

Romanticism and Gender Identity as Predictors of Sexual Behaviours among Undergraduate Students in a Nigerian University

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ABSTRACT The study examined the effects of romanticism and gender identity on the occurrences of sexual behavior among 400 undergraduate students of Delta State University, Nigeria. Two valid scales were responded to by the participants. The Pearson correlation, Multiple Regression and t-test procedures were used to investigate the predictive capacity of the independent variables on the dependent variables. The result indicated that independent variables, when taken together and individually were effective predictors to the sexual behavior of undergraduate students. It was suggested that Sex Education is required with an in- depth understanding of the functionality of the romanticism and gender, to enable students become more knowledgeable, and understanding of their sex, gender, sexual health and sexual relationships and related issues for the adequate development of a proper sexual behavior.

INTRODUCTION

As the universal term “sex” is gradually becoming a language for all without inhibitions, sexual activities among individuals, particularly among students in the university is gradually becoming a common and acceptable occurrence. In the last several decades, it has been observed that there has been substantial increase in the proportion of undergraduate students who report sexual activity while at school. Reports of Odewole (2000) and Omoteso (2003) reported sexual activities as kissing, hugging, genital fondling as well as sexual intercourse among the undergraduate students they studied. The trend has since been traced to having begun in a more liberal form during the adolescent years as reported in several studies (Owuamanam 1995; Unuigbe and Ogbeide 1999; Ugoji 2008), with initial sexual intercourse experiences occurring at that time of growth. This current trend is a far cry from cultural values in time past when various taboos were created around pre-marital sex and the virginity of a girl until she got married. Hence, it is little wonder that sexual behavior, particularly among undergraduate students, is worrisome.

Obviously there are consequences associated with this behavior that places the students at risk. Some of these include the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STI's), HIV, gynaecological problems, substantial interval of risk for non-marital pregnancy and unwanted pregnancy as well as increase in the number of abandoned

babies. This creates a dilapidated environment with chaotic and decaying values in addition to fostering eradication of a supposedly useful population. In an attempt to curtail this change in sexual behavior among students, studies have tried to identify etymological factors responsible for its occurrence such as the family background, parental marital status, religion, media, age, gender and peers. According to Akinleye and Onifade (1996), Odewole (2000), Omoteso (2006) and Ugoji (2008), the trend of sexual behavior among students could be due to erosion of various custom and observances as well as factors associated with rapid urbanization and other factors such as family background, peer pressure, media influence, economic situations and educational background of parents. It is, however, the prevalence of this sexual trend among students that prompts this study to decipher if romanticism and gender identity could be a facilitator of sexual behavior among university students.

Romanticism and Sexual Behavior

Romanticism is a concept that has widely been discussed in both academic and non- academic context particularly in the western world, though little or nothing is known of it in this region. According to Spanier (1972), romanticism is a general disposition an individual has toward love, marriage, the family and with relationships involving male-female interaction in which the

affective component is regarded as primary and all other considerations are excluded from conscious reflection. Every individual anticipates a happy marital and blissful life such that the involvement in any relationship calls for romantic expectations. In this regard Sprecher and Metts (1999) aver that when a relationship is considered to be or has the potential to become romantic, the subset of expectations and beliefs that constitute the romantic ideal is likely to become salient. They added that although the specific descriptions vary, beliefs associated with the romantic ideal typically include the centrality of love as a basis for marriage, the belief that love at first sight is possible, that there can be only one true love, that true love lasts forever, and that love can overcome all obstacles (Sprecher and Metts 1999). These assumptions are often not true.

It should be noted that while these romantic beliefs can be important influences on initial attraction and important resources for coordinating early stages of relationship development (Knee 1998), romanticism or romantic beliefs could be considered dysfunctional and misleading. There is a significant difference between the ideal and the real. The ideal is usually not realistically practicable and needs to be interwoven with the real. In this case, romanticism which is an idealistic view is not realistic. Romanticism is characterized by idealization of the partner, extrapolation of the relationship into the far future, incorporation of romantic fantasies, and a nostalgic valuation of the specialness of the moment.

The female expects male attentiveness as a sign of his devotion, and the male must know how to sustain "ideal love" in order to keep romanticism alive. It tends to make the individual generate positive illusions in their expectation in relationships. In such a situation, the romanticized individual is easily seduced into committing all into the relationship, not considering how intricately committed the other partner is or the stability of the relationship. The frequency of sexual intercourse in such relationship maybe high with all forms of risks involved. Consequently, it is often a common feature to see students in the university co-habiting and engaging freely in sexual relations in a type of pseudo-marital pattern within the campus. The end of such a relationship is often disheartening and depressive for the romanticized partner as the relationship may reach a point of disillusionment where the idealization of each partner breaks down.

Experiencing feelings of romantic love or fantasizing about love, marriage, and parenthood is natural particularly among students. Scott (1983) reported that teens often romanticize their love relationships, sometimes displaying a need to have someone depend upon them or someone to love and protect. Buchholz and Gol (1986) found that most adolescent females romanticize that their boyfriends will fulfill most of their dreams. Nevertheless, there is little research on students' attitude towards love, romance, and romanticism (Scott 1983; Medora et al. 1994). It could be argued that the characteristics of those with strong romantic beliefs may bolster the ability and willingness to engage in sexual activities without hesitation. This study would attempt to establish whether there is relatedness between romanticism and sexual behaviour of students.

Gender Identity and Sexual Behavior

It is pertinent to note that society prescribes arbitrary gender role on how one is supposed to and not supposed to dress, act, think, feel, and relate to others, think of oneself, and so on, based on one's sex. These gender roles are called feminine and masculine. Gender is constructed from a variety of sources and older peers played a particularly important role in sustaining these beliefs and behavior. However, while this typology is not intended for generalization, it does highlight major differences in the attitude and behavior of young males and females that are evident, to some degree, in all settings, and can be adapted in other settings as well. Likewise, a number of case studies in diverse settings have highlighted the extent to which the context defining the formation of sexual partnerships between young people is gender-specific.

For instance, Jadack et al. (1995) reported that men engage in significantly more risky sexual behavior than women, more men reported that intercourse without a condom occurred in unplanned, spontaneous situations, while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or with a person not well known. More women reported that intercourse without a condom occurred in long-term relationships. Women were significantly more comfortable abstaining from sexual intercourse and asking partners about their sexual history while men were significantly more comfortable buying condoms. Gender roles help to explain why men are willing to take more risks, and in

what situations risk taking is apt to occur (Jadack et al. 1995).

One case study among adolescents attending reproductive health services in two hospitals in Argentina reports the widespread belief that male “sexual urges” are uncontrollable, and consequently explain the greater “need” that men have for casual sexual relations (Pantelides 1991). WHO (1993) reported that 43% of girls and 67% boys aged between 14 and 19 years were sexually active. In the studies of Carpenter (2000), Koenig (2000), Sanders and Reinisch (2001), Shearer et al. (2005), it was reported that young men surveyed were more likely than women to report sexual experience. Therefore, this study is an advancement in the linkage between gender and sexual behaviors particularly as it affects students in the university.

Research Question

The following research questions were raised to guide the study

1. Is there any significant relationship among romanticism, gender identity and sexual behaviors of undergraduate students?
2. What are the combined effects of romanticism and gender identity on sexual behavior of undergraduate students?
3. What are the relative contributive effects of romanticism and gender identity on sexual behavior of undergraduate students?

RESEARCH METHOD

The study employs the descriptive survey design to determine the practical variation between the variables chosen for the study.

Sample

Four hundred participants were selected for the study. The participants were all in school and currently admitted students in the Delta State University, Delta state, Nigeria. The participants were selected using the simple random sampling technique. The participants were aged between 19-28 and with a mean age of 24.7.

Instrument

Romanticism Scale: The study utilized a modernized version of the 32 items Dean

Romanticism Scale (Dean 1961) which was used to measure romanticism. The modernized version of DRS contains 20 items, each scored on a Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The individual scores for each of the 20 items were summed to obtain a total romanticism score (range = 20-100). Higher scores signify a higher degree of romanticism. Dean (1961) reported good split-half reliability ($r = .90$) and good content validity for the DRS. The modernized version when validated reported a Cronbach alpha of 0.87 indicating an effective reliability.

Sexual Behavior Scale: The Sexual Behavior Scale (SBS) is also self-developed. The scale is a 15-item scale structured in a 5-point likert format with scores ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Scores range from 15-75, with increasing scores indicating high risk sexual behavior and conversely for lower scores. This scale has demonstrated satisfactory validity and reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .78

Procedure

After selecting the participants for the study and their consent provided, the researcher with the assistance of two other research assistants administered and collected the completed questionnaires from the participants within three days. In this manner, a 100% percent return of the questionnaires was attained for the study.

Data Analysis

To determine relationship among the variables the Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics was used. The combined and relative effects of the independent variables on the dependent variables were determined using the Multiple Regression statistical procedure.

RESULTS

Research Question 1

1. Is there any significant relationship among romanticism, gender identity and sexual behaviors of undergraduate students?
The result in Table 1 shows that the variables tested in the study are all well correlated.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics and correlation among variables

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Sexual behavior</i>	<i>Romanticism</i>	<i>Gender-identity</i>
Sexual behavior	1.000		
Romanticism	.518	1.000	
Gender identity	.442	.479	1.000

Research Question 2

2. What are the combined effects of romanticism and gender identity on sexual behavior of undergraduate students?

Going by the result presented in Table 2, the two independent variables made a joint contribution to the prediction of sexual behavior of undergraduate students. The result of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) that was done using multiple regressions produced an F-ratio value of 52.5587 which was significant at 0.05 Alpha levels.

Research Question 3

3. What are the relative contributive effects of romanticism and gender identity on sexual behavior of undergraduate students?

From the result presented in Table 3, the two variables contributed significantly to the prediction of sexual behavior among undergraduate students. The t observed for each of the variables attest to this verity significant at 0.05.

DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows that romanticism and gender factors are directly related to the sexual behaviors of the participants. This indicates that the occurrences of forms of sexual behaviors among students are associated with their gender factor and their romantic beliefs. The result in Table 2 shows that the combination of the two variables produced a multiple regression $r = .558$ and an r squared of .311. This also indicates that the combination of these variables accounted for 31.1% of the sexual behaviors of participating students. The result is further affirmed with an F-ratio 52.5587 significant at 0.05 Alpha levels.

The result of Table 3 further disclosed that of the two variables tested, romanticism appeared to be the better predictor of sexual behavior. Sequel to the fact that the concept of romanticism is a new one to this region the result comes as a surprise, though it is expected that the romantic belief held by an individual may to a large extent determine the individuals' pattern of sexual behavior. Considering the characterization of romanticism, that is the idealization of the partner, extrapolation of the relationship into the far future, incorporation of romantic fantasies, and a nostalgic valuation of the specialness of the moment, that the frequency of sexual intercourse and related risk would be associated comes with high probability.

Another probable explanation is seen from the socio-cultural view of relationships particu-

Table 2: Summary of regression analysis between predictor variables and sexual behavior

R = .558

R² = .311

Adj R² = .309

std. error Estimate = 18.87

<i>Source of variation</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sum of squares</i>	<i>Mean s square</i>	<i>F-ratio</i>	<i>P</i>
Regression	2	14880.24	6516.747	52.5587	.05
Residual	236	33470.95	123.990		
Total	239	48351.19			

Table 3: Relative Contribution of the independent variables to the prediction of sexual behavior among undergraduate students

<i>Predictor</i>	<i>Unstandardised coefficient</i>		<i>Standardized coefficients</i>	<i>t-ratio</i>	<i>P</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SEB</i>	<i>Beta (β)</i>		
Constant	20.904	.5.634			.05
Gender identity	.278	.163	.111	1.705	
Romanticism	.103	.045	.146	2.284	

larly the heterosexual relationships. Students on campuses while engaging in a relationship at all cost attempts to reproduce a kind of pseudo-marital life style. This sort of engagement is believed to involve fidelity, trustworthiness, honesty, and a prospective future. When a partner is romanticized, all forms of restrictions and cautions towards sexual behaviors are relaxed as need to love and be loved increases, the frequency of sexual intercourse increases with the intention of strengthening the relationship, accruing to the prospects of risky consequences of STD/HIV, unwanted pregnancy and so on.

Gender factors also revealed predictiveness for the occurrence of sexual behavior among the participants. The finding gains support from works of Peterson and Zill (1986), Demo and Acock (1988), Dawson (1991), Achenbach et al. (1991), and Blake et al. (2001). A possible explanation for the current finding is not far-fetched for a society as ours. It is often difficult to dissociate the individual gender from societal sex stereotypes. Societal expectations describe males as widely perceived to needing sexual experience and a variety of partners while it is the contrary for women. It is believed that young men often sought justifications from related others for their risky and violent behavior. Thus, sexual coercion is often followed by intensive peer consultations and reinforced coercive and risky behavior. This coercion would range from teasing or making lewd/obscene comments to attempted rape. This behavior could be said to be reinforced by the young men's notion from societal expectations that a 'real' man had multiple sexual partners. As such, this stereotypic view of gender and expected sexual behavior could be the possible explanation for gender factor predictiveness for sexual behavior among students.

CONCLUSION

The study has shown that romanticism and gender factors largely play an important role in determining the sexual behavior students engage in. This is evidence that the trend of sexual behavior engaged by student can be regulated with an in-depth understanding of the functionality of the romanticism and gender. For this study, romanticism has been described as a dysfunctional attribute which portrays an individual to recline to a perception of the ideal hence quickening the rate of unguarded and risky sexual

behavior in an intense, romantic relationship. The romanticized individual is often at risk of contacting STD/HIV as well as being psychologically tortured when such relationship does not last.

RECOMMENDATION

It is therefore imperative for counseling psychologist and related others who deal with student's relationship and welfare to utilize the understanding of the concept to assist students develop proper sexual behavior, particularly in romantic relationships. At this juncture, the importance of sex education cannot be overemphasized. Sex education is required to enable students become more knowledgeable, understanding of their sex, gender, sexual health and sexual related issues for the adequate development of a proper sexual behavior.

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