

Gender Counseling and Mainstreaming in Human Communication and Development

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Abstract

This article explores dynamics of gender Counseling and Mainstreaming in human environment and development. It examines aspects of sexual orientation, gender rights, equality and diversity in human communication and development. The contention of the article is that there are unique social perspectives and differences between women and men which lies in the fact that babies are born girls and boys learn how they are expected to think and behave as women and men. This differs from one culture and society to another, changes over time, and defines who has power and influences over what. This is what many come to embrace as they grow up through proper guidance and counseling. These are dynamics that need to be observed in order to create egalitarian society. There is need to incorporate positive gender perspectives into the planning processes of all ministries and departments of government, particularly those concerned with macroeconomic and development planning, personnel policies and management, and legal and constitutional affairs including the administration of justice.

Key words: Nigeria, Gender, Counseling, mainstreaming, communication and development

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Introduction

Gender and communication is a vital area in the communication discipline in which the focus is on how verbal and non – verbal communication affect and are affected by gender. One of the common misconceptions about gender and communication is that it is viewed as the study of differences in the way men and women communicate. Gender communication is a specialization of the communication field that focuses on the ways, we as gendered beings, communicate. Society assumed gender roles and interpersonal differences can contribute meaningfully to the communication gap between the sexes. Men and women have assigned roles in society that triggers the gender divide. Therefore, it is important to remember, however, that not all biologically able bodied man and women fit into a labeled category of effective gender communication.

Gender communication applies to a variety of interpersonal, organizational and mass communication which is particularly adopted for exploring the impact of gender in human communication. Gender communication tends to explore gender in the above context, thus helping to redefine how gender is understood and conceived.

Gender communication also focuses on communication of information on gender in relation to disability; the aged; violence against women and men. And also relates information on gender in relation to their economic, health, education, conflict and emergencies, opportunities, rural livelihoods; infrastructure, governance as well as their rights, equality and diversity.

Counseling is conceptualized in this context to mean: a process and a supportive relationship between the professional counselor and the client. As a process the counselor expresses care and concern towards the gender who is a perpetrator and in need assistance for attitudinal and behavioral change; and the victim of gender violence. As a supportive relationship, the client in their gender form is helped by the counselor through a systematic process to cope or with adjust to aspect of their lives that relates to their gender that are being considered as maladaptive.

The goal of gender counseling is to create an enabling environment of trust where the client in their gender forms, learn more about their thoughts, feelings their lives and action that will help to resolve gender crisis as experienced by either an individual (as in individual gender counseling) or by people of the same gender, experiencing same problem (as in group gender counseling).

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Statement of the Problem

Gender is a concept that refers to a system of roles and relationships between women and men that are determined by the political, economic, social and cultural context rather than by biology. One's biological sex is naturally given while gender, on the other hand, is socially constructed. They simply relates to 'appropriate' behaviour and attitudes, roles and activities, expectations and desires expressed by men and women. It is this learned behaviour that makes up women's and men's gender identity and determines their gender roles. In some climes, recent gender analysis reveals the emergence of female disadvantage in certain areas, especially the girl child (for example in educational attainment and access to health care). Where this occurs, a gendered approach can ensure that interventions address these inequalities appropriately.

In most parts of the world, women are disadvantaged. Therefore, since this review article is intended to advance gender equality and equity, much of its analysis focuses specifically on ways to improve women's standing in the information sector. How are gender roles manifested in the social construct and what are the implications for women and men? Four areas are addressed: work, global resources and benefits, human rights and religion. In all these areas, women are disadvantaged in various ways in many countries of the world.

Objectives or Research Question

Objectivity is often held up as the main principle of journalism.

1. To determine how the assumption of objectivity find expression by individual communicators socialized into accepting unequal relationships between men and women in gender differentiation
2. To understand the importance of raising gender awareness among writers, reporters, editors and all those involved in the creative process.
3. To determine the critical areas to target which are language, stereotyping and awareness creation.
4. To communicate gender equality to journalist and other media practitioners to observe the ways that people may be marginalized because of their gender as well as race/ethnicity, class/caste, age and other such factors.

Review of Related Literature

Gender differences are linked to power and influence in the mainstream media. Over 400 women communicators from 80 countries called the media "a male-dominated tool used by those in power," (Bangkok Declaration, 1994). According to the 1995 Global Media Monitoring Project, "it is evident that gender differences are linked to power and influence," and "news gathering and news reporting are rooted in a value system which accords higher status to men and 'the masculine'." The way the world is portrayed on television "serves to maintain entrenched power imbalances," and "this fits into a long history of the use of public displays of violence to maintain rankings of domination ..." (Eisler, 1996). News, for example, is more often being presented *by* women but it is still very rarely *about* women. According to the 1995 Global Media Monitoring Project, women comprised 43 per cent of journalists but only 17 per cent of those interviewed as experts or opinion makers.

Studies suggest that the presence of more women journalists and female experts voicing opinions in the media would create "significant role models for other women, stimulate female interest in public issues, and – perhaps – sometimes speak in the interests of and for women" (Sreberny- Mohammadi, 1994). Another solution is for the media to shift attention away from the traditional 'power' perspectives with respect to the top echelons of

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politics, government and business, and focus more on aspects that are more inclusive of women. This is not to suggest an abandonment of power and influence, but rather that the media broaden their horizons and seek greater inclusiveness and diversity in their reporting.

Most regions have seen a steady growth in the numbers, range and scope of women working in mainstream media, but women are much more likely to be concentrated in administrative than in the other occupational categories (i.e., production/editorial, design, and technical). Of all the women working in media, some 50 per cent are located in administration in contrast to five per cent on average in the technical field (Gallagher and von Euler, 1995). Women still lack the power to develop media policy, or to determine the nature and shape of media content. This is so even in North America, where a dramatic increase has been noted in women-owned media and in women's organizations working on media representation issues. Women's average share of posts at the top three levels of management is below 20 per cent in all media and all regions except for broadcasting in Latin America. Women are also a minority in the committees and boards that define and shape policy, holding just 12 per cent of these positions in broadcasting, and 9 per cent in the press.

Despite the general upward trend in their numbers and visibility women also drop out at a greater rate than men. The most commonly reported obstacle to career development reported by women is that of male attitudes. Women are constantly judged by male standards and performance criteria of what constitutes news and who constitutes a newsmaker, a gender bias which leads to discrimination in the awarding of assignments: many women journalists report being denied approval to cover beats such as science and technology, politics and economics. Women are also confronted by social disapproval since the critical, independent, assertive and self-assured approach required of journalists often runs counter to cultural norms for women.

Many scholars agree that greater involvement by women in both the technical and decision-making areas of communication and media would improve both the content of media coverage and the context in which women journalists work. Gender-based stereotyping can be found in public and private, local, national and international media organizations – electronic, print, visual and audio. The media is often criticized for perpetuating images that reduce women to sex objects, and for promoting violence against women as 'entertainment'. Degrading images negatively affect women and distort men's attitudes towards women and children by fixing them.

According to Abella. M. I; 2003, Diversity and complexity of gender issues and their societal importance, there is need for mainstreaming gender issues in all facets of human and national development including education, agriculture, security, HIV/AIDs programmes, health, entrepreneurial trainings, Non-governmental organizations, science and technology, public services, trade and industry, advocacy, household and community programmes, information technology, finance and governance.

Gender

Gender is a term used to refer to socially constructed characteristics that define and relate to male and female ways of being and behaviour within specific contexts. Gender also refers to the web of cultural symbols, normative concepts, institutional structures and internalized self-images which through a process of social construction, define masculine and feminine roles and articulate these roles within power relationships.

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Gender Diversity

Gender-blind– ignores the different socially determined roles, responsibilities and capabilities of men and women. It is based on information derived from men’s activities and/or assumes those affected by the policy have the same (male) needs and interests.

Gender-neutral– is not specifically aimed at either men or women but it is assumed to affect both sexes equally. However, it may actually be gender blind.

Gender- specific– recognizes gender differences and targets either men or women, within existing roles and responsibilities.

Gender-redistributive – Seeks to change the distribution of power and resources in the interests of gender equality.

Gender analysis - This involves analyzing the status of women vis-à-vis men in any sector and examining the impact on women and men of information and communications policy.

LGBTQIA+

LGBTQIA+ is an acronym that has evolved in recent years. It is inclusive of the spectrum of sexual orientation and gender identities in the context of Nigerian culture and tradition. This category of gender or sexual orientation is considered a ‘taboo’ with a 14 – year sentence imprisonment as passed into law by the Nigerian legislative arm of government. In the western world, the same class of gender enjoys the same freedom of the association, equal right and equality as those who do not belong to this category. Gender counseling is also of utmost importance to this category of persons.

Letter ‘L’ of LGBTQIA+ refers to Lesbian, a woman who is sexually or emotionally attracted to other women.

Letter ‘G’ is an abbreviation of Gay was a name ascribed to a man who is sexually attracted to a fellow man. In recent times, the word Gay refers to anyone who is sexually attracted to the same gender.

Letter ‘B’ in an abbreviation for Bisexual. A bisexual is sexually and emotionally attracted to both gender (male and female). Such a person has more than one gender identity.

Letter ‘T’ of LGBTQIA+ in an abbreviation of Transgender, used to described an individual whose gender identity or expression differs from what in expected of him/her based on the sex he/she was assigned at birth. For example, a child, born as a male child grows up to express the personality traits of a female (a behaviour, dressing pattern and socialization) a transgender, after transition to what they feel, they choose to be addressed as what they feel they are, dropping their names and identities at birth and taking on names that fits their new status.

Letter ‘Q’ of LGBTQIA+ is an abbreviation of the word Queer, a broad term used for anybody who is not straight or considered as Cisgender, Cisgender are people whose gender identities and expression match the sex they were assigned at birth.

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Letter ‘I’ refers to people who are classified as intersex. These are a very rare class of people, yet they exist amongst the living. An intersex, does not fit the typical definition of male or female as they possess both reproductive organs. This deficiency is caused by genetics, hormonal or anatomical differences or imbalance. Their sexual orientation or gender identity is linked to the sex organ whose personality traits are highly expressed above the other sex organ.

Letter ‘A’ in LGBTQIA+ is an abbreviation which represent two concepts of gender abnormality requiring gender counseling. Its first meaning in Asexual. People who are identified as asexual experience, neither do they have the urge for sex. The second meaning is ‘Ally’. This category of persons is identified as Cisgender yet very supportive of social and legal equality of LGBTQIA+.

The + (plus) sign ends the acronym LGBTQIA+ encompasses other sexual orientations that are not listed in LGBTQIA (example; Pansexual, dermis sexual, among others).

Methodology

The article is a review article and mostly used secondary sources of data, information and literature for drawing rationale conclusions.

Gender Counselling

Gender counseling is the provision of professional assistance and guidance in resolving personal and psychological and social problems, they relate to gender issues. Counseling is conceptualized in this context to mean: a process of a supportive relationship between the professional counselor who expresses care and concern towards the gender who is a perpetrator and in need of association for attitudinal and behavioural change and the victim of gender violence. As a supportive relationship, the clients in their gender form are helped by the counselor through a systematic process to cope with or adjust aspects of their lives that relate to their gender that are being considered as maladaptive.

The goal of gender counseling is to create an enabling environment of trust where the clients, their gender forms, learn more about their thoughts, feelings, their lives and actions that will help to resolves gender crisis as experienced by either an individual or by people of the same gender experiencing same problem (as in group gender counselling) [D’Alconza et al; 2003]. Gender counselling is a psychological therapy that communicates important information on gender in relation to disability; indigenous people; older people and violence against women and men. Guidance and counselling also keep the gender informed in relation to economics, health, education, conflict and emergencies, rural livelihoods opportunities, infrastructure and governance.

Gender Mainstreaming

Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. (Government of Indonesia Statement 2000), It is a strategy for making women as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally.

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The gender mainstreaming approach focuses on the fact that women and men have different life courses and that development policies affect them differently. It addresses these differences by mainstreaming gender into development planning at all levels and in all sectors, focusing less on providing equal treatment for men and women (since equal treatment does not necessarily result in equal outcomes). (Government of the Republic of the Philippines statement 200), Gender mainstreaming focuses more on taking whatever steps are necessary to ensure equal outcomes. It recognizes the fact that the empowerment of women can only be achieved by taking into account the relationships between women and men.

According to Effiom and Jacks (2019), No nation can toy with the education of the girl child because of the saying that if you educate a woman, you educate a nation. This term may be conceptualized into different ways: on the one hand, it is an integrationist strategy which implies that gender issues are addressed within the existing development policy, strategies and priorities. Hence, gender concerns should be appropriately integrated where applicable. On the other hand, mainstreaming also implies agenda-setting, which denotes the transformation of existing development agenda using a gendered perspective. These two concepts are not exclusive and actually work best in combination.

The Gender Mainstreaming System (GMS), where adopted, provides a comprehensive system for mainstreaming gender. It addresses the policy context, structural and cultural issues within government or other institutions, and the requirements for effective gender analysis and planning. The Gender Mainstreaming Strategy involves working with a wide variety of stakeholders in government and civil society who pilot the processes of gender in development.

Mainstreaming Gender in Development Process

The strategy of gender mainstreaming is aim at transforming a ‘mainstream’ at all levels to end gender discrimination. Women in Development (WID), and Gender and Development (GAD) refer to two essentially different approaches to development. A woman in Development is based on the assumption that women are ‘left out’ of development, and need special projects to ‘integrate’ them. Gender relations and power inequalities are not addressed, and women’s participation is often passive (Hugo.G; 2003). Gender and Development is based on gender analysis and sees gender equality as a fundamental development goal, with women’s empowerment and agency as key features of the development strategy.

Gender differences can also result in men being disadvantaged. For example, the phenomenon of male under-achievement in Caribbean education systems is beyond the scope of the WID approach, but can be addressed through a gender-awareness approach to development (CATW; February 2002). Tracking gender equality in sector-specific data makes it possible to compare the positions of women and men in relation to, for example, health, education, family structures, the labour market and earnings/income. Appropriate policy interventions and mainstreaming can be made to promote gender equality and equity.

The Women in Development approach began with an acceptance of existing social structures and focused on how women could be better integrated into existing development initiatives by targeting women’s productive work and not their reproductive work (Human Right training for UN Agencies 2003), This approach was characterized by income-generating projects for women that did not address the causes of gender inequality. It tended to view women as passive recipients of development assistance, rather than as active agents in transforming their own realities. Women’s concerns were viewed in isolation, and so marginalized.

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The Commonwealth Plan of Action summarizes the shift of focus from Women in Development (WID) to Gender and Development (GAD) as follows:

- i. Women in Development policies aim to integrate women into existing structures and address women's specific needs and concerns. The focus is on how women must change to fit into an essentially 'man made' world.
- ii. Gender and Development, on the other hand, seeks to integrate gender awareness and competence into mainstream development to account for the different life courses and different impacts of development policies on women and men. It emphasizes that development activities may affect women and men differently and calls for appropriate 'gender planning' to address them. It also calls attention to 'outcomes', and the need to take the necessary steps to ensure that the resulting conditions and outcomes are equitable, rather than being preoccupied with giving only identical treatment.
- iii. In summary, the Gender and Development approach focuses not only on the differences between men and women but on the inequalities that emanate from these differences: women and their allotted roles have been historically undervalued and continue to be so up to the present time. Hence the need to fully mainstream gender into all facets of human and national development through enhanced gender and human communication and counselling.

Strategies / Skills

- Organizing Counseling programmes in schools that will enhance the student's assertive behaviour
- Organizing group gender counseling interventions for adolescents of same gender who may be experiencing the same problems.
- Enhancement of information group procedures.
- Making referrals for individuals with gender sensitive problems.
- Organization of programmes with financial management strategy.
- Organization of programmes using psychological tests to enhance cognitive behaviour modification.
- Organization of relationship Education that will enhance corrective measures for LGBTQIA+.

Conclusion

Gender counseling should be used as a basic tool in the provision of professional assistance and guidance in resolving personal and psycho-social problems as they relate to gender issues through an effective human communication strategy that communicates important information on gender in relation to rights, equality, diversity, opportunities and privileges.

An effective Gender Mainstreaming System (GMS) that will provide a comprehensive system for mainstreaming gender. The GMS requires a strong political will and commitment to gender equality at the highest levels. This will address the policy context, structural and cultural issues and help in mainstreaming gender issues in all facets of human and national development including education, agriculture, security, HIV/AIDS programmes, health,

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entrepreneurial trainings, non-governmental organizations, science and technology, public services, trade and industry, investments, advocacy, household and community programmes, information technology, finance and governance.

The gender counseling will also be streamlined to address issues of disability; indigenous people, older people, violence against women and men and keep the gender informed in relation to economics, health, education, conflict and emergencies, as well as available rural livelihood, opportunities, infrastructure, credit facilities and government policies.

Recommendations

Gender mainstreaming aims at integrating a gender equality perspective into all the mainstream activities of government, at the policy, programmes and project levels and will involve the following:

- i. Forging and strengthening the political will to achieve gender equality and equity, at the local, national, regional and global levels.
- ii. Integrating a gender perspective into sectoral planning cycles, including the analysis, development, appraisal, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes and projects.
- iii. Using sex-disaggregated data in statistical analysis to reveal how policies impact differently on women and men.
- iv. Increasing the numbers of women in decision-making positions in government, and the public and private sectors.
- v. Providing tools and training in gender analysis and gender planning to decision makers, senior managers and other key personnel to ensure that they know how to integrate a gender perspective into their work.
- vi. Forging linkages between governments, the private sector, civil society and other stakeholders to ensure a coordination of efforts and resources.

The following are also recommended strategic areas in which action can be taken to advance gender equality in the counseling, information and communications departments:

- i. Review existing policies – legislation, guidelines, codes of ethics – with a view to integrating a gender perspective aimed at enhancing women’s skills, knowledge, access, and participation in all types of media, including online technologies
- ii. Promote balanced and diverse media portrayals of women as persons who bring to their positions many different life experiences – as politicians, peace negotiators etc.
- iii. Apply gender analysis to programming and develop editorial policies that are gender-sensitive and reflect gender equity, so that women and men’s perspectives are equally included in all topics.
- iv. Support local, regional, national and international networks for women media professionals and promote active North/South and South/South co-operation between journalist organizations, women’s professional media associations, women’s legal groups and women’s political associations.

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- v. Encourage gender-sensitive training for media professionals including media owners and managers, to encourage the creation and use of non-stereotyped balanced and diverse images of women and men in the media.
- vi. Ensure all national statistics are disaggregated by sex, to facilitate national analysis and planning in the gender mainstreaming process. Aim to repackage research for wide dissemination.
- vii. Set up an international online network for exchange of information on portrayal of women in the media and information on women's media enterprises.

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