This is not usually part of the agreement. Physical violence from clients includes things such as being beaten, deceit and short or down-payment. Okafor and Duru (2010) note that, owing to the fact that most of female undergraduates move among unknown clients, they are easy tools in the hands of ritual killers and kidnappers. Further, when a woman accepts money for sex, she has conferred on the man the authority and power to decide what kind of sex is to happen. She would be expected to endure brutality, rape and other crimes against her behind closed doors.

One of our respondents claims that:

One of the greatest risks in this job is cheating; at times, we are cheated by our agents (pimps) or even by our clients by not paying the agreed amount. This usually result into argument and if one is unlucky to meet a wicked man, he can beat you up or set trap for such person (Runs girl, IDI, 200 level, 22 years).

Another area is the health implications of having unprotected sex. Although it is risky to have sex without a condom, runs-girl may risk unprotected sex for better pay. One of the respondent said she risked what she called 'naked' sex if the money is good and she may later use part of the money to undergo a post-sex medical check-up and to buy drugs to 'revitalise'. It is interesting to note that health can be subjected to a cost-benefit analysis. She also undertakes medical check-ups monthly.

I am always scared of having naked sex. Most times I use condom because one can never know a man that has HIV/AIDS. Although sometimes some men always want naked sex and in that case, they will have to pay triple than what is earlier bargained. Part of the money realized as a runs-girls are used in revitalizing the body, in which I go to the hospital once in a month to examine myself (Undergraduate Runs-girl/IDI/23 years).

## Discussion

Modernity has indeed created normative conflict in the social interpretation of sexuality expressions among the youth in Nigeria. The use of the euphemism, *runs* in aristocratic relationship neutralizes deprecating remarks, which equate exchange in this context to prostitution. In the traditional African setting, chastity was commonly valued and to show strong attachment to observance of it, wives who had been defiled before the night of their wedding were sent back to their parents with social stigma and community resentment. The

bride price paid was returned to the grooms' families. The families are stigmatized. Among the Yoruba, the defiled lady (who lost her virginity) was described as a 'broken pot' or 'basket'. This attitudinal reification was valued to ensure that sexual or coital affairs occur between societal-approved unions. 'Runs' is a school arrangement among girls who set out to create a distinct class for themselves through a network of relationships established with 'aristos'. Their material possession is an important tool for recruiting new members into the network.

As a social category, they exploit their erotic capital to build a social capital base, found in the *aristo*. While monetary compensation may be the immediate gain, aristocratic relationships provide sponsorship, job opportunities, material benefits, such as the purchase of Porsche cars, Blackberry phones, and apartment furnishings, and so forth. In other words, *runs-girls* may date aristos for immediate monetary returns but may extend this into a relationship owing to an impressive first date. While prices may be fixed on a first date, subsequent outings are devoid of this. This cannot be totally separated from the economic strain and unequal access to resources, which make girls more vulnerable. Studies have shown that African women and young girls, in particular, have sex for money in order to meet their basic needs (Nzyuko et al. 1997; Maticka-Tyndale et al. 2005; Mufune 2003).

The true meaning of exchange in sexual relationships is complex and depends on the social and cultural context within which it occurs (Nyanzi 2006). While gift-giving it has been argued by several scholars is normal and expected (see Poulin 2005; Nobelius et al. 2010), the aristocratic relationship investigated in this study is contextually transactional, for anticipated gains. These are monetary (short term) and other long-term benefits (academic security, job placement, setting up a business and so on). The choice of whom they establish a relationship with is informative: only a person who can meet their financial needs and boost their chances after school. Those who are not sure of long-term benefits stick to short-term benefits, which are monetary and material. This is because of the flexibility in the dating choices of an *aristo*. Our position is consistent with earlier studies, which found that the 'sugar-daddy' syndrome is a sexual relationship involving school girls who date older, wealthy men who can assist them with school-related expenses or purchase of material goods (De Bruyn 1992; Gorgen et al. 1993; Isiugo-Abanihe 1993).

Zelizer (2005) observes that there is an intertwined harmony between economic and personal-social relationships. He claims that money and love cannot be disentangled. Offering various coital services to aristos was security for consequent benefits. Female undergraduates exploit their erotic capital to their benefit. Erotic capital is as crucial as economic, cultural and social capital in understanding social and economic processes, social interaction and social mobility (Hakim 2010). This notion is important in analyzing erotic association between *runs-girls* and aristos. Engaging in runs harnesses the erotic capital to connect with the social capital of aristos. They combine beauty, sexual attractiveness, sociability, liveliness, social presentation and sexuality to bargain for academic 'security' among corrupt lecturers on campus and social security after school with aristos.

Our study has established the social economic status and the cultural context within which aristocratic transactional sex takes place. Hunter (2002) argues that transactional sex is sustained by the privileged economic position of men, rooted in their access to the most lucrative segments of the formal and informal economy as well as to resources, such as

housing. These inequalities provide a material basis for transactional sex. A second factor is masculine discourses that place a high value on men having multiple sexual partners. Instead of seeing these masculinities as demonstrating some kind of innate African “promiscuity,” as some accounts on AIDS imply, Hunter (2002) argues that sexualities are unstable and are produced through men’s and women’s practical engagement with shifting economic, cultural and spatial conditions and relations. He avers that women approach transactional relations not as passive victims, but in order to access power and resources in ways that can both challenge and reproduce patriarchal structures. This position is true for Nigeria because, according to Aderinto (2001), men’s control over productive resources is much greater than women’s.

*Runs-girls* may accept an offer of unprotected sex for better pay. This has serious health implications. The ages of most of our respondents also fall within the HIV/AIDS risk group. There is ample evidence to suggest that rates of infection are higher in urban areas and among young people aged 15-24 years (Adedimeji, Omololu and Odutolu 2007). Thornton (2009) observes that there is some rationality in being members of these networks in spite of the glaring risk of contracting diseases including HIV and spreading them among other partners.

## Conclusion

Transactional sex among female undergraduates in Nigeria is a social reality and is assuming a process of redefinition. The expressive Western sexual orientation has gained much ground with its effect on the moral consciousness of *runs-girls*. Doing ‘runs’ is to be ranked among the ‘high-class’ ladies on campus. It is not a career but a critical survival life investment strategy. This makes them reject the notion that their transactional sex is prostitution. To them, *runs*, as an erotic relationship, is sustained on a principle of reciprocity. Although, it could be said to be rewarding economically, emotionally, and politically, its effect on the values of the society and the health of the actors is acute.

The socio-economic characteristics of aristo clients show that policy makers, politicians and the business class are the aristos. This will make it difficult to implement a policy to control transactional sex in universities. Despite the reported benefits, an aristocratic sexual relationship is capable of endangering the lives of those involved. Risks include violence, rape, HIV/AIDS, and being used for money-making rituals. A panacea may be to establish part-time jobs for vulnerable students, institute entrepreneurial education as well as formulate and implement an institutional policy on transactional sex.

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