

Bibliotherapeutic Influence on Nigerian Female University Students: Self-report on Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors

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This study examines the influence of self-prescribed literature on sex education of female students at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The sample population consists of 303 married, engaged, those in love and those yet to fall in love female students. The analysis of data reveals that they read books specifically on friendship, love, marriage and sex, and other related literature on romance, suspense, adventure, science fiction and true life stories. Furthermore, the results show that the main opportunities of instruction on sex and sexual behavior open to the respondents are books, friends and hardly their teachers and parents. They do recommend similar sources of information to their friends and relations.

Keywords: bibliotherapy, sexual attitudes, sexual behaviors, female students

Introduction

Evidence exists, at least orally, that in some traditional African communities, some forms of guidance and counseling on sex and sexual behavior were given to spouses at the point of getting married and not before that crucial period of their lives. There were specialists who were mainly elderly men and women entrusted with the responsibility for guiding and counseling spouses on the observances, methods and the process of procreation in marriage. Therefore, in such traditional communities, it was not entirely the duty of parents to instruct or counsel their children on the human anatomy, and other expected and unexpected social and cultural attitudes and practices concerning sex. It was, however, the duty of parents to live decently and conduct themselves respectfully before their children. They also vehemently preached to them against immorality as dishonorable act. Essentially, it was partly done to gain and sustain a good family name in the community. A good family name was an invaluable social asset to the entire members of a family.

However, the advent of Western education and modern practices of living would seem to have greatly influenced the process of sex education even in the traditional communities in Nigeria. The newly emerged social and economic patterns of interactions in the traditional communities do not seem to support the communal interactions that had dominated human affairs in the traditional communities. Things have fallen apart and some of the adolescents now undergo a relatively long period of formal education, while some others

* In the evergreen memories of the author's dear academic mentor and the father of reading education in Nigeria—Professor Solomon O. Unoh and the author's colleague and friend—Dr. N. M. Ibudeh (clinical psychologist). They provided the author with the initial materials in the discipline of bibliotherapy.

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are involved in trades that take long period of apprenticeship. These new developments seemed to have resulted in the emergence of a new value system based on the Western social and economic precepts. It seems to have eroded the traditional value system in which the traditional community sex counselors were regarded and consulted and were of tremendous relevance.

Generally, the issue of sex education has received great attention in Nigeria in the form of debates on whether or not to institute sex education in the institutions of learning. The great debates seem to have subsided without a consensus on the status of sex education in Nigerian institutions of learning.

In the seemingly confused situation, in which the traditional institutions have been eroded and in which there has been no functional national policy on sex education, a social reference gap has been avoidably created. In spite of this gap, life has to go on. The adolescents have to grow. The question of where the adolescents turn to for vital information on sex and sexual related issues of love, friendship, marriage and pregnancy lingers on. Perhaps, in this situation, adolescents could turn to other immediate and readily available alternative sources of information, such as books, friends or haphazardly gather information by way of experience in the course of their growth into adulthood. Thus, this study examines whether reading of books exerts any influence on the attitudes and behaviors towards sex and other related issues among female university students in Nigeria.

Review of Related Literature

The important issue of reproductive capacity of the human beings is of great social significance in African communities and was once of central focus of great philosophers and scholars. For instance, as was noted by Akinboye (1984):

The Greek philosophers speculated about certain aspects of puberty which today are called secondary sexual characteristics. Of the 110 characters in Plato's dialogues 12 to 14 are adolescents. Both Aristotle and Plato made references to certain aspects of adolescence, and systematic, developmental patterns were delineated in other early writings... And there is no doubt that many Africans addressed the subject orally as reflected in their traditional practices. For example, circumcision rites, the keeping of youngsters in fertility rooms before marriage and other rituals connected with the menarche in girls indicate the seriousness with which Africans take the issue of puberty. (p. 483)

Different perspectives on human sexuality have been provided by different scholars as shown by Hart (1979) and Collins (1981). Although the perspectives of scholars vary considerably, the undisputable point of convergence, however, is that, though human sexuality has some biological tincture, the human attitudes and behaviors towards sexuality are mediated through social processes in the human ecological system. Therefore, meaningful interpretation of the biological developments taking place in the adolescents which are quite beyond the control or manipulation of the adolescents is capable of producing stress if the adolescents are not given appropriate guidance and counseling. Related to this view, according to Akinboye (1984), the natural developments in the adolescent have definite pressure on him/her and could account for his/her sexual conduct. However, this instinctual life of the individual, if properly mediated by social experience through guidance and counseling, could be channeled into social harmonious expression by the individual concerned.

The point being established here is that a careful analysis of the interaction of biological and social variables as they affect sexual conduct could, to some reasonable extent, provide some insight or explanation to the adolescent's sexual attitude and behavior. Why it may not be quite a difficult problem to explain the biological determinants of sexuality in the Freudian fashion, it would appear hardly possible to account for the social sources of the Nigerian adolescent's sexual attitudes and behaviors in the present situation, in which sex

education is not taught in schools and where it is doubtful if it is at all taught in homes in Nigeria.

Bibliotherapy and Human Behavior

In the modern human society, the new entrants are usually socialized into the culture primarily through interpersonal and mass media processes. In this discussion, our focus is on the influence of the book medium of mass communications on value system acquisition and behavior modification.

The literature on bibliotherapy indicates that the educators, librarians, physicians, psychologists, nurses and the occupational therapists are in consensus that the book exerts tremendous effects on the human spirit and impacts heavily on human behavior. In some instances, the extent of such impact is so gripping and the total of that it is immeasurable. Nenashev's (1987) experience explained this point. According to him, there was neither radio nor television in the village where he grew up. Books were his principal sources of cognition, information and intellectual growth. He could not imagine how the importance of books in a man's life can be exaggerated. Another example that indicates the great impact of books in people's lives was reported by Tonga (1997) as follows:

There was this lady. Everybody thought that she would not have a happy marital life because she did not socialize when she was a spinster. When eventually she got married, she was an example to the ladies in her area. When she was asked how she was able to adjust and cope, she informed her admirers that she picked her experiences from the literature texts she had read when she was a virgin and spinster. (p. 46)

The practice of using books to enrich, modify or change human behavior is known as bibliotherapy. Schrank and Engels (1981) threw light on the origin and use of bibliotherapy as follows:

The ancient Thebans cherish books for their value in adding quality to life through communication, education, contemplation and therapy. Writers usually trace the practice of bibliotherapy to that era and society. Books have been used ever since as primary sources of entertainment, instruction and healing. (p. 143)

Bibliotherapy has been variously defined by many scholars such as Tews (1962), Schrank and Engels (1981), Unoh (1981), Alekseychick (1989), Hynes (1990), Randolph (1993), Aiex (1993), Gladding (1994) and Myracle (1995). For our immediate need here, we will use only the following two definitions:

(1) Bibliotherapy means guided reading that helps individuals gain understanding of the self and environment, learn from others and find solutions to problems. It consists of three fundamental processes between readers and literature: identification, catharsis and insight. Identification begins with an affiliation between a reader and a character (or situation) in a story. This identification may expand one's view of self or reduce one's sense of being different from others. Catharsis takes place when readers share and vicariously experience motivations and conflicts presented in literature. Readers often realize their identifications and thus gain insight into motives of their own behaviors. Insight occurs when readers see themselves in the behaviors described in the reading materials (Schrank & Engels, 1981);

(2) Bibliotherapy can be defined as the use of books to help people solve problems. Bibliotherapy is a family of techniques for structuring interaction between a facilitator and a participant based on mutual sharing of literature (Aiex, 1993).

Bibliotherapeutic intervention may be undertaken for many reasons among which, according to Aiex (1993), are to:

- (1) Develop an individual's self-concept;

- (2) Increase an individual's understanding of human behavior or motivations;
- (3) Foster an individual's honest self-appraisal;
- (4) Provide a way for a person to find interests outside of self;
- (5) Relieve emotional or mental pressure;
- (6) Show an individual that he or she is not the first or only person to encounter such a problem;
- (7) Show the individual that there is more than one solution to a problem;
- (8) Help a person discuss a problem more freely;
- (9) Help an individual plan a constructive course of action to solve a problem.

Schrank and Engles (1981) indicated that:

There is considerable evidence to suggest that bibliotherapy may be an effective practice in effort to modify attitudes. Moreover, this evidence is broadly-based, concerning people and topics throughout the life span and human condition. (p. 143)

Research indicates that bibliotherapy has been used by participants with the aim of improving their level of academic achievement, assertiveness, attitude change, helper effectiveness, marital and couple accord, self-concept, self-development and therapeutic gains (Schrank & Engles, 1981).

The practice of bibliotherapy should be handled with measured care, however, in much the same way in which a professional can carry out a bibliotherapy exercise, an individual can also make a judicious choice of books to effect definite self-determined bibliotherapeutic objectives. This view that an individual can embark on self-book therapy accords with that of Moore and Breland (1962) that:

Just as in the general field of physical medicine, the use of treatments ranges from the self-administered aspirin to the physician-prescribed drug, so also in the field of psychological medicine, books or treatment agents range from self-selected readings of novels and magazines to the carefully, professionally selected books and articles. (p. 227)

Procedures and Methods

The population for this study is made up of undergraduate female students at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. A total number of 500 copies of a validated and pretested questionnaire were administered to the respondents at the three female halls in the university. Of the total number of the copies of the questionnaire returned, 303 copies were found to be usable for this research. The respondents consisted of 45 (14.9%) married; 62 (20.5%) engaged to getting married; 88 (29.0%) who were in love; 46 (15.2%) who are yet to fall in love; and 62 (20.4%) who did not belong to any of the above categories.

A purposive method of sampling was used to ensure that only those who indicated prior interest to participate in the research, by accepting to fill the questionnaire, were used as respondents. It was necessary to adopt the purposive sampling method, because it was discovered during the pilot research that some female students would not accept to fill the questionnaire because according to them, it is asking too intimate questions that need divulging personal and private information.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the respondents were subjected to a simple descriptive statistical analysis of frequency counts and percentages to show the responses to questions and describe the characteristics of respondents collectively.

Results

Importance of Books, Types and the Topics Read

Table 1 is a composite of three items. Firstly, the majority of respondents indicated that the knowledge they acquired from books was of importance to their attitudes and behaviors towards sex and related issues (friendship, love, marriage, sexual inter-course and pregnancy). Secondly, respondents indicated that they read different types of sex related books, such as romance stories, suspense stories, true life stories, adventure stories and science fictions. The major concentration of interest fell on true life stories, 121 (39.9%). Thirdly, the respondents were interested in reading books on friendship, love, marriage, pregnancy control and sexual intercourse. The major concentration of interest falls on topics on friendship and love, 172 (56.8%).

Table 1

Importance of Books, Types and Topics Read

Item of response	Importance of books, types and topics read					
	Very important	Important	Less important	Not important	No response	Total
The importance of books to your knowledge, attitudes and behaviors towards sex and other related issues	110	126	42	20	5	303
	36.3%	41.6%	13.9%	6.6%	1.7%	100%
Types of books read	Romance	Suspense	True life stories	Adventure	Science	Total
	84	34	121	43	21	303
	27.7%	11.2%	39.9%	14.1%	6.9%	100%
Topics of interest read	Pregnancy control	Sexual intercourse	Friendship and love	Marriage	No response	Total
	34	26	172	71	—	303
	11.2%	8.6%	56.8%	23.4%	—	100%

The data in Table 1 establish the fact that the respondents were of the opinion that reading books on sex and other related issues is of importance to their knowledge, attitudes and behaviors towards sex and other related issues; they read romance suspense, true life stories, adventure and science stories; and they were interested in reading themes or topics on friendship, love, marriage, pregnancy control and sexual intercourse.

Information Sources and Their Comparative Relevance on Sex and Other Related Issues (Friendship, Love and Marriage)

The results of data analysis in Table 2 show that books and friends were the major sources of information: 185 (61.1%) followed by parents and teachers and 62 (20.5%) available to the respondents. Respondents were of the view that information from books and other sources are both relevant to their information needs on sex and other sex-related issues. The respondents indicated that the relevance of information from books did not surpass the information from other sources in value and vice-versa.

Perception of the Influence of Books

The results of data analysis in Table 3 indicate that a large number of the respondents agreed/strongly agreed, 120 (39.6%) and 29 (9.6%) respectively, that in reading of books they gained knowledge on how to get involve in sex and other related issues. While 79 (26.1%) and 66 (21.8%) strongly disagreed/disagreed respectively that they have been influenced by the books they read. However, as it is further shown in Table 3, a large proportion of the respondents has been positively influenced 105 (34.7%) and a relatively large

proportion has both been positively and negatively influence 99 (33.7%), while 82 (27.1%) has had no form of influence from the reading of books. The result of data analysis in Table 3 indicates that the respondents were divided on the two items of how knowledge gained from books influenced involvement in sex and other sex related issues and on the nature of the influence. It is however, obvious from Table 3 that books could exert positive and negative influences on the readers.

Table 2

Information Sources and Their Comparative Relevance

Item of response	Information sources and their comparative relevance					
Information sources on attitudes and behaviors towards sex and related issues	Parents & teachers	Books & parents	Friends & teacher	Books & friends	Other sources	Total
	62	15	30	185	11	303
	20.5%	14.9%	9.9%	61.1%	3.6%	100%
Information from books is more relevant than other sources	Strongly agree	Agreed	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response	Total
	23	110	110	39	21	303
	7.6%	36.3%	36.3%	12.9%	6.9%	100%

Table 3

Perception of the Influence of Books by Respondents

Item of response	Perception of influence of books					
Knowledge gained of how to be involved in sex and other related issues	Strongly agree	Agreed	Strongly disagree	Disagree	No response	Total
	29	120	79	66	9	303
	9.6%	39.6%	26.1%	21.8%	3.0%	100%
Nature of the influence of books	Positive	Negative	Negative & positive	None of the above	No response	Total
	105	11	99	82	6	303
	34.7%	3.6%	32.7%	27.1%	2.0%	100%

Social Mobility Skills Gained From Books

Respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they have gained some skills that enabled them to relate well with members of the opposite sex through reading books. Data in Table 4 show that a very large proportion of the respondents 49 (16.2%) and 122 (40.3%) respectively, indicate that they gained some social mobility skills and that they relate well with members of the opposite sex, 204 (67.3%).

Utilization of Knowledge Gained by Reading Books on Sex and Other Related Issues

Respondents were asked to indicate the use to which they have put the knowledge gained by reading books on sex and other related issues (see Table 5). The data analysis indicates that 203 (67.0%) of the respondents have been able to avoid unwanted pregnancies. Out of the respondents, 132 (43.6%) indicate that they have frequently been able to avoid unwanted pregnancies, while 51 (16.8%) were not able to.

On the question of the likelihood of misapplication of the knowledge gained, an overwhelming majority of the respondents, 138 (45.5%) and 95 (31.4%) disagreed/ strongly disagreed respectively that they would misuse such knowledge. It is right to suggest based on the results of data analysis in Table 5 that the respondents have had some bibliotherapeutic gains.

Table 4

Benefits by Reading Books on Sex and Related Issues

Item of response	Benefits by reading books					Total
	Yes	No		No response		
Benefited from books	214	59		30		303
	70.6%	19.5%		9.9%		100%
Development of social mobility skills through reading of books	Very large extent	Large extent	Small extent	Very small extent	No response	Total
	49	122	52	14	66	303
	16.2%	40.3%	17.2%	4.6%	21.8%	100%
Relating well with members of the opposite sex	Yes	No		No response		Total
	204	58		41		303
	67.3%	19.1%		13.5%		100%

Table 5

Utilization of Knowledge Gained From Books on Sex and Related Issues

Item of response	Utilization of knowledge gained by					Total
	Yes	No	No response			
Avoidance of unwanted pregnancy	203	31	69			303
	67.0%	10.3%	22.8%			100%
Frequency of avoidance of unwanted pregnancy	Frequently	Not frequently	No response			Total
	132	51	120			303
	43.6%	16.8%	39.6%			100%
Likelihood of misapplication of knowledge gained by reading books on sex	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response	Total
	12	39	138	95	19	303
	4.0%	12.9%	45.5%	31.4%	6.3%	100%

Patterns of Book Recommendation by Respondents

When asked to recommend to relations and friends the sex-related literature they had benefited from reading, 136 (44.8%) recommended romance and true life stories. Another 121 (39.9%) recommended books on friendship, love, marriage and sex, while other types of books received their share of recommendation (see Table 6).

Table 6

Patterns of Book Recommendation by Respondents

Types of books	Patterns of recommend books	
(A) Books on friendship love marriage & sex	A & B	121 (40.0%)
(B) Romance stories	B & F	136 (44.8%)
(C) Suspense stories	C & D	22 (7.3%)
(D) Adventure stories	D & E	24 (7.9%)
(E) Science fictions	E & D	(See D & E)
(F) True life stories	F & B	(See B & F)
Total No. of respondents		303 (100%)

Discussion

It is evident from the study that the reading of books exerts therapeutic influence on the female university students. The study indicates the importance of the influence of books on the knowledge, attitudes and behaviors towards sex and other related issues like friendship, love, marriage and pregnancy of the university students. Furthermore, the study reveals that female university students read real life, romance, adventure stories and science fictions on sex and other related issues concerning their gender and relating to the opposite sex.

The major sources of information on sex education for female university students are books and their friends. However, data analysis indicates that the information from books and friends was not in any way more relevant to female university students than the information from other sources.

Through exposure to bibliotherapeutic literature, they gained some perspectives and social mobility skills which enabled them to deal competently with the members of the opposite sex. It is also evident from the results of the study that the reading of literature on sex and other related issues also exerts negative influences on the readers. The implication of this is that the reading of literature can also exert some psychological abnormalities on the readers. Therefore, care must be taken in the selection of literature for behavior modification by female university students. Jake's (2005) seven points are relevant here and are worth thinking about when selecting literary resources, how well does the book help with: (1) fostering personal insight; (2) triggering emotional catharsis; (3) assisting with solving problems; (4) altering the ways in which clients act; (5) promoting satisfying relationships with peers; (6) providing information about shared problems; and (7) providing a good quality recreation experience.

Conclusions

Bibliotherapy can bring about attitude and behavior changes. While some books can morally and spiritually elevate, some other books can be morally and spiritually destructive. Therefore, bibliotherapy as a programme of selected activity involving reading materials, should be planned, conducted and controlled under the guidance of a professional or carried out by a mature person and/or a well self-directed individual, for the treatment of emotional and other problems.

Since the female university students mainly carried out self-administered bibliotherapy, it is pertinent that a judicious choice of literature is made in order to ensure that beneficial and non-counterproductive results are obtained from such bibliotherapy programmes.

Recommendations

The findings of this study point to the absolute need for a national policy on sex education in Nigerian educational institutions. Parents should be concerned to discuss sex and other issues with their children, at least to provide the initial information on the challenges of growing up and becoming young adults in a turbulent social-economic, political and cultural environment that is faced with serious problems of national value system and strong western institutions and precepts.

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