

# Body Shaming: Perspectivising Gender in Contemporary Discourses

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**Abstract:** Body shaming is one gender construct that is aimed at ascribing negative comments on individuals' body features. This has been considered from varying strands of study with apparent neglect to the typological and contextual indices of this act and its strategic construction in the media. Relying on the triangulation theoretical approach, the study adopted the pragmatic act theory complemented by polyphony, the theory of voice and intertextuality, and gender theories, to establish the nexus between body shaming and gender among Nigerian celebrities who are victims of body shaming. The study submits that typologically body shaming is enacted through same gender, other gender, and media construction within the contextual ambience of media trolling, conflict, relationship, family defence and reporting. From these findings it was submitted that body shaming act is instrumental to the proliferation of surgeries by women in order to fit into the "ideal" body structured engendered by the ideologies of (im)perfectionist ideology and is invariably salvaged through the advocatist ideology.

**Keywords:** gender, body shaming, context and ideology

## I. INTRODUCTION

Body shaming, another wave of psychological threat to the sanity of humanity, has taken a tremendous toll in the discourse of gender in contemporary times. After its appropriation into different scholarly contexts, it is evidently established that the society's construal of the human body has negatively impacted the views of many individuals' perception of self – a construct in the parlance of physiological identity. In other words, the society has parochially set out its own ideals for what and how the male and female's body should be structured, shaped and appreciated. This has, in the most disturbing fashion, dictated the valued positions of both genders towards who is dubbed beautiful and handsome. Not going too far, the practice of pageantry of the most beautiful in the world and other social exhibitions and their attendant criteria have stamped these artificial specifications of bodily "perfection" mostly among women. With the introduction and emergence of the (social) media, the situation has received a more debasing status, as companies and industries that are into fashion constantly promote this purported ideal body frames through adverts and mannequin's – all geared towards invoking and validating the consciousness of the perfect body, shape, skin-colour and size. Beyond its psychological import, it poses a deleterious standard that promises constant state of depression for individuals who do not meet this artificial physiognomy. While many scholars have mainly evaluated this apparent genderised discourse through the lenses of public health,

social sciences and feminist perspectives, a sufficient gendered purview from pragmatics and discourse analysis has not really concentration on gender and body shaming in the Nigerian context. This paper therefore examines the body shaming as integral discourse of gender and its intricate perspectives in contemporary Nigerian society.

## *Conceptualizing Gender in Contexts*

Gender is a social construct based on role ascription basically defined by the biases of human biological features. Although its definition is often controversial along the lines of this description, gender is mostly constructed along the lines of sexes but eminently transcends that to the incorporation of what the surrounding environment allows. Most often, it has strong cultural inflections. As a concept, gender has thus been conceived variously by researchers from variegated multidisciplinary positions. These reflect mainly in the answers forged out by the question of what gender actually means. Situating gender within the ambience of security studies, Luna, Van Der Haar and Hilhorst (2017) consider gender as a product of roles. In it, role definition, using the Nepalese women example, has more to do with the aftermath of conflict where the need for surviving redefines what role a male or woman perform. To them, warfare is particularly a veritable empowerment for women overtime (Arostegui, 2013; Buvinic, Dasgupta, Casabonne, & Verwimp, 2012; Grabska, 2013). From their view, the occurrence of conflict is a possible balancing of the gender differences. While this is not entirely untrue, the society in question and their ideology of gender has a lot more to do with role distribution. This is validated by the construal of gender roles by the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2008) where these roles are believed to be socially determined over time and space and are influenced by social, cultural, and environmental factors characterizing a certain society, community or historical period. Stilling defining gender with respect to roles, ILO has admitted to the different influencing factors that actually forge out what defines gender. Lee (2006) citing Foster (1999) defined gender from the prisms of the "doing gender" – an approach which states that gender is not something that men and women "have" but rather something that they "do". What men and women do, cannot be, according to some quarters, the sole determiner, rather, it is the society that determines what gender it is, probably based on attitudinal justification (Obasi, 2004). To say that gender is measured on the bases of what men and women do amounts to downplaying the place of sex in determining gender. In addition, According to Butler

(1990), sex itself is a social construct in discourse. Butler's views are countered by other scholars on different grounds. For instance, Wodak (1977b) contends that sex is used as a powerful categorization device in society. By this it means that the place of sex in the determination of gender cannot be completely eroded. This is because it is believed that children's gender identity develops around the biological sex label that has been assigned to them at birth. In this description, sex is the major signifier of a child's gender identity. To this study sex, the biological index occupies the heart of gender construction and thus remains the crux of all discriminatory activities along gendered lines. It is therefore argued that sex is a marked tool for the actualization of body shaming engendered by gender differences and society expectation.

## II. PROBLEMATIZING THE BODY SHAMING DISCOURSE IN LITERATURE

Body shaming, the negative appraisal of one's biological make-up, has received a considerable level of attention in the literature. While most studies admit to the act of body shaming being spread between both genders and as therefore, by implication, should not be perused from the genderised stance, the fact remains that studies on body image in men is limited when compared to the research on women (Pila, Brunet, Crocker, Kowalski, Sabiston, 2016; Striegel-Moore et al., 2009). This underscores the fact that body shaming, though largely aimed the female gender, is not primarily directed towards women and that makes it an issue of concern for studies like this which sought to unravel the contextual complexities and perspectives drawn on the body shaming construct. In the literature, body shaming has come under different nomenclature and descriptions. In their description, Duarte and Gouveia (2011:6) averred that body shaming is incurred from body image because the image represents a dimension of the self that can be easily assessed and scrutinized by others. Not only does this assessment emanate from others, it also informed the basis for individual's self-evaluation. It is natural that people get affected by the comments they get of their outlook and also measure themselves in line with such external judgments. Because it is societally instigated some scholars consider it as a function of ideology. One of those studies that acknowledge this proposition is Ramirez (n.d) in a paper titled "body shaming ideologies in women health magazine in the Philippines". Ramirez submitted that body shaming happens when someone is made to feel shame for his or her body image. Commonly critiqued in this category include, according to the author, whether or not one is overweight, pretty, handsome and some other image representations on social media that are set as standard body image. He thus examined this act in the advertisement on women health magazine. Despite his deep illustration, he failed to also acknowledge the apparent gender bias against women in the body shaming act. This definitely drives the ideology of most body fitness and health magazine, according to Ramirez. In response, most women now starve to

lose weight, even to the detriment of their body organs. Many societies have been investigated over the act of body shaming as mostly affecting women. In the Asian American women, for instance, Brady (2016:3) observed that unlike women of other racial groups, Asian American women are often exposed to unique racist and misogynist media representation and narrow gender expectations that can induce gender role strain and exacerbate body image satisfaction. Probing further, Elíasdóttir (2016) expresses his curiosity on where body shaming predicts poor physical health and whether it commands a gender disparity. His paper found that women are more likely to self-report as poor than men. From the finding, it is obvious that there are many stressors that were not covered as attention was mainly paid to the psychological implications, leaving out the big picture of the phenomenon as regards its representative construction on the media and its various typological dimensions.

### *Aim and objectives*

The paper examines body shaming from the prisms of gender biases and thus is aimed to be realised through three paramount objectives. These are:

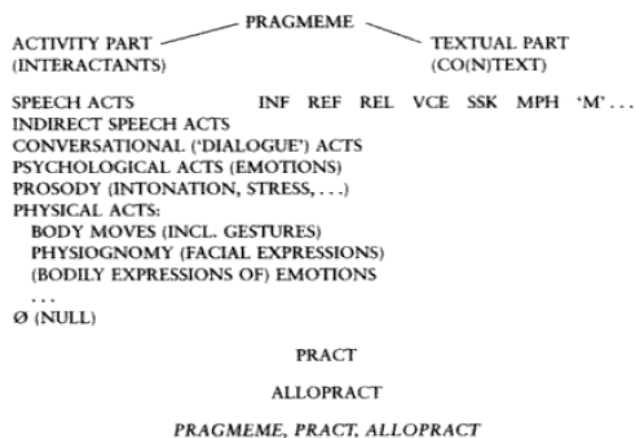
- a. to determine the typological contexts underlying the genderised body shaming acts
- b. to identify and substantiate the ideological, and pragmatic strategies together with the linguistic indices that underlie the contexts
- c. to evaluate the implication of these typologies on the immediate and wider society

## III. METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Data for this study was purposively gathered from online news reports on body shaming of Nigerian celebrities. Using the descriptive research design, eleven (11) reports were purposively selected from Legit.ng, *Daily Post*, Punchng.com, tsbnews.com, EveryEvery.com, LuciPost, and P.M News. Mostly evaluated for pragmatic interpretation are reports concerning actors and actresses, and other artists that were body shamed. The research adopts the triangulation theoretical approach that blends three theories for effective appraisal of the construction of gendered discourse of body shaming in the data. The trio includes pragmatic act theory (Jacob Mey, 2004) complemented by polyphony (Eddy Roulet, 1996) and Caldas-Coulthard and van Leeuwen's (2002) notion of gendered discourse.

Mey's (2004) pragmatic act theory, first published in 1993, opens linguists to the "use of language in various unconventional ways, as long as we know as language users, what we are doing" (Mey, 2004: 207). In concise terms, pragmatic acts theory has to do with how language users perform using language: what they do with language and how they do it. It comes to rescue the dilemma occasioned by semantic clash – basically clashes ignited by the absence of context of language use. The theory itself is an upgrade of the

speech act theory by J.L Austin (1962) which was over-reliant on speech to the exclusion of extralinguistic realities. Essentially, pragmatic acts are the resources used by online news reporters to show how celebrities are body shamed, drawing on various contextual affordances. The pragmatic acts theoretical model, also called *pragmeme* (Mey, 2004) graphitizes this construction which this study will appropriately genderise in the following diagram.



The above diagram lays out the *pragmemic design*. There are two parts to the deployment of the pragmatic act theory (PAT) that are responsible for the holistic construction of meaning: the activity part and the textual parts. While the former presents the user of language, the choices he/she has in order to effectively communicate, the latter part is concerned with resources from the text which encompass speech act, indirect speech act, conversational or dialogue act, psychological act, prosody, body moves, physiognomy and emotions. These together with the attendant contexts of the text are deployed in activating the discourse issue in question using such resources as INF (inferencing), REF (references), REL (relevance), VCE (voice), SSK (shared situational knowledge, MPH (metaphor) and M (metapragmatic joker). In their functional textual design, these features connected to the appropriate activity part, synergise to offer the interpretation of communicative choices of the body shaming reports on celebrities.

On the part of the complementary theory to the pragmatic act adopted in this study – polyphony – the place of the intertextual voicing in the construction of body shaming reports on and of celebrities in Nigeria is established. As concept that originated from Bakhtin’s construal of discourse called dialogism, polyphony is semanticised in four main differing notions:

- a. the interplay between socio-ideological languages in discourse and society
- b. any discourse that connects sundry dialogical threads to existing discourses of similar type and theme
- c. that discourses, even the monologic are construed as lying between preceding texts and anticipated responses.

- d. Ultimately, the discourses of others take a prominent place in the discourses of a speaker.

In the interpretation of the body shaming texts it is already expected that the society’s voice which could be multilayered is conveyed by the reports so that the ideological information that one needs to properly situate the menace among Nigerian celebrities would be effectively culled. Readily available resources that typify these voicing include presupposition, direct and indirect speech where different voices are inherently deciphered in a monologic text, hence, there is, in one text, the speaker and the enunciator (Ducrot, 1984).

The third theory that makes up the triangulation emerged from the work of Caldas-Coulthard and van Leeuwen’s (1984) entitled “Stunning, Shimmering, Iridescent: toys as the representation of gendered social actors. This concept is hinged on children’s ideology in toys’ preference with respect to their perceived. As observed in the movie directed by Alan Berliner, toys were constructed as social actors through their complexion in terms of their design, colour schemes, movement and other features. It is argued that the implication of these designs on children’s perceptions, who see these toy movies, influences the objectification of humans according to gender. This conceptualization is bolstered by Hall’s (1997) definition of representation that objects, people events in the world do not have in themselves any fixed, final or true meaning, and that it is humans that ascribe meaning to them meanings according to cultural and societal influences. Toys, in the description of Hall (1997) represent the signification of the society in terms of roles (power relation), technologies (tools and instruments) and identities and practices. To Roland Bathe, toys are microcosm of the adult world. By implication, body shaming is deemed to be the objectification and signification of the female body in the measuring yardsticks what the technological world (media) have amplified to be the ideal body. If celebrities are not exempted from these irrational framings, how much more then, would the plight of the commoner be?

This preceding construal of toy is relevant to the framing of human biological and physiological make up that brought about the body shaming conundrum in the Nigerian society. Owing to this insight, this study will be drawing insight from these conceptual approaches to demystify the reports on body shaming and their pragmatic implication for gendered discourse.

#### IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Three principal typological dimensions have been found to be drawn on the discourse of gendered body shaming in contemporary Nigerian gendered discourse space. They are: same gender body shaming (SGBS), other gender body shaming (OGBS) and media constructed body shaming (MCBS). These body shaming types are steeped in four contexts, namely, context of media attacks, context of relationship (sexual), context of family (defence), context of conflict and context of reporting. Ultimately, these contextual

indices are ingrained in two ideologies: advocatist and (im)perfectionist, respectively. As means of concretising the body shaming goal, three pragmatic strategies were found to permeate the reports. These include: objectification of body parts, graphicization of emotional appeal and de-amplification of negative comments, underlined by the material, mental, and relational processes. These are exhaustively discussed in turn.

#### *Body shaming types and contexts in contemporary Nigerian gendered discourses*

Identified in the gendered discourses represented in the reports considered for this study are three types of body shaming: same gender, other gender and media constructed body shaming, which are consequently constrained by the contexts of media attacks, context of relationship (sexual), conflict of conflict and context of family (defence). The following section discusses as well as substantiates these body shaming types and their constraining contexts.

#### *SGBS in the contexts of media trolling, conflict, and family defence*

Same gender body shaming (SGBS, *hereafter*), on one hand describes body shaming that ensues between individuals of the same sex. This involves female to female or male to male negative criticism of human biological features. Obviously, the battlefield for this body shaming conundrum remains the media, which is invariably the altar of celebrities' news and events. As a result, most attacks are recorded there. In the context of the media attacks, the SGBS plays out basically from fans and fellow celebrities who hurl insensitive criticism on the actors concerned over that body frames. Significantly, the reports are replete with manifest pragmatic acts that help foreground the pragmatic implication of the attacks in the reports. The immediately following examples validate women to women SGBS.

#### *Excerpt 1:*



DailyPost, June 19, 2021

#### *Excerpt 2: #BBNaija: Angel's mother reacts to Maria, Nini and Peace body-shaming her daughter,*

Angel's mother, Titi has reacted to Maria, Nini and Peace saying that her daughter has the "worst, dirtiest and nastiest vagina" in the house. We reported earlier that the gossip came up after the female housemates were granted access to the executive lounge. Titi who reacted to this, stated that it's a shame that "so much hate" is coming from women against her 21-year-old daughter. She added that she will always be there for her daughter even when the whole world is against her. Too much hate coming from women on a 21years old girl what a shame, to all the aunties hating how market nah cruise we dey cruise don't take it too personal @theangeljbsmith even if the whole world is against you I promise to always stand by you ([tsbnews.com](https://www.tsbnews.com), August 27, 2021)

Same gender body shaming is constructed in both excerpt 1 & 2 within the ambience of conflict and media trolling. In the first excerpt, two Nigerian female celebrities who featured in the renowned reality show called Big Brother Nigerian were reported to have engaged in a body shaming exchange in the context of media trolling. With reference to a tweet from Wathoni, one of the social actors involved in the trolling, it was implicaturally suggested that she had been body shamed with the shamers targeting her armpits. It thus appeared as a response to this act, unfortunately, she directed the troll to a fellow housemate named, Dorathy who is reputed for possessing huge breast. From the linguistic context, it is evident that Wathoni did not overtly reference Dorathy whose name was not mentioned. Rather, she banked on the SSK and the metaphorisation of the "balloon" concept to trigger the body shaming of the big breast that her trolling target possesses. Ironically, in her opening proposition she had lightly expressed shock at the body shaming act directed at her in the expression "totally lost me at body shaming". Then she went ahead to add "the balloons were found shaking". The proposition content of her tweet reveals that Dorathy wasn't the body shamer but clear it plausibly emanated from fans. Rather than address that neutrally, she was drawing attention to another house mate whom she felt should be "body shamed" instead of her. This shows that body shaming is a weapon of war for ladies and this is unconsciously registered as a practice for getting one another in the entertainment industry.

The second excerpt also demonstrates SGBS where the same gender was seen involved in the act of body shaming. In it, the mother of the victim, Titi is seen, responding to the body shaming act on her daughter by two of the daughter's co-house mates. This is where the family defence context is established. The report documents this shaming act in the proposition "worst, dirtiest and nastiest vagina" against Angel, a lady like them. It is apposite to mention that body shaming is driven by jealousy among women and it is intended to stir negative emotions on the target. In her personal evaluation, Titi lamented that "so much hate" is coming from women against her 21-year-old daughter". This structured woman to woman body shaming act is barely

recognised in the literature of gender and body shaming. Most often, gendered discourses are tied to men against women. But this study has disproved this reality.

#### *OGBS in the contexts of family (defence) and media trolling*

The other gender typological dimension of body shaming deals with instances where the act of body shaming emanates from the opposite sex. It is a female to male as well as male to female enterprise. In its composition, the OGBS is orchestrated by the opposite sexes. This genderised body shaming act is hinged on the contexts of family defence and media trolling. While these two contextual manifestations are inseparable in this study, families whose members suffer body shaming come swiftly to defend them especially on designated media handles. Instances are presented in the following excerpts.

*Excerpt 3: BBNaija S6: Jaypaul accuses Saskay of body shaming him, 31 August 2021*

Big Brother Naija Shine Ya Eye housemate, Jaypaul, has accused his love interest, Saskay, of looking down on him because of his small stature. The recent Head of House made this known in a late night chat with Saskay on Monday, as they both discussed their feelings. Jaypaul said that Saskay is judging him by his 'small body' and 'small face' but the 21-year-old denied doing that. He continued, "No jokes though, I like my body. I like the way I look. I cannot even lie. I see people my age and I probably know I tried." (**Punch Newspaper**)

Quite on the contrary, the typological trend on OGBS takes the tune of a lady body shaming a man based on his height in the context of relationship and perhaps, preference. As revealed in excerpt 3, two house mates of the BBN with stage names Jaypaul (male) and Saskay (female) were reported to have involved in the act of body shaming in the course of their friendship. By implicational interpretation, the co-text of the report "Jaypaul, has accused his love interest, Saskay, of looking down on him because of his small stature", shows that first, the man had interest in the lady, but he felt her response does not match the proportion of his love for her, and by that, he pragmatically accuses her of body shaming him. This is evidenced in his resigning proposition "No jokes though, I like my body. I like the way I look. I cannot even lie. I see people my age and I probably know I tried". Secondly, the direct act implies that Jaypaul was already verged in the societal construct of the type of body frame that is appreciated in the society he belongs. That is what could have engendered the emotional reaction asserting "I love my body" to implicate the general thought of people in the house or possible generalized opinion of ladies about his stature. It equally suggests the setting in of complexes as depicting in his proposition "...I see people my age and I probably know I tried". Comparison is a signal for low self-esteem while body shaming is a trigger. Hence, in this example, a female is purportedly reported body shaming a man, an event that

explains the menace as an equitably distributed gender phenomenon.

#### *MCBS in the contexts of media trolling, and reporting*

For the MCBS, the body shaming is enacted through the media's construction of the news and consequently framings (by this, we mean description) of the concerned social actors. Although, it appears unprofessional, media firms make insensitive remarks in their reports that clearly depict invoke the body shaming construct. This is evident in the contexts of media trolling on the part of social actors' comment and in the context of reporting the act itself. This is adequately exemplified in the excerpts that follow:

*Excerpt 5: Nigerian actress Ify Okeke talks about body shaming, says nothing can bring her down (photo) September 17, 2019*

Plus-sized Nigerian actress has advised her fans not to pay mind to body shamers. The actress, Ify Okeke, noted that she never gets moved by what body shamers say to her - Okeke stated that people cannot be loved by others if they do not love themselves first A Nigerian actress Ify Okeke has preached self-love on social media. The plus-sized actress advised people not to let body shamers bring them down. The actress, who preached self-love on her Instagram page, noted that she has never been moved by what body shamers say to her. The actress expressed that despite being an emotional person, she does not let what people say get to her. Okeke expressed that many of her fans have come to her, saying that they are depressed due to pressure from body shamers. She noted that the fans are triggered by inferiority complex. According to her, she has always been comfortable in whatever she wears. She stated that as long as she is comfortable she loves it. (**Legit.ng**)

In this media constructed type of body shaming, a female Nigerian actress's experience is revealed. While reporting the ordeal of the actress, the mediated voice in the news is also admittedly making descriptions that further amplify the anchor for the body shaming act as insensitively captured in the lexeme "plus size" in the repeated nominal construction "Plus-sized Nigerian actress". The cognitive import of the description plus-size naturally project "extra-large" in the mental frame. And to see the media handle use it to frame the actress while reporting a case of body shaming is absolutely condemnable. This is where the place of the media voice is emphasised in news delivery as they do not only represent the media brand but also the audience perceptions. Once the media chooses a particular description for a situation or an individual, that is what the general reading or listening populace would use in describing such. In excerpt, the actress Okeke did not deploy any of the terms used by the body shamers in representing people who share similar body frame with her, the media did. This largely entrenches the fact that body shaming, beyond the gendered toll, is fanned by media representation of the victims.

*Ideological, pragmatic strategies and linguistic features underlying gendered body shaming discourses*

Ideologically, body shaming reports reveal that there are strong perfectionist and advocatist beliefs that drive both the pro-shaming acts and the counter position or what could be better referred to as the defensive positions. Consequently, these have been strategically constructed to pragmatically project the body shamers and the defendants' stances on the issue. While the pragmatic and linguistic choices are discussed within the frame of the ideologies, the following sections shall be devoted to the instantiation of these ideological constructs, accordingly.

*(Im)Perfectionist ideologies underlying the gendered body shaming discourses*

Perfectionism is construed as the drive to absolutely conform to set standards. This is what exactly engineers the mental construct of shamers, largely because the society has, without any legal or moral justification, established a kind of standard for body shapes, heights and other physical ornaments. The perfectionist ideology bifurcates into **individuated and societal (im)perfectionist ideals**. This cuts across the three body shaming types earlier discussed – SGBS, OGBS, and MCGBS. This ideology, in its construction, relies on the pragmatic strategy of objectivisation of body parts and graphicisation of emotional appeal.

*Individuated (im)perfectionist ideology*

The individual (im)perfectionist ideology is a self-constructed or individuated ideological concern about how individuals think of themselves. In most cases, it is a product of dissatisfaction with self, leading to inferiority complex. It thus defines a self-evaluation that resorts to the belief that humans are imperfectly created and therefore needs to still work on their body to achieve perfection – a thought sponsored by the body shaming world.

*Excerpt 7: BBNaija 2020: Nengi Shares Body Shaming Ordeal, October 6, 2020*

“Personally I struggled with that for a very long time, I said it countless times that I had surgery done because I struggled with my confidence, I wasn't confident in my body, I didn't like my body. I don't know but I feel like I'm just the wrong person to be saying be comfortable in your body If there is anything I want people to know is that don't stress it, don't stress it at all . If you feel like there is anything you can do, before I did my surgery I used to wear waist trainers and I'll look perfectly fine. I feel like everybody is beautiful in their own way. I only did it because okay I have the mind, I have the mind to do it. I feel like every woman is beautiful in their own way. Fine people say I have a hot body but I still get shamed a lot.”(EveryEvery)

*Excerpt 8: Nigerians react after music critic Osagie says Teni should quit singing because she doesn't have the looks, September 25, 2018*

According to several reports, a music critic, identified as Osagie 'Osagz' Alonge, shared his controversial view on some musicians including Wizkid and Teniola, among others, on his podcast called Loose Talks. The music critic is facing serious heat from some Nigerians on Twitter because of his comment on fast rising music star, Teniola Apatu. According to Osagz, the plus sized singer would be better off as a songwriter rather than a singer because she doesn't have the looks. This did not go down well with several people on social media and they took to their pages to slam the critic. (Legit.ng)

Construed in the two excerpts is the individuated (im)perfectionist ideology and its construction on the media report. In excerpt 7, a BBN celebrity, named Nengi unearthing her plight in the hands of body shamers. While narrating her experience, certain pragmatic information were divulged and this has to do with the sociocognitive state of the actress. First, she had fallen a victim of a society that objectifies the woman body by setting certain standard that must be possessed to be applauded. This informed the proposition “I said it countless times that I had surgery done because I struggled with my confidence. I wasn't confident in my body, I didn't like my body. linguistically, the mental process “like” further concretise the emotional circumstance of the lady. Why would she not like her body to the extent of using trainers? And why could that graduate to the point of surgical corrections? As a celebrity in Nigeria and beyond, you are the face of many brands and that must implicitly come with some normative sort of standard. Else, the actions of Nengi can only be interpreting through the shared knowledge provided by the encounter studied earlier about other celebrity. You see many celebrities enlarging one part of the body to the other just because it doesn't conform to the celebrity standard. Hence, Nengi's ideology contravenes that of Okeke who would advise people to be comfortable with their body because she (Nengi) is of the (im)perfectionist philosophy that preaches extra effort to attaining bodily perfection as contained in the proposition “I feel like I'm just the wrong person to be saying be comfortable in your body If there is anything I want people to know is that don't stress it, don't stress it at all . If you feel like there is anything you can do”. This only strongly attests to the fact that body shaming has taken a whole ideological fashion propelled by unscripted but mutually shared celebrity standard.

Excerpt 8 is a validation of this notion of celebrity demands in the imperfectionist ideology of body shaming victims. As presented, the critic Osagie Alonge is trying to spell what looks should be for what entertainment industry. In body shaming another celebrity, Osagie established that Teni Apatu, because of her body structure, despite the huge talent, does not fit the stage performance of the body structure. When pragmatically, examined it is deducible that most celebrities

flaunt their bodies, most often, half-naked – showing body shapes and sizes. Hence, the report “According to Osagz, the plus sized singer would be better off as a songwriter rather than a singer because she doesn’t have the looks” speaks of the background role the singer ought to be playing instead of taking the front stage with her talent. This ideology prices body perfection ahead of talent and skills. This type of body shaming comments is instrumental to the step taken by Nengi who publicly condemned her body – because the individual stances have shaped the thoughts of the social actors.

#### *Societal (im)perfectionist ideology*

Societal (im)perfectionist ideology deals with the ideals of perfectionism as dictated by the societal demands. This ideology underlies the body shaming acts that are anchored on people’s evaluation of themselves based on the common ground of what the ideal body structure should be. In the following excerpts (9&10), these social actors are responding directly to the populace driven by this ideology.

*Excerpt 9: Nkechi Blessing Tackles People Who BodyShamed Her In The Past, Dec 21, 2021*

Nollywood actress, Nkechi Blessing Sunday, has tackled women who body shamed her in the past. In a post on her Instagram page, Nkechi Blessing Sunday wrote about people who criticized the shape of her jaw in the past. According to the actress, many people now pay to get their jaws to be like hers. Read what she wrote below, “This same Jaw some used in abusing me, I see many of you paying to get it now Father lord I thank you. Abeg we are still outside.” (**Independent Newspaper Nigeria**)

*Excerpt 10: I was called names because of head size – Omawumi, February 2022*

Nigerian singer, Omawumi Megbele, has revealed that she was body shamed as a child because of her facial features. She made this known on her Instagram page on Monday, stating that she was called several nicknames because of her protruding forehead. The Bottom Belle crooner said, “I was one of those kids they used to call ‘Hammer Headed’, ‘OGORstina’ and ‘Ekpengbe forehead’. “Well, there was a time I allowed it get to me. There was a time that I couldn’t step out without being heavily decked up in makeup. I would do all manners of things to hide my flaws because I felt imperfect,” she disclosed. The singer, however, revealed that she has grown to love herself despite her imperfections. (**Punch Newspapers**)

This is similar to the individuated ideals but differently contextualised. From excerpt 9 &10, there is a vivid account of how the society is infested with body shaming and the impact this has on celebrities. These celebrities reported in both excerpts have similar experience. For Nkechi Blessing, there is a profiling of how she was body-shamed because of her jaw. A careful study further reveal that what seems to be a deformity to people later became a template for other women’s measurement of jaw beauty. It is important that to

stress that sometimes, what the society feel is below standard, when explored by a celebrity of repute, it immediately becomes the trend and consequently the standard. In a similar vein, Omawumi in excerpt 10, recounted the body shaming she had to grapple with. She was also connected to her facial features. The psychological effect from that was that he had to always apply heavy make-ups to meet the “standard” the world could appreciate. These two celebrities’ account implicate the societal (im)perfectionist ideology rubbing off on them psychologically. This portends that most celebrities are constrained to act and dress and desire certain physical features because that is what the society want and ultimately dictates to them. This is apparently evinced from the indirect act of Omawumi’s report that “they used to call ‘Hammer Headed’, ‘OGORstina’ and ‘Ekpengbe forehead’. “Well, there was a time I allowed it get to me. There was a time that I couldn’t step out without being heavily decked up in makeup. I would do all manners of things to hide my flaws because I felt imperfect.”. The pronominal they is a REF to the outside reality and what they had defined as perfect or imperfect. That was why she felt imperfect. Simply on the account of the standard the society has set – and to further complicate it, they, even kids resort to calling offensive names.

#### *Advocatist ideology underlying the gendered body shaming discourses*

This ideology is the summed outcome of body shaming. It is the response victims of body shaming give the act. Advocatist ideology deals with the countering of negative comments that depict body shaming. These ideologues are hell-bent on fighting body shamers. It is simply the fight against, directly or on behalf of, body shaming in the various forms and context of it. Two subcategories of its manifestation come in: **Self-advocatist & proxy-advocatist ideology**, respectively. Self-advocatist ideology concerns the victim’s self-defensive act while the proxy advocatist ideology has to do with an activism against body-shaming that is anchored on other’s or organisations’ actions. It is enacted through the pragmatic strategy of de-amplification of negative comments. This is exemplified in the examples that follow in excerpts 11&12

*Excerpt: 11 Nkechi Blessing, Mary Njoku hit viewers’ body-shaming’ BBNaija’s Angel, JULY 27, 2021*

The Nollywood actress spoke in response to the various social media reactions that trailed the female contestant. At the second launch of the reality TV show’s 2021 edition over the weekend, Angel wore a bosom revealing outfit. Blessing said people with saggy bosoms haven’t necessarily had too much sexual intercourse as many insinuate. In the caption of her post, she added: “I understand if a man shames a woman for having fallen breast. “But aunty, even you? Common we can really do better than making a woman feel less of herself, unlike some oda people that can’t stand trolling and insults, they tend to fall into depression and harm themselves. Advertisement “But you see me? If dem born your father

well come and abuse me on my page. I will send you back home. We need to be the change we seek, by spreading more love than hate. Love and light.” Joining the conversation, Mary Njoku, another Nollywood actress, wrote

([https://www.instagram.com/p/CRzLpsljVq5/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/p/CRzLpsljVq5/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)) in Pidgin: “Bros, e dondo naa! Bres don fall, bress don fall, so? Your mama own never fall? All bress go fall las las. Make we hear word Abeg! Stop body-shaming women.” (TheCableLifeStyle)

*Excerpt 12: Nigerian actress Ify Okeke talks about bodyshaming, says nothing can bring her down, September 17, 2019*

DEY WORK! Truly I had to do this to help a lot of people. Everyday I get CALLS, DMs, SMS, WHATSP, MESSENGERS etc with cry of DEPRESSION or a question of HOW DO YOU DO IT? And what’s causing the DEPRESSION? COMPLEX! INFERIORITY COMPLEX ABOUT THEIR BODY SIZE. And I get so upset when they start with the whining part...MY DEAR, NOBODY WILL LOVE YOU IF YOU DON’T LOVE YOURSELF! I IFEOMA UZOAMAKA OGECHUKWU NNENNA EJEHI RACHAEL BOSE IYABO ARIYKE KEMI ELIZABETH MARIAIMMACULATE ONOME BEAUTY have NEVER wished to be like anybody. There’s nothing in this world I want to wear that I cannot wear as long as I look at myself in the mirror and feels OK am set to go. Growing up have always had slimmer friends, sometimes am the youngest amongst us all or we’re all within the same age bracket but looks older because of my size, even the industry judged me same way not just me but every plussize person. Which one will I kill myself for? MY VOICE OR SIZE? None because have Always love me for ME. I FLAUNT IT WHEN I CHOOSE AND HOW I CHOOSE TO. Have got HOT LEGS, MY EVER SWEET FACE, MY SEXY VOICE, MY FINE UNIQUE GAP TOOTH, MY MAN U, MY ARSENAL, GODDDDDDDDD and someone is hating herself for her gift. Please Help them to appreciate themselves and ROCK THE WORLD...#IfyOkeke #AdaOgidi#AdaIde#AdaIgbo #AdaAnambra #NwaOsike #PowerOsike #HalfEdoHalfIgbo. (Legit.ng)

The unrelenting force against body shaming is squarely demonstrated by the excerpts presented in 11 & 12. Excerpt 11, for instance, is an example of the proxy-advocast ideology in the representation of Nkechi Blessing and Mary Njoku in defence of BBN’s Angel was body shamed. Their stance in standing in for an up and coming celebrity is hinged on the fact that they themselves had at one in their career faced similar challenge. Hence, they practically challenged the body shamers on behalf of the victim, Angel. This is ingrained in the media trolling context and as a result, the advocast directs their responses to these media TROLLS as a deterrence to other form of potential body shaming. With reference to excerpt 12, there is the presentation of a direct act

by Okeke over a body shaming encounter where the actress demonstrate an outstanding self-advocast ideology by fighting back her shamers and using that avenue to also encourage others going through or experiencing such persecution in and outside of the entertainment industry. The actress de-amplified the negative comments by strategically objectifying, metaphorising and capitalizing the same body features for which she was being body-shamed as contained in the proposition “MY VOICE OR SIZE? None because have Always love me for ME. I FLAUNT IT WHEN I CHOOSE AND HOW I CHOOSE TO. Have got HOT LEGS, MY EVER SWEET FACE, MY SEXY VOICE, MY FINE UNIQUE GAP TOOTH, MY MAN U, MY ARSENAL, GODDDDDDDDD and someone is hating herself for her gift”. The pragmatic capitalization is intended to dissuade the negative critics and to promote self-love among people with shapes and heights that do not seem to satisfy the anomalous standard of the society. Hence, the voice of the direct act is encouraging while performing the speech acts of condemning the negative comments. By this token, other celebrities and ordinary people who possess physiological frames would be empowered to speak and condemn these deplorable of body shaming.

## V. CONCLUSION

In this current research effort, a critical study of the body shaming act, its contextual drivers, the ideological, pragmatic and linguistic strategies have been extensively explored with special focus on celebrities in Nigeria. It theoretically deployed the pragmatic act theory, polyphony, and a theory of gender to x-ray the types of body shaming that permeates the Nigerian society in general and the entertainment industry in particular. It was found that body shaming is constructed by same gender, other gender and the media largely established in the contexts of media trolling, relationship defence, conflict and reporting. While these pragmatically enacted through objectification of the body, graphicization and de-amplification of negative comments. Within the spectre of these strategies, linguistic features drawn from Halliday’s trasitivity processes such as mental, material and relational were found to be used to concretise the emotional, and physical activities that characterise the acts of body shaming in the texts examined. The implication of these discourses is that gender in the contemporary era has taken a different dimension because of the unwholesome societal standards for the ideal or standard body shape. This is perceived to be instrumental to many decisions by women to undergo different grades of surgery to attain the utopian perfect body.

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