

Sexual Self-disclosure and Gender Consciousness of Undergraduate Students of Obafemi Awolowo University

S.A. Oluwatosin

Department of Educational Foundations and Counseling
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife

A.A. Adediwura (Corresponding author)

Department of Educational Foundations and Counseling
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife
E-mail: yemtoy20002000@yahoo.com

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Abstract

The study investigated gender consciousness and sexual self-disclosure of undergraduate students attending counseling sessions as well as gender difference in sexual self disclosure.

Sixty (60) consenting undergraduates who had attended counseling session for sexual concerns in the last three months preceding this study period were used for the Snell (1996) were used to collect data for the study

The results showed that the relationship between sexual self-disclosure to therapist and gender consciousness is a weak but positive relationship (Pearson and Kendal tau correlation coefficients: $r=0.15$ and 0.12 , respectively). There was a significant but negative relationship between students' sexual self-disclosure and the therapist sex ($r=-0.52$ and $b=0.37$). Also difference in sexual self disclosure between male and female clients showed a non significant t-test of $t=0.20$.

The study showed a trend in clients' psychological androgyny (neither strongly male nor strongly female) inclination to gender consciousness and self-disclosure.

Keywords: Gender consciousness, Sexual self-disclosure, Undergraduate students, Gender difference

1. Introduction

An important variable in counseling and interpersonal relationship is self-disclosure. It is primarily concerned with the verbal communication of information about oneself to another. Since 1971 when Sidney Jourard investigated disclosure as a phenomenon, it has since assumed a multidimensional construct covering: intimacy, affective, duration amount, content and flexibility (Eugenia, John, Jeffery, 1981, Wan, Chung & Chiou, 2009). These and other issues like privacy, boundaries, and gender have generated research interest which have produced significant shift in the scope of what disclosure used to be.

A recent development in the study of disclosure is the aspect of self that is associated with sexual perception of the individual. This aspect of disclosure is concerned with sexual communication or communication of sexual likes and dislikes. Sexual matters are usually regarded as discreet matters; therefore disclosure of related issues is likely to be conditional. In research, it has been found that sexual self-disclosure is related to sexual satisfaction. Variables like sex or gender of persons in the dyads may be instrumental to the outcome of the disclosure in terms of content and quality.

Past research and traditional gender role expectation as opined by Vera & Betz (1992) as cited by Byers (1996) indicated that women disclose more than men about nonsexual issues but 'with respect to sexual self-disclosure, the traditional sexual script prescribes that women be sexually naïve and that men be directive and assertive about their sexual needs'. However, with the gender equality tendency and sexual liberation among enlightened people today, it is possible that gender differences in sexual disclosure may not be consistent with the traditional role expectation especially among young undergraduates. Investigation into this proposition may likely provide another perspective into operationalization of sexual self-disclosure.

Discussing gender differences in sexual self-disclosure may become more constrained in real life if such dichotomy is dependent on the level of gender consciousness of the disclosing persons. For instance a male client who is not gender bias may feel no harm in disclosing private information to a female therapist while in the same vain such an individual may behave otherwise if there is a shift in his gender consciousness. We therefore hypothesized that the level of one's gender consciousness will affect one's level of sexual self-disclosure. In traditional African societies, it is often acknowledged that there are limits or boundaries to what, when and who a woman should disclose to, more importantly when the information is shared knowledge.

In research literature, it is believed that men and women use different criteria for deciding to open or close boundaries. It is equally observed that there are men like women in nature and vice versa. There is the belief that individuals are expected to disclose information that is congruent with their gender; that is men should make masculine disclosure-reflecting attitudes, behaviors and experiences stereotypically of men, while women should make feminine disclosure stereotypically of women (Bem, 1993). So far this position may have varied in that there is what scholars regard as psychological gender, which lay emphasis on difference in sex roles orientation. This concept brings about different beliefs regarding what sexes are like (Wen-Bin, 2006). Those who are in this category may have different perception of masculine versus feminine disclosure. A measure of individual's gender consciousness could be indicative of these differences. It is hoped that this study would identify current belief and societal expectation in sexual self disclosure.

Heterosexual relationship has become more complicated and delicate because of the associated risks which can be influenced with adequate and mutual sharing of personal information. Sexual protective behavior is partly informed by some proportion of information about self and partner. Thus, it is important to identify how people disclose information about self with gender sensitivity in consideration. It is necessary to consider this because of the multiple counseling benefits derivable from disclosing during counseling process. This similar opinion was expressed in the World Health Organization (WHO), 2003; report on HIV status disclosure to sexual partners. It was clearly stated that counseling strategies need to be culturally appropriate to the target audience and gender specific. Against this backdrop we therefore investigated if university students who engaged in sexual relationship would self-disclose information based on their gender and gender consciousness.

Principally, this study intends to determine the relationship between students' sexual self-disclosure and their gender consciousness, students' sex and therapist sex and to find out if there is any significant difference in the sexual self disclosure of male and female students. Thus three hypotheses were formulated for the study.

- a.) The relationship between the student's sexual self-disclosure and their gender consciousness is not significant.
- b.) There is no significant relationship between students' sexual self-disclosure and therapist sex.
- c.) There is no significant difference in the sexual self disclosure of male and female students.

2. Method

Participants for this study were 60 volunteered undergraduate students (40 males and 20 females) who had attended counseling sessions for sexual concerns in the last three months preceding the study.(this is a convenience sample representing only those who have attended counseling clinics three weeks before this study). The average age of the participants was 26 years. Two different instruments developed by Snell (1996), were used to collect data for the study. The first instrument titled 'Sexual Self-disclosure Scale' which measures the extent to which an individual would disclose sexual information about self to therapist on gender basis. The second instrument titled 'Gender Consciousness Questionnaire' measures the individual tendency to attribute one's decision to being male or female. It measures several aspects of public gender consciousness which involves the tendency to be aware of other's reactions to aspects of one's own particular gender, and private gender consciousness which by contrast involves the tendency to be personally aware of gender related phenomena about oneself and society These instruments have been used overtime and adjudged to be reliable. Snell (1997) and Snell & Johnson (2004). Participants' responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale with items been scored from '0' (Not at all characteristic of me) to '4' (Very characteristic of me).

3. Results

The first hypothesis was aimed at determining the relationship between the student's sexual self-disclosure and their gender consciousness. To test this hypothesis students' response to sexual self-disclosure and gender consciousness questionnaires were scored and the collected data were then correlated using Pearson Product Moment coefficient (r) and Kendall's tau (b) to determine the required relationship. Table 1 presents the result of the analysis.

<Table 1 about here>

Table 1 present the mean score of students on both self-disclosure to therapist and gender consciousness questionnaires as ($\bar{X} = 139.77$ and $\bar{X} = 56.28$) respectively. Further analysis using Pearson and Kendal tau correlation coefficients ($r = 0.15$ and 0.12) respectively indicated that the relationship between students' self-disclosure to therapist and gender consciousness is a weak non significant but positive relationship. Thus hypothesis one is accepted.

The second hypothesis was aimed at determining the strength of relationship that exists between students' sexual self-disclosure and therapist sex. In testing this hypothesis, individual students' self-disclosure score to male therapists and female therapists were correlated using Pearson (r) and Kendal tau (b) correlation coefficient. Table 2 presents the result

<Table 2 about here>

From Table 2 it could be observed that more students were disposed to disclosing their sexual activities with the male therapist with a mean score of $\bar{X} = 103.90$ as against the mean score of $\bar{X} = 34.98$ for disclosing to female therapist. The Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = -0.52$) and Kendal tau correlation coefficient ($b = -0.37$) at 0.05 level of significance is an indication that there is a significant but negative relationship between students sexual self-disclosure and therapist sex. Thus hypothesis two is rejected.

The third hypothesis was aimed at finding out the strength of possible difference in the sexual self disclosure of male and female students. To test this hypothesis students' response to sexual self-disclosure questionnaire were sorted into male and female group and score of the two groups were compared for difference in mean using t-test. Table 3 presents the results.

<Table 3 about here>

Results as presented on Table 3 with mean score ($\bar{X} = 140.68$ and $\bar{X} = 137.95$) for male and female students respectively clearly showed that there are difference in the sexual self-disclosure to therapist. The t-test result ($t = 0.20$) as presented in the Table implies that the difference in sexual self-disclosure of male and female students that is observed is not significant that is the difference is not as a result of the students sex. Thus, hypothesis three is accepted.

4. Discussion

This study anticipated the relationship that may exist between gender consciousness of clients and their levels of sexual self disclosure. Findings indicate that there was no significant relationship between the two variables. This is surprising in that human discourse is usually biased by one's perception of what we believe to be conventional. For instance socialization into traditional sex role concept has accounted for sex differences in self disclosure. However this study did not align with this functional sex differences even on sexual matters. This finding may perhaps be hinged on the fact that traditional dichotomy of sex roles into what is feminine and masculine is fading away, especially among youths who are more exposed to the western civilization through education. In our society today, it is difficult to identify in some cases which dress is for men only or 'girlie' as observed by McRobbie (2009). Gender awareness has become globalized and fluidity (university environment not exempted) such that individuals tendency to be personally aware of gender related phenomena about oneself and the society is not strong enough to inhibit sexual self disclosure. Thus people are becoming less responsive to the idea of sex stereotype irrespective of gender and expressive once there is an opening ear they can trust. So gender difference may not (as far as this study is concerned) be an inhibition to sexual self disclosure of clients.

The trend in the research literature has been that gender difference plays an important role and otherwise but the authors interpretation of their results show that the relationship of gender and sexual self disclosure may be dependent on the client and counselor behavior repertoire This is consistent with the opinion of Eugenia et al (1981).

The other concern of this study is to find the strength of possible difference in sexual self of male and female clients. The study indicated that there was no significant difference. The level of sexual self disclosure was not as a result difference in sex. The traditional opinion of people within the cultural settings of the participants considers women as people who are suppose to be conservative. But this culture is only limited to the traditional society and totally and totally different from the university environment which the participants of this study belong. The university environment is an enlightened society where both male and female students are quite aware of their 'self'. Gender sensitivity is more pronounced with some sense of civilization which allows free expression of feelings without gender consideration. It appears from the findings of this study that there is a trend in most client (at least for the participant in this study) to be androgynous in relation to their gender consciousness and in their sexual self disclosure. But it is unclear if this concept is consistent with variability in the sensitivity of the topics or contents of disclosure. There is the need to further investigate this variability and the psychological androgyny in sexual self disclosure of what is considered as sensitive or intimate issues in interpersonal relations.

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Table 1: Relationship between Students' sexual self-disclosure and gender consciousness

	X	SD	N	r	b	P
Students' Self Disclosure Score to Therapists	139.77	49.26	60	0.15	0.12	>.05
Students' Gender Consciousness Score	56.28	24.34	60			

Table 2: Relationship between Students' sexual self-disclosure and therapist sex

	X	SD	N	r	b	P
Students' Self Disclosure Score To Male Therapists	103.90	58.31	60	-0.52	-0.37	<.05
Students' Self Disclosure Score To Female Therapists	34.9833	37.13	60			

Table 3: t-test showing the difference in the sexual self-disclosure of male and female students to therapist

	Students' Sex	N	X	SD	T	df	p
Students' Self Disclosure Score to Therapists	Male	40	140.68	52.34	.20	58	>.05
	Female	20	137.95	43.72			