

empower

WOMEN'S HEALTH & EQUAL RIGHTS INITIATIVE (WHER)
BI-ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

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WHO WE ARE?

Welcome to the Women's Health and Equal Rights (WHER) Initiative!

We are delighted to introduce the maiden edition of our bi-annual newsletter: EMPOWER. We hope to use this publication as a means to promote a deeper conceptual understanding of gender and sexuality as well as to establish a platform for sexual minority women to have their voices heard and their experiences recognized. In these pages, you will encounter critical analyses, stories, artwork, and poetry that we believe represent a variety of lived realities while simultaneously celebrating the unity, community and love we share as sexual minority women.

Being both women and possessing a sexual orientation or gender identity contrary to Nigerian societal norms often means we face compounded discrimination. It is out of this pressing need to improve the quality of life for sexual minority women in Nigeria that the Women's Health and Equal Rights (WHER) Initiative was conceived in 2010 and eventually established in 2011. Here we are 5 years later, ready to share our journey, triumphs, struggles and revelations with you!

Our goal is to advance and promote the well-being and equal rights of sexual minority women in Nigeria by addressing the health and psychosocial effects of homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and sexism through research, education, training, advocacy, empowerment and other direct services.

As a feminist organization, our strategies are built on the principles of respect, diversity, collectivity, community, and equality. We believe that by creating an environment for the holistic self-realization, empowerment, and self-development of sexual minority women that we can begin to dismantle the patriarchal systems of oppression and violence that affect our day-to-day lives and work to create a better, safer environment where the complexity of our identities can be respected and celebrated.

We hope you enjoy reading EMPOWER!

-Oguaghamba Akudo, *Executive Director*



(Pictured above: group of WHER team members)

THE LAST DANCE

By Emmanuella Nduonofit

She had been publicly jilted by her girlfriend. After their dinner, her girlfriend quietly and gingerly told her that she had fallen in love with someone else: a woman more beautiful than herself. They had been inside a restaurant and in front of everyone, she threw a glass of water at her girlfriend and walked out of the restaurant. Heads rolled and people laughed. "Catfight," someone mumbled as they continued with their dinners.

That same night, she went to a beer parlour and ordered a drink to quench the anger of being humiliated by her own girlfriend, now "ex-." She idly watched a couple dancing a slow waltz to the pure instrumental jazz music playing from a jukebox. It was obvious, she realized, that the night-

meal and everything else that she had with her girlfriend would be their last. A tear quietly trailed down her cheek as she secretly admired the glorious dance of the couple. This made the split with her girlfriend all the more painful. She watched with awe as the couple kissed at intervals. When the jazz music gradually came to an ethereal end, the couple stopped dancing but remained on the dance floor. They looked into each other's eyes and simultaneously touched each other's cheeks. Mesmerized, she watched.

Gradually, they began to touch each other's clothed torsos. He opened her blouse. She opened his shirt. What the jilted woman saw shocked her.

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MY STORY

By Juliet Ndukwu

It all started as a joke. I got a call from my ex's friend, asking me to come around the next day because she was sick and so I hurried down. Upon getting there, she asked that I visit her house first before going to my ex's house. Little did I know, there was much more going on than I could have anticipated.

Lo and behold, my ex walked in 10 minutes after I arrived. Right in front of her friends she began to abuse me. I didn't understand what was going on because we had never had any issues before, but I knew she was upset with me because I got a call from her two days before saying that we were over and that I shouldn't pretend to not know what she was talking about.

I was already tired of and used to the entire break up and make up session, so I decided to just be quiet and allow her to vent as usual, and

then wait until she came back to apologize. But instead, she started accusing me of not being faithful and collecting money from a crush she suspected I was having an affair with.

The whole evening was a disaster. Not only did she beat me up, but she also took my phone, asked me to pull off the dress I was wearing because she bought it, collected my iPad out of my purse, my Samsung gear, left me at her friend's place and went back to her house with my items.

She contacted everyone on my contact list on social media (e.g. BBM, WhatsApp, Facebook) while pretending to be me. She didn't stop there, she also accessed my Facebook account and posted the text message she received from an anonymous number accusing me of being un-

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MUSING

By Lala Legend

There is something about being young and carefree
Something about being able to laugh while taking a cool dip in the sea
Something about having the wind blow through your hair
I know that feeling cos love's in the air.

Something about your touch when tempers are flailing
Yeah it's crazy but that boat's been sailing
Sexting during the day, sexting through the night
Afterwards we lie and cuddle with all our might.

I wish I may, I wish I might
Crown our love up with a ring and a vow
I wish I may, I wish I might
With this stifling law I know not how.

IF ONLY

By Juliet N Ulanmo

If only I could mean to you
A little much more than I already do
If only one more thing I do
Could make you smile or impress you
If only by a word or two
I could show you, how you make me blue.
If only I could sometimes touch
That lovely skin I love so much
Or, even brace myself and kiss
Those lovely lips, Oh! Such bliss
If only I could sit beside you
And stare into those lovely eyes
Never flare!
If only I could make you see
How much you mean to me

If only I could make us be
One soul, one spirit for all Eternity
If only to love me; my darling you
would agree
Then I'd give my heart, my hope, my
all to thee...
If only society would allow me
I'd climb the highest mountain and
shout it loud
If only religion would permit
I'd put a ring on that finger
And claim you as Mine
If only the world would agree
I'd do all these and not go breathless
If only this love was free...
If only.

TRY YOU MUST

By Remi

Was it love you sought?
Inconsistent and short sighted
Clinging to your interpretations
Expectations you nurtured
Experiences that taught you nothing
Was it love you sought?

Try you must.
I am familiar with your territories
Your world with all its promises
Echoes of a dream come true perhaps
Beauty to all who stand afar
A place imagined by all
Desired by many

With all your warlords
And zillions of tiny soldiers
Commanding me to yield
Tried you have
Tired you must be

Tell your forces and advisers
This one won't yield
To your promise of a better life
A life you designed with an iota of me
for me

Turn to the right you say,
Left I respond
Spreading my legs to you
To the pleasures you imagine
Without the audacity of a kiss
But how do I arrive,
when the key is left behind

WHER ACTIVITY HIGHLIGHTS

June 2015 - June 2016



June 2015
Attended Changing Faces, Changing Spaces Conference

July-August 2015
Consciousness Raising Workshops

October 2015
Established WHER Paralegal & Human Rights Desk



December 2015
Social Networking Activity

November 2015
Consultation on the Establishment of West Africa LGBTQ Activist Led Fund

October 2015
Human Rights Training



April 2016
African Commission on Human & People's Rights

May 2016
Financial Empowerment Workshop

May 2016
Pan African ILGA Conference



June 2016
Hosted the Health Empowerment Rights Collective

QUIRTY By "M"

noun | quir • ty | [kwawr-tee]

Meaning:

"A condition of being in your Thirties (or just turned 30) and Queer. Living in the town where you were born, in your late Fathers' house, with your mother in a culture where a 30-year-old unmarried woman has failed and being queer is an abomination"

Examples:

Quirty is being confronted at work on a Monday morning by your mother, after a Sunday of not so quiet sex, with accusations of carrying out lesbian activities under her roof.

Quirty is never talking about it again.

Quirty is a fragile peace, an unnegotiated moratorium on all talks related to sexuality.

Quirty is working so hard, in a way you never have before, putting your all into something you believe in, physically and mentally.

Quirty is a constant conversation, recalibration, planning to do better, be better, promising not to fall asleep on the phone.

Quirty is a one-woman woman.

Quirty is experienced in heartbreak, but thinks it can be beautiful and a catalyst for growth.

Quirty may/could/will run away and explore the world.

Quirty is working with unbelievably fertile young women with 2.1 kids, and shrugging off daily prayers that you find a "good husband" and have a family of your own.

Quirty is working in the wedding industry, attending an average of two weddings every weekend and learning Olympic worthy linguistic acrobatics to get myself out of answering the never ending question from family and friends, "when are you getting married?"

Quirty is thinking seriously about if you want children and figuring out how you want to go about creating your family.

Quirty is brave, fierce, feminist in a very hostile place.

Quirty is as comfortable/uncomfortable as my converted quarters overlooking my fathers' grave and a stone throw away from my mothers' bedroom.

Quirty is living without pretence but not announcing it because 14 years is a long time.

Quirty is diplomatic acts like taking down the "Gay Street" framed poster that hangs over my bed when an aunty is visiting.

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UPCOMING EVENTS!

- ◆ WHER Staff Capacity Development Trainings—September
- ◆ Attending the 13th AWID International Forum in Brazil—September
- ◆ Community Paralegal/Human Rights Peer Educator Training Workshops— October and November.
- ◆ The End of Year Networking Activity—December
- ◆ Resource Library— Coming Soon!



WOMAN of Influence



CHINELE OKPARANTA was born and raised in Port-Harcourt, Nigeria. She relocated to the United States with her family at the age of ten. She received her BS from The Pennsylvania State University, her MA from Rutgers University, and her MFA from the University of Iowa. Okparanta has published short stories in a number of publications, including *Granta* and *The New Yorker*. Her debut short story collection, *Happiness, Like Water*, was listed as one of The Guardian's Best African Fiction of 2013. Her first novel, *Under the Udala Trees*, published in 2015, won the 2016 Lambda Literary Award in the General Lesbian Fiction category. *Under the Udala Trees* was named one of the 10 Outstanding Nigerian Books for 2015 by *Pulse*

Nigeria. Okparanta currently works as an Assistant Professor of English & Creative Writing (Fiction) at Bucknell University .

(Wikipedia Contributors. "Chinele Okparanta." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, n.d. Web.)

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Bombs!! Real, red, thin bombs!! In a flash, she removed his shirt and he removed her blouse. The jilted woman raised an alarm by screaming. She jumped out of her seat and made a run for the exit of the beer parlour. All heads turned towards the dance floor. By the time she reached the exit, the bombs on the couple's bodies had exploded. People started running for their lives.

The building exploded and came crashing down on them. Piercing screams rang out. The lady knocked her head against the bonnet of a car and passed out.

When she regained consciousness, she found herself on a hospital bed with her mother at her bedside. As she squeezed her mother's hand and the whole incident came back to her, she realized clearly that the dance of the couple in the beer parlour was their last.

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Quirly is learning to be kinder, but not soft. Firm, but not hard. Fair, but not harsh.

Quirly is teaching my 15-year-old cousin about consent and that only she can give access to her body.

Quirly is putting the shame on the crime and not on women's bodies.

Quirly is teaching her to stand her ground, scream, blow the whistle, tell on, and not be subdued by the predators who may try to mess with her.

Quirly is imagining a non-binary gendered culture where we could have a queer traditional itshekiri ceremony.

Quirly is making plans to achieve this.

Quirly chooses to stay, to fight, to not runaway. To live in love in a place that tries every day to kill people just like me.

Quirly is optimistic and decides to thrive.

ARTWORK

By Tyna Adebawale



Acrylics and Pens on Canvas

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faithful along with a defamatory note, and while still posing as me, she even threatened to call my mother and tell her about my sexuality.

During the two years of our relationship, there wasn't a time she caught me chatting with someone else, she had the password to my phone and frequently went through it even though I never had her password or went through her phone (didn't bother).

The next day, I traveled back to my place, then went home to visit my mother. She figured I was in distress and asked me if all was well. That was my moment of truth, I was scared and I thought that

telling her about my sexual orientation would break her heart, but to my greatest surprise she asked if I wanted her to talk to my ex on my behalf. I declined, but said to myself, this thing called a relationship died a long time ago and I just refused to acknowledge it.

I have since relocated and started a new life, new job, with new friends. With the help of some community members, friends and WHER, I was able to deal with all of the drama that came with that terrible incident without losing my cool. Although I lost a huge part of me, I was able to find much more of myself thanks to the workshop "Becoming a Woman and Adorned in the Knowledge of Self".

That's my story.



Know Your Rights

CALL OUR
HOTLINE!

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Contributor PAGE

THE WHO'S WHO OF THIS ISSUE

EMMANUELLA NDUONOFIT

Miss Emmanuella Nduonofit hails from Uboro-Oro Village in Urue-Offong/Oruko local government area. She currently holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka in Anambra State, Nigeria. She writes in three basic genres of literature: Poetry, Prose Fiction/non-Fiction, and Drama for the stage.

"M"

M is a queer thirty year old living and working in Benin. She enjoys cuddles, collecting books that she rarely has time to read, making minion cakes, and being out of order.

TYNA ADEBOWALE

Tyna Adebawale is a talented and inspiring artist. The female body is a major influence in her artwork. She is passionate about presenting issues around the female identity; pains and struggles of sexuality. She silently celebrates the queer female body(s) through her art.

CHINUE IGWE (EDITOR)

Chinue Igwe is a biracial Nigerian-American lesbian from California. She graduated from university with a Bachelor's degree in Women, Gender, and Sexuality studies. When she's not working, she's making the most of her Netflix subscription, belting her heart out to Tracy Chapman and shamelessly curating an ever-expanding shoe collection.

JULIET N ULANMO

Juliet Ulanmo is a Legal Practitioner, Human Rights activist, Sexual Rights activist, Social Critic, LGBT Rights Advocate, and Feminist. She has been practicing law since 2008.

LALA LEGEND

Lala Legend is an Economist who is passionate about the rights of sexual minority women. She is a community paralegal and an advocate for women's empowerment. She is looking forward to a united Nigeria where people are respected and appreciated for who they are irrespective of their sexuality. In her spare time, she plays the piano and loves rap, hip hop, afro pop and classical music.

JULIET NDUKWU

Juliet Ndukwu was born in Lagos, Nigeria, and graduated with a degree in Library and Information Science. She hails from the southeastern part of Nigeria, and is an activist who is passionate about equality for all.

REMI

Remi is a trained Lawyer, Human rights activist, Human development enthusiast and Entrepreneur. She's an aspiring sex educator and collector of sexual experiences. Her recent poem is an attempt to explore the expectations of a lover as mere propositions.