

A Chat With Todayz Girlz

Ayooluwa Uthman

It's not news that teenagers often feel, and are indeed alienated in most societies. Being too young to be adults, and yet too old to be children, they are in that special limbo of rebellion, irreverence, and naiveté. This puts them at odds with their parents or guardians, creating a sturdy though invisible wall, between them.

My colleague, Jennifer just a few years out of this limbo, spent time with some teenage girls, in an attempt to connect, and get the gist on what it's like to be teen girl today. Our meeting was held at a fast food joint and a promise of protecting their identities made them pretty comfortable to share. From two girls, who are from middle class families, we learn that in a faster world with communication at everyone's fingertips, parent daughter communication is still awkward.

THE RESPONDENTS.

**Mercy* is a seventeen-year-old student of the University of Lagos (UNILAG) who is currently in her second year studying Estate management. She is the first of six children; currently Mercy stays off campus, in a private hostel, but otherwise, lives with her parents at Ojodu-Berger. Mercy's not sure what she wants to be, but she knows it has to do with art, design and somehow, politics.

**Jane*, also seventeen, is preparing to sit for JAMB, and hopes to study Mass Communication at the Lagos State University (LASU). She currently lives at Ikotun with her parents and two siblings. Jane's dream is to become a newscaster, because she likes the way newscasters look and sound when they share the news and she likes the idea of being someone who delivers relevant information to people.

BEING FEMALE TODAY

They spoke of living in a faster and freer world, but then, when the issue of

boys and relationships came up, there was some hesitation. The question was: "do you like boys?" And their reactions showed that 21st Century female teenagers in Nigeria are still quite closed on this, even though male female relationships are easier and more common.

We were surprised to hear Jane say she had "no interest at all" in the opposite sex. It wasn't until Mercy spoke about boys being her preferred companions, that Jane volunteered an explanation: "I like boys, but I like them as friends, I even have more male friends than female ones". She tells us why: "because boys are freer, they are more open and easier to talk to than girls", supporting Mercy's stand.

Jane's position is easily explained. Hanging around males gives her a heads up on their 'nature', which has made her more cautious about going any further than friendship... for now: "I roll with guys a lot, and we gist a lot. When I hear stories about how they treat their girlfriends, I just think: 'no, I don't want to be a part of this'. They are all players". Mercy expressed a similar opinion,



though for an entirely different reason: "It's too much drama".

LET'S TALK ABOUT SEX

Their views were divergent on this, but clearly it's an ever-present issue with them. Mercy having had sex, was an advocate who is more particular about who one chooses to do it with. "Don't do it with a douchebag i.e. a 'bad boy'". Jane, on the other hand, was of the opposite opinion: "I'm not interested", and when asked why, she replied: "I think it's because of my friends. When they talked about it, they said they didn't like it. Maybe it was because of the guys they tried it with."

SILENCE... PARENT AROUND

They gave similar replies when inquired about the relationship with their parents. Jane's version was: "I'm not really close to any of them.". And when they talk it's about "just normal things, normal, random things, not really the things on my mind." Mercy shared the same view, saying being close to her parents felt "weird".

On the dynamics between teenagers and adults in general, our respondents felt misunderstood. Jane: "I don't think we're understood, everybody just thinks that once you're a teenager, you're into bad things, you might look at some and think they're bad but if you ask why, you'll see that it's deeper than just trying to be bad or cool. And our parents don't ask questions, they just see what you do and immediately judge you, they don't wait to listen to your explanation or anything of the sort, they just react."

Mercy: "People just assume teenagers all try to copy each

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other, and while that's true to an extent, some of us aren't really about that, we're just exploring. I mean, there are some things you do, that you aren't exactly proud to tell your parents, some things that might look very bad to some people, but it's not like you're trying to be bad, or destroy your life, neither are you trying to be cool or anything, you're just trying to make your mind up for yourself."

WATCH OUT!

Less judgment, more understanding and more open communication from parents and society at large is a must the girls say, if they are to navigate today's world that is largely devoid of hope. To the older generation Mercy says, "Give us hope because things seem like they're never going to change", and Jane appeals, "Stop judging us and actually start trying to teach us how we can make things better."

Without change, more teens will succumb to their age group pressures today: "Sell out and be a *'runs girl'", amongst other drastic things girls and even young boys do for money. In Mercy's words: "Every girl wants to be an Instagram girl, or a slay queen, or something of that sort. All the guys want to be ballers, regardless of where the money came from."

**Not their real names*

**A runs girl is a young girl who sleeps with older men/richer men for money.*



Lami & Labo

From Friends to Lovers...

By Ayooluwa Uthman

Love stories are an all-time human favorite. Few can resist the rush of emotions that comes with following an expertly told tale of two lovers; the timeless cast that no amount of modernization, however sophisticated, can replace. Anyone you ask, no matter how cynical, will confirm the lingering human hope that out of the mass of people who pass through their lives, there will be one who sees every part of their being, and still chooses to stay.

Lami Phillips, singer and songwriter, found hers - Labo Gbadamosi. I meet her at Sweet Kiwi in Lekki Phase 1 where she gives me the lowdown of her romance story while ordering breakfast. After she receives her order, her story begins...

They met over 20 years ago at a Jesushouse fellowship meeting in London. It was Lami's first time at the fellowship. Immediately she saw him, the teenage Lami had a strong conviction that he was the one for her. "I can't explain it, as soon as I saw him, I said: 'He's the one, that's my husband,'" she says. The conviction was unmistakable, and it was apparently a two-way thing: "That's what happened with him as well, he looked at me and said: 'That's my wife'. So, he never said 'will you be my girlfriend?' or anything like that. We basically just became friends and it transitioned into 'Will you marry me?'"

Its proof was the curious series of events that started the relationship. After their initial meeting, Lami travelled to the US for a summer holiday and all through that period, her thoughts were on him. There was no way for them to communicate as she didn't get his number and didn't give him hers. Eventually summer passed and she returned to London. Relating their reunion, she says, "When I got back to London - God forgive me - the only reason I went to church on Sunday was to check this guy and see if this [conviction] was all in my head. He wasn't around that Sunday, and I thought: 'I really should have gotten his number.'

"I saw another guy who happened to be in that fellowship, and I asked: 'Where's Bole?' [they used to call him Bole] and he was like: 'Oh he's not around'. I thought: 'How am I going to pass this message across without looking desperate or like I came to church for a

boy?', so I said 'Okay just say I asked for him.'"

She had met Labo on a Thursday night - that's when the fellowship held. The following Thursday however, she was down with a severe case of chicken pox and couldn't go for the meeting. But of course, love always finds a way, and the next Sunday, she received a call; it was him, he was outside her house, and needed permission to get in. (He came to check on her because she didn't attend church service.) She recounts the experience as anxiety filled at first: "I wanted to DIE, because I looked like death on a stick. I was black, with ugly spots on my face, but he came up and he sat with me the whole day. We talked all day and he didn't even react to how grotesque I looked." That moment confirmed her conviction and started the partnership that is today, a marriage blessed with two daughters.

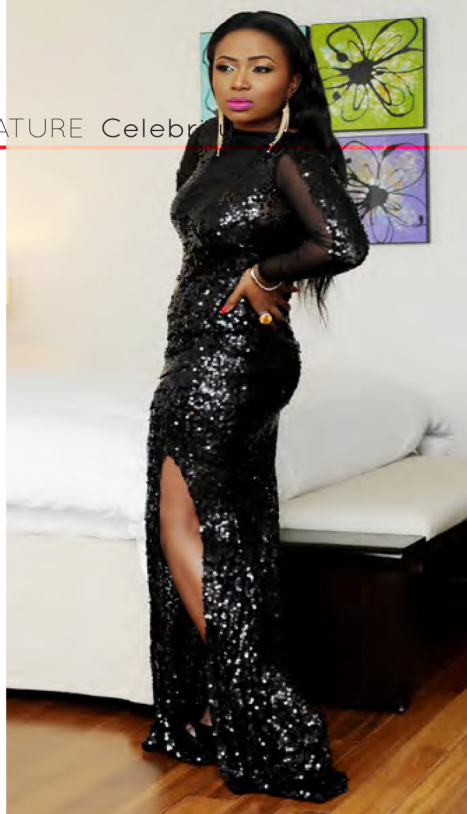
At this point, the room is quiet. Funtó, her Executive Assistant, sits behind, totally escaping my awareness; it seems she too is fascinated by the story. The air is friendly, and Lami is all smiles as she recounts the journey: "I remember the day he proposed to me. What touched me was that we had been dating for a while, and still, he was nervous. He proposed at the London Hilton; he had been suggesting that we should do breakfast there, until one day he decided to take me there for dinner. It's really funny, I think he had been trying to propose for a while - you look at the past and see a lot of pointers. I remember him in hindsight, all sweaty and constantly touching his jacket pocket. I was really worried and thought: 'Is he sick? Doesn't he have money to pay?'"

The growing tension was aggravated by his sudden departure from the table. "I just continued eating, till I decided to go to the balcony; it was the top floor and it had a very nice view of London. As I turned back, I saw this guy on two knees. I started to think '*gasp* 'It's happening!'. So, I stopped hearing what he was saying, till he said: 'But you know you need to say yes and I need to give you the ring'. So that was that."

She also recalled how touched she was at the sense of pride she saw in his expression, and Lami believes every woman should strive to earn that respect from her man. "I think these days, women forget that they are treasures to be won," she says. "When a man has done everything to convince you to marry him, there should be a sense of pride and accomplishment, not a very arrogant 'Yeah, yeah, I put a ring on it'".

So far, her story has been about the sweetness of love, but great stories are never without challenges; circumstance always throws curveballs the lovers' way and couples have to work to make their marriage a happy one. We switch the discussion to how Lami has kept her marriage separate from her celebrity status, and how she and Labo have grown from friends, to teenagers in love and now a married couple.





Lami says that her friendship with Labo has played a big part in the success of her marriage. "When everything fizzles out, it's the friendship that will still stand," she says. I ask her how her celebrity status has affected her marriage and she says, "I think it's a mindset. I don't see our marriage as a celebrity one. I don't talk about my private life and that's intentional because I don't want people feeling like they're entitled to an opinion. I may be a celebrity because I'm in the public eye, but I don't see myself that way. I see music as my job and part of my purpose in life, and it's foolish to let it dictate the whole. I see myself as my husband's wife, a mother to my kids, and a child of God, shortcomings and all. I go out of my way to ensure that, a temporary status doesn't get to me."

She also mentions how her family and loved ones help her stay grounded: "When I get home, and I'm wearing slippers and smell of pepper and my daughters need my attention, that's the richest part of my life. It matters more to me than people clapping, because I don't know if they'll stick with me through thick or thin. But here at

home, are people who are ride or die. That's what I focus on. I thank God for my husband - he's an extremely wise person, so if I start to deviate he's quick to reproach with love and say 'Babe, careful'".

As she paints out the ways she and her husband navigate the slippery slopes of married life, I picture a marriage based on open and honest communication; they always find the best ways to tell each other the truth, no matter how uncomfortable it is. Lami also stresses the importance of God in their family, and how He's using her husband to help shape her into the woman she's meant to become:



"I have a husband who understands the importance of prayer, and he occasionally jokes that a prayerful person is like someone who goes to the gym; someone who's very fit doesn't have to make noise about it - you see it in their lives. He's also taught me to be very clear in my expectations from myself and others because blurry areas cause miscommunication. I've found

a partner who complements me, who pushes me and understands purpose and will give his all to make sure I fulfil mine."

Being together, in the simplest of ways, is the couple's favorite activity. They go out a lot, travel a lot and watch movies, all together. They unsurprisingly talk a lot too, as she bluntly puts it: "We can TALK".

Lami closes our discussion with an elegant summary of marriage, purpose and the interconnection between them:

"When you don't understand the purpose of something, you're either afraid of it and/or you abuse it. Marriage is there to make you a better person; it's not meant to take away from you. Your spouse is someone I believe destined by God to help you get where you're supposed to be and be a guide. So, if you start to miss your way, get afraid, cry or whatever, you always have your cheerleader in your corner. So, the purpose of marriage affects the perspective. That should be a quote."

