Sex Role Orientation among Selected Student Counsellors in Lagos Metropolis, Nigeria

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Abstract
The study focused on the sex-role status of selected student counsellors in Lagos metropolis. A total of 60 participants, drawn from the University of Lagos and Lagos State University were involved in the study. Bem's Sex-Role Inventory BSRI (1994) was used to collect relevant data. Three assumptions were tested using simple percentage and the Chi-square test at the 0.05 alpha level. The findings, the subjects appeared sex-stereotypic, neither did their gender nor parental education influence their sex-role status. Based on the findings, certain recommendations were made.

Keywords: Sex role orientation, sex role status, sex stereotype

Background to the Study
Ideally, the education and training that counsellors receive should certainly help them to make their professional services effective to all prospective clients, without regard to their sex. Counselling as a helping profession, particularly career counselling focuses mainly on assisting the individual to attain self-actualization. In addition, achieving balanced psychological health among clients demands that the counsellor be adequately trained, not only in the theories and practices of counselling, but also as a gender sensitive professional.

Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz and Vogel (1970) reported on the relationship of counsellors' attitude and values to the counselling process suggesting that counsellors seem biased against female clients and these biases are reflected in sexist based therapy for women. Thus, it appears there is the existence of counterproductive biased attitude towards women on the part of counsellors. The situation appears inevitable because the sex-role system is the core of most cultural norms (Chetwyd and Hartnett 1978), a system which results from the pervasiveness of sex-role stereotyping in the culture.

The counsellor is therefore in double jeopardy of acquiring traditional sex-role stereotypic view about the nature of women and men both as a member of his culture and in the professional training where traditional psycho-analytic views are still widely taught (Wilgosh,

1980). In this view, a woman who pursues her own goals and strives for self-fulfillment is considered neurotic. In practice, it appears that counsellors inadvertently help to reinforce conformity to traditional sex roles, partly because they are a product of the same environment that produced the stereotypes and partly because they are not aware of the damaging effect of sex-stereotyping. In addition, they may not be aware of egalitarian practice and therefore, find it difficult to change.

In a world governed by sex stereotypes, and as reported by Mischel (1970) sexist stereotypes appear to influence the choices made by girls, 80% of whom usually aim for traditional professions. Training received by girls covers 30 specialized fields against 300 for boys (Mischel, 1970). Such a situation arises to a large extent, from the fact that girls are not sufficiently informed, nor are the advisers and counsellors, who too often steer them towards traditional occupations. Empirical studies have produced sufficient confirmation of practitioners' bias in defining mental health standards for men and women. Counsellors are noted for defining a more socially acceptable concept of mental health for men than for women (Browerman et al, 1970). In the United States, promoters of equity in education are aware that sexist stereotypes are kept alive among children by counsellors. This may be due to their own ignorance of egalitarian legislations, new trends in women's development, their choosing to steer children and more particularly, girls exclusively towards traditional occupations, the use they make of psychological tests, manuals and career guides laden with sex stereotypes, their way of saying 'he' when discussing traditional male activities, and 'she' for those that are allegedly for females, and the linguistic use they make of masculine terms to designate certain occupations, for instance, fireman instead of firefighter.

Counsellors are also criticized for their unconscious and non-verbal behaviour which fosters the idea among students that there are appropriate and inappropriate options for each sex, and this discourages, or at least, ignores any nontraditional choice of subjects or occupations that may be formulated by certain pupils, instead of giving them encouragement.

To aggravate the situation, it appears that teacher training programmes, including that for counsellors, do not pay attention to the issue of gender equity and sex stereotypes in education. As an integral part of a sexist society, educators' training should include sex desensitizing package that would ensure that counsellors, in particular, are equipped with skills that would not only enable them rise above societal sex role standards, but also those skills that would enable them compensate their clients by emphasizing not the limitations society has placed on them, but the possibilities that are open to them.

There is therefore the need to assess the sex role status of student counsellors in order to establish data base on their sex-role orientation, for the development of any meaningful and appropriate curriculum at the teacher-training level.

Statement of the Problem

Implicit in the concept of equality of educational opportunity is not only accessibility and outcome, but also of equal importance are the in-process activities, one of which is guidance programme of the school. Counselling as a tool for achieving balanced psychological health, assumes that counsellors have been trained not only to rise above societal sex-role standard, but also to be aware of egalitarian laws and current trends in gender-fair schooling process. They are also assumed to be aware of its sexist content and therefore, as change agents, compensate for disadvantages of stereotyped information. Based on the specialized function of the counsellors and its consequence for the achievement of equality of educational opportunity which is one of the central concerns of the National Policy on Education (1981), this study is interested in what goes on in counselling.

Optimally, sex bias in counselling should be evaluated through direct observation. However, due to the fact that most counselling encounters enjoy confidentiality and privacy, one can only infer what takes place from a knowledge of counsellors' characteristics, attitudes and from the materials used in counselling. This assessment appears necessary, because, more than classroom teachers, counsellors enjoy a closer relationship with students, and are therefore, more likely than teachers to influence them in many ways. Since it is clear that no professional can rise above his/her own personality, which includes world views, attitudes and orientations, counsellors may inadvertently promote inequality. There is the need therefore to investigate counsellors' sex-role status, and the sex role standard of student counsellors, in order to establish data base for curriculum development in counsellors' education programmes.

A Review of Related Studies

Some studies have attempted to answer the question of whether the knowledge of a client's sex could affect the counsellor's educational and occupational expectations, evaluation and treatment of him/her? Research findings on this problem, however, appear contradictory. Broverman *et al* (1970) stated that therapists do respond to the client's sex when making treatment plans. The researchers studied 61 volunteer practising male and female psychotherapists drawn from psychiatry, social work and clinical psychology and noted that mental health clinicians hold a double standard for mentally healthy male and female, and that these view parallel sex-role stereotypes. While the adult and masculine concepts of mental health are not much different, the adult feminine portraits of mental health are quite different through the inclusion of such adjectives as passive and emotional.

Medneve and Collins (1976) compared the attitude of counsellors, psychotherapists and advanced graduate students by asking the groups to rate the appropriateness of 25 different occupations for women. They found significant differences among the three groups, with the male counsellors displaying the most restrictive attitude. 90% of them rated less than half of the occupations as being appropriate for women. Johnson and Scarato (1979) found that sex role orientation of counsellors seems to have some influence on preference of clients, and asserted that counsellors, regardless of gender, tended to perceive male and

female clients with similar problems as possessing different personality traits. They also reported that the counsellors in the study tended to choose lower paying occupations that are more highly supervised and require less prerequisite education for female than male subjects.

Among other findings, Bingham and House (1973) reported that their counsellor samples were misinformed on over 50% of the items presented to them. In addition, the male counsellors tended to believe that women were generally less able than men; that women currently had sufficient employment opportunities and that women were unable to perform jobs traditionally held by men. These counsellors also displayed lack of awareness of discriminatory practices by employers.

In addition to sex-biased counsellors, the tools of counselling have been documented to be biased. Association for Measurement and Evaluation in Guidance (1973) concluded that vocational interest inventories, through their construction, psychometric property and use have consistently channelled women into traditional roles. It has been recognized that occupational and other information available to counsellors depict stereotypic image of women and work. Birk, Cooper and Tanney (1973) demonstrated sex bias in describing occupations (The Occupational Outlook Handbook, 1972, 1973; Bureau of Labour Statistics, 1974 and Dictionary of Occupational Titles, 1965). Birk, Cooper and Tanney (1973) also examined the Science Research Associates Occupational Briefs and the Encyclopaedia of Careers and Vocational Guidance (1972) and found them to be overwhelmingly biased. Males were pictured doing exciting, challenging and autonomous work, whereas females were shown in traditional occupations.

In a study directly relevant to our discussion, Mitchack (1978) reported that counsellors rated female clients with a nontraditional career goal as having made a less appropriate choice than clients with traditional goals. In addition, the counsellors in this study rated the nontraditional women as significantly more in need of psychotherapy than their more traditional counterparts. Other findings included such statements as it is unrealistic for women to expect meaningful implementation of vocational self-concept and that there must be something 'wrong' with a woman who wants to do a traditional masculine job.

While the sex of the client and that of the counsellor is an important variable in the process and outcome of counselling, attitude and expectations arising simply from the knowledge of the sex of the other counselling participants may influence the counselling relationship. Thus, it is evident that clients as well as counsellors may stereotype each other based on their sex. Expectancies for counsellors seem to follow the same way, male counsellors are expected to be active and competent, and female counsellors are expected to be passive and understanding (Chesler 1971).

The findings of the studies reviewed tend to agree with Bem's (1971) thesis which claims that all of us possess a gender schema, that is, the set of things which we associate with

males and females, and counsellors are no exceptions. The findings also indicate that counselling practices appear to be gender-biased. As argued by Frank (1973), therapists' values and attitude play a part in counselling and may even be a major curative factor. Thus, educators should be concerned about the values and attitudes of counsellors and find a way of moderating these characteristics so as to ensure counsellors' effectiveness resulting in their clients realizing their optimum potentials.

Gladly, some studies have focused on the possibility of gender-fair counselling practice (Yanico 1978), when after reading sex-fair career information, counsellor subjects modified their stereotype ratings of occupations, thus suggesting that it is possible to change attitudes about the appropriateness of traditional male occupations for women and vice-versa. The implication is that when counsellors are exposed to and are aware of egalitarian career information, they are likely to become increasingly aware of the options opened to their clients rather than those that are closed to them.

Therefore, there is the need to continually assess the professional practices of counsellors in order to improve their training by curriculum reforms that reflect current world view about men and women. As change agents, counsellors should be sensitized to egalitarian laws and practices so that they can become effective interventionists even in a society that treats males and females differently. Vetter (1973) argued that counsellors must not continue to perpetuate such a situation but rather become involved in social action and make it a definite aspect of their professional task to change the status quo. Schlossberge and Pietrofesa (1973) and Maslin and Davis (1975) recommended intervention strategies for helping counsellor trainees understand and deal with their own gender biases.

This study is motivated by the above considerations and also aims at providing relevant data base for curriculum and practical reforms aimed at gender-fair counselling.

Research Methodology
The design for the study was the descriptive research method. The location of the study was Lagos metropolis. A total of 60 student counsellors made up of 32 or 53.33 percent females, and 28 or 46.67 percent males, drawn from the University of Lagos and Lagos State University, were involved in the study. Their ages ranged between 20 and 34 years.

The instruments used to collect data included a Personal Data Inventory and Bem's Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) (1974). The inventory consisted of 60 personality attributes, 20 feminine attributes such as gentle, understanding, sensitive to the needs of others, and 20 typically masculine attributes (e.g. ambitious, self-reliant, independent, assertive, and 20 characteristics that serve as filter items (e.g. truthful, happy, honest). The instrument is a 7 point scale and respondents were required to indicate how well each of the 60 attributes describes her/him. BSRI treats female and male as two independent dimensions rather than the usual two ends of a continuum, thereby enabling a person to indicate whether she/he is high on both dimensions (undifferentiated) or typically masculine/feminine stereotypical.

However, in the study only four scales – feminine, masculine, androgynous and undecided were used instead of the initial seven scales used by Bem.

In addition, 15 final year students who were not involved in the study were requested to explain what they understood by each item. Their responses seem to indicate universal application of the words as there was 96 percent agreement among the raters. The exercise also appears to confirm that the inventory is culture-fair as also indicated by Famojuro (1984) when he used the instrument for Nigerian samples living in United States of America.

The BSRI has been used repeatedly after its construction and enjoys a high reliability and validity coefficient of 0.87 and 0.90 respectively.

The assumptions were that;
1. student counselors will tend to be equigender in their sex-role orientation;
2. there will be no significant gender difference in sex-role orientation among respondents;
3. there will be no significant relationship between socio-economic status and sex-role perception among subjects.

Data Analysis and Findings
Simple percentage and chi-square test were employed to analyze the data generated through the administration of BSRI on the subjects. All findings were held significant at the 0.05 alpha level.

First and foremost the subjects were requested to classify the BSRI items into male and female valued categories. The result was that 42 or 70% of the adjectives were classified as tending towards the masculine pole and as more desirable, while 18 or 20% were classified as female valued and as less desirable.

The male-valued adjectives seem to reflect competency and instrumental cluster of such attributes as being independent, objective, while the female-valued items tend to be socially and person-oriented with such characteristics as being helpful, compassionate and understanding.

The first assumption was that student counsellors will tend to be equigender in their sex-role orientations. The findings are displayed on the table I below.

Table I: Ordinary x^2 test of differences in sex-role orientation among student counsellors

	Feminine	Masculine	Androgynous	Undecided	Total	X^2
Observed	9	12	6	33	60	30.0*
Expected	15	15	15			

* Significant at 0.05; df = 3, critical x^2 = 7.85

Table 1 shows a calculated X^2 value of 30.0 as against a critical X^2 value of 7.82, given 3 degrees of freedom at the 0.05 alpha level. Since the X^2 value is greater than the critical value at the 5 percent level of significance, we reject the hypothesis and conclude that they appear gender differentiated in their sex-role orientation. Although an overwhelming 55% of the subjects were undifferentiated 20% of them were masculine, 15% feminine while the remaining 10% were androgynous.

The second postulation was that there will be no significant gender differences in sex-role orientation among respondents. The findings in relation to the hypothesis are stated on Table II below.

Table II: X^2 test of the relationship between gender and sex-role orientation of respondents

Respondents	Feminine	Masculine	Androgynous	Undecided	Total	DF	X^2
Male	3 (4.20)	7 (5.60)	5 (2.80)	13 (15.40)	28	3	4.87*
Female	6 (4.80)	5 (6.40)	1 (3.20)	20 (17.60)	32		
Total	**9**	**12**	**6**	**33**	**60**		

Expected frequencies are in bracket; * Not significant at 0.05; df = 3; Critical x^2 = 7.82

Table II indicates that the calculated X^2 value is 4.87. At 5 percent confidence level, with 3 degrees of freedom, the critical X^2 value is 7.82. Since the calculated X^2 is less than the critical value, the null hypothesis is upheld. We therefore conclude that gender does not appear to be a significant factor in subjects' sex-role orientation.

Lastly, the third hypothesis states that there will be a significant relationship between parental education and respondents' sex-role orientation. The findings are illustrated on table III below.

Table III: X^2 test of the relationship between gender and sex-role orientation of respondents

Respondents	Feminine	Masculine	Androgynous	Undecided	Total	DF	X^2
No Formal Education	1 (5%)	5 (25%)	2 (10%)	12 (60%)	20	3	NS 4.70
1st School Leaving Certificate	3 (15%)	4 (20%)	1 (5%)	12 (60%)	20		
WASC and above	5 (25%)	3 (15%)	3 (15%)	9 (45%)	20		
Total	**8 (13.33%)**	**12 (20%)**	**6 (10%)**	**33 (55%)**	**60**		

NS = Not significant at 0.05; df = 3; Critical x^2 = 12.59

Evidence from Table III reveals that a calculated X^2 value of 4.70 as against critical X^2 value of 12.59, given 6 degrees of freedom at 0.05 alpha level. Since the calculated X^2 value of 4.70 is less than the critical X^2 value of 12.59, we uphold the hypothesis and conclude that there is no significant relationship between parental level of education and sex-role orientation of student counsellors.

Discussion of Findings

The first assumption was that our subjects will tend to be equigender in their sex-role orientation. With a calculated X^2 value of 30.0 at 3 degrees of freedom and the table value of 7.82, the hypothesis was rejected and we therefore concluded that student counsellors in the study appear to be traditional in their sex-role orientation. Our findings seem to corroborate those of Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz and Vogel (1968; 1970) that clinically trained psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers have been found to employ different standards in the evaluation of mental health for men and women. The present finding also seems to have some bearing with those of Medvine and Collins (1970) which indicated that male school counsellors displayed the most restrictive attitudes.

However, the findings seem to indicate that while 15% and 20% of the adjectives were ascribed to feminine and masculine categories respectively, the majority, 55 percent, were undecided. The last stated finding appears quite interesting and may hold some promise for the future. If without any training in androgynous behaviour among counsellors, as many as 10% were already gender sensitive, and as many as 55 percent, undecided, it is therefore reasonable to assume that with appropriate gender sensitive curriculum for counsellors, and by extrapolation, teacher training curriculum, counsellors and teachers would be adequately prepared to combat sexism among themselves so as to compensate for traditional gender stereotypes among their clients. Yanico (1978) suggested that when counsellors are exposed to and are aware of egalitarian laws, career and educational information, they are likely to become equigender to the extent that the gender of their clients will no longer be a significant factor but their overall self-actualization and fulfillment as they counsel them in all spheres of life.

The findings of data analysis in respect of the second assumption indicated that the gender of student counsellors was not an important factor in their sex-role orientation with a calculated X^2 of 4.87, table X^2 value of 7.82 at 3 degrees of freedom. Male and female respondents appear well represented in each category, 15%, 20% and 10% of the total participants chose the feminine, masculine and androgynous categories respectively. Still supporting our earlier hope, 55% were undecided. The differences in the gender distribution are not too wide suggesting that perhaps sex-role standards are not inborn but learned through symbolic interaction with one's environment, and by implication can also be unlearned (Abe, 1989).

The last finding on the relationship between parental education and sex-role orientation was also not significant. The calculated X^2 value was 4.70 while the critical X^2 value was

12.59 with 3 degrees of freedom at he 0.05 alpha level. Parental education and by implication respondents' socioeconomic status was not a critical factor in their sex-role orientation, just like their gender was also not a significant factor. The two findings are not surprising because it appears that sex-role system may not be based on whether one is male or female, or one comes from a particular social class, but is the core of cultural norms (Chetwyd and Harnett, 1978). The findings also tend to agree with Bem's (1971) thesis that all of us possess a gender schema, and counsellors are no exceptions. As part of the society, it appears the radical and restructuring of women's societal role has often far outstripped the necessary revision in corresponding attitudes and expectations among student counsellors (Epstein, 1970). If this is so, and majority of our samples (55%) are undecided and as many as 10% of them are already androgynous, with appropriate curriculum and desensitization and sensitization, counsellors may be assisted to develop androgynous sex-role standard.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, intervention strategies should be put in place to help counsellor trainees to understand and deal with their own sex biases. These strategies should focus on both the cognitive and affective aspects of bias. Counsellors must not continue to perpetuate the status quo, but should pick up the challenge to become involved in social action against sexism. There is the need for counsellors to become increasingly aware of bias in guidance materials, tests and inventories, and counsellors' bias in interpreting and using these materials. Professional counselling organizations should be in the forefront of the action against sex-role stereotypes, by organizing workshops, seminars and conferences for members.

At the training level, all materials should be evaluated for sex-bias and appropriate gender-fair curriculum put in place. It is hoped that as trainees interact with such curriculum, their traditional sex-role standards will give way to androgynous sex-role orientation. In addition, there is the need for counsellors' renewal in sex equity. It should be noted that sex bias is one form of stereotyping which limits the options of individuals by limiting opportunities and creating psychological barriers to options which exist. Good enough, counselling profession has taken a stand in asking counsellors and counsellor educators to reduce sex-bias and discrimination in counselling (American Personnel and Guidance Association, 1979).

Changes in society require that we look at male and female development and youth preparation for the future roles from systems perspective. Therefore, counsellors should prepare youth for a new age from the view point of male and female development. Sex-role issues affect both women and men, one cannot redefine roles for one category without having a powerful effect on the other. Inequalities in development and opportunity begin in the early years, at home, school and work place, and are reinforced at every stage of development, and through an understanding of an openness to change, counsellors, psychologists, parents and educators can help to reduce the barriers to development and expand life options.

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