

Paradigms of Self Perception and Attributional Behaviour Among Selected Nigerian Commercial Sex Workers

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ABSTRACT This study focused on identifying the paradigms of self perception and attributional behaviour among selected Nigerian commercial sex workers. The study is guided by research questions set to investigate whether the Nigerian commercial sex workers possess an unbiased and stable self perception attribute when they are measured on the three self perception primary factors of 'self as perceived by subjects', 'self as perceived by others' and 'the real self', and the extent to which Nigerian commercial sex workers attribute their self perception to 'associate causes', (extrinsic motivation) culturally favoured causes (conformity). Accessible causes (intrinsic) and salient causes (extrinsic). The findings reveal that Nigerian commercial sex workers possess an unbiased and stable self perception attributes. They equally exhibit a positive bias to accessible reasons, i.e. the right thing expected to be done in explaining the primary factor that motivates them to behave in a particular way. Explanations were given in respect of the findings and their implications were discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Given the exacerbation of the economic downturn in Nigeria, coupled with several years of neglect by the Nigerian government, many Nigerian Youths, particularly those belonging to the female sex, have adopted prostitution as their sole means of survival. In another dimension, a critical appraisal of the factors motivating the choice of prostitution as a major occupation among these female Nigerian Youths has implicated the largely eroded global attitude to sexual activities which is characterized by excessive permissiveness. Exposure to media brain washing through films and movies that are awash with sexual interplays has proved to be an effective demystifying instrumentation of promiscuity. From yet another angle is the fact that many parents are careerists who, in attending to the demands of their jobs, are taken away from the home environment far too often, thus becoming unable to apply themselves

adequately to the responsibility of monitoring the development of their children. Not to be overlooked is equally the problem derivable from unemployment and underemployment which have forced most of the youths to flee the shores of Nigeria. In migrating out of the country, they are encouraged and sustained by the assumption that once in the chosen land of refuge, all problems pertaining to job acquisition would be solved. However, this hope is often than not dashed and the young female would easily fall prey to sex peddling. The most recent factor has to do with the change from military rule to a democratic government. In Nigeria, the advent of democracy therefore has succeeded in spawning several new nouveau riche politicians around whom young females swarm, flouting sex for whatever perks such could attract. For this reason, several female youths have been involved in rural-urban drift that has landed them in the urban cities where the seat of government is located, thus predisposing them to compromise their morality and be easily lured into sexual escapades. The above factors are quite plausible and have been frequently cited in discourses as being responsible for the explosion of prostitution. None the less, they have not been subjected to rigorous empirical investigations. Hence this study aspires to empirically determine the extent to which the personality profile (i.e. in terms of self perception and attributional predisposition) of the Nigerian commercial sex workers is defective or otherwise.

Taking a critical look at the psychic predisposition of the average commercial sex worker by exploring their self concept vis a vis how they attribute cause to an effect, would probably provide an empirically derived answer to the question of how they justify their chosen occupation which in all its ramifications does not conform with the norm of the society within which they operate. Self perception has been isolated as the pivotal construct to explore

because in itself, it is the totality of an individual's knowledge about his or her personal qualities (Smith and Mackie, 1995). The extent to which these qualities are adjudged to tally with acceptable social and cultural scripts is the extent to which the individual would attribute positive reasons capable of justifying their sustainability.

According to Rholes and Pryor (1982), the more accessible a potential cause, the more likely it is to be cited as an explanation of behaviour. It is a general consensus that different people, particularly people from different cultures do associate behaviours with different types of causes. Hence in a study where Miller (1984) looked at the way children and adults from the United States and India explained behaviours, it was found that adults from the United States were likely to attribute behaviour to the actor's personality traits or stable personality characteristics. While adults from India and children from both countries placed more emphasis on other characteristics of the actor such as his or her roles and social relationships. Mackie and Smith (p.87) construe this to mean that people in independent cultures including the United States, tend to think in terms of traits and those in interdependent cultures such as India, emphasise roles and social relationships. Other causes likely to influence attribution include the attribution to salient causes as was demonstrated by Taylor and Fiske (1975). Salient features, which may include such focal objects as bright colours, moving images, loud voices, opulence, fame etc. can draw our attention, thereby turning a potential cause into the probable cause (McArthur and Post, 1977; Robinson and McArthur, 1982).

This study however has chosen to look at attribution from the point of view of self concept. According to Lewis and Brooks-Gunn (1979) human babies start to recognize their own image in a mirror around the age of two. But the development of a self concept takes much longer. Sources of self knowledge include learning things about ourselves by observing our own behaviour whether at work, at home, in the church or wherever. Another source is imagined behaviour. For example, imagining any given role, action or response to any stimulus might lead us to a conclusion that the imagined role represents how we would describe ourselves

(Anderson and Godfrey, 1987).

As was reported by Mackie and Smith (p.116), self perception theory assumes that we draw inferences from our behaviour only when internal cues are weak or ambiguous and when there are no compelling situational pressures present. So in the absence of strong internal feelings and compelling external pressures, people tend to view themselves as having qualities consistent with their past or present behaviour. (Chaiken and Baldwin, 1981; Fazio et al., 1981). People are most likely to draw inferences about themselves from behaviours that they see themselves as having chosen freely, thus implying that a freely chosen behaviour is driven by intrinsic motivation. But when a behaviour is performed as a means to some external end, it is said to be governed by extrinsic motivation and according to Harackiewicz (1979) and Deci (1971) we often lose pleasure in performing it.

In order to fulfil the purpose of this study, answers shall be sought to the following questions;

- (1) Would the Nigerian commercial sex workers possess an unbiased and stable self perception attribute when their scores on the three self perception source factors (self as perceived by subject, self as perceived by others and the real self) are correlated.
- (2) To what extent do Nigerian commercial sex workers attribute their self perception to; Associated causes (Extrinsic Motivation) Culturally favoured causes (Conformity) Accessible causes and (Freely Chosen Intrinsic) Salient causes (Extrinsic Motivation).

METHODOLOGY

Correlational designs were used to establish the types of relationship that exists between self perception pattern and attributional causes. In view of the fact that commercial sex workers favour the urban centers for client accessibility, the study was carried out in the three urban centers of Lagos, Benin and Port Harcourt. The perceived social disapproval of their occupation and a subtle fear of persecution imposes upon the average commercial sex worker the need to be on her guard at all times. This makes them a tough customer to deal with when intimate

information about themselves and their means of livelihood is focused upon. However a total of 140 professionally active commercial sex workers responded to the questionnaire (Self Perception Questionnaire SPQ) by means of which data were gathered for this study. The age range of subjects was 17-32 with the mean age located at 24 years.

Instrument: A 47 item author-designed questionnaire tagged Self Perception Questionnaire (SPQ) was utilized as the main instrument by which data was collected. The questionnaire was in two parts. Part A contains 21 question items that seek to gather information on self perception source factors. Each question cell comprises of three question item fitted to reflect the three sources which are; 'self as perceived by subject', 'self as perceived by others' and 'the real self'. Hence for each cell, there are question items ABC. All 'A' question items ask questions on; Self as perceived by subject', 'B' question items ask questions on 'self as perceived by others', while 'C' question items ask questions on the 'real self'. Part B comprises 25 question items designed to gather information on the reasons why people behave the way they do in social settings.

The fitness of the instrument was tested in a pilot study. 20 subjects were sampled and their response to the questionnaire reflected a correlation coefficient of $r = .81$ at the first and second attempt of 4 weeks interval. A jury styled cross-validation of content was conducted among experts in the behavioural sciences who evaluated the instrument to be fitting for the measurement of self perception.

Procedure: The Questionnaires were administered in the hotels where a cluster of the commercial sex workers can be found. The language at times posed a problem but the research assistants were at hand to translate difficult expressions into a language understood by the subjects. Questionnaires were administered and collected immediately to prevent subject mortality as commercial sex workers maintain a high rate of mobility from one hotel to the other.

Data Analysis: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and simple percentages were the statistical methods adopted in analyzing the data gathered. These were graphically presented below.

RESULTS

In table 1 the inter item correlation of the three source factors were shown as follows.

Table 1: Inter item correlation of self perception source factors

Variables	cases	mean	SD
AA	138	17.6812	6.1762
BB	138	17.7971	5.7148
CC	138	17.3623	6.5557

Key

AA = Self as perceived by subject

BB = self as perceived by others

CC = self as it is (real self)

Table 2: Correlations

	AA	BB	CC
AA	1.000	.8005	.8675
BB	.8005	1.0000	.9465
CC	.8675	.9465	1.0000

$P < .001$

A significant relationship exists between the three dimensions of self perception as is shown in table 2. The correlation between subjects' scores on self as perceived by subject which is represented by AA in the table and self as perceived by others represented by BB stands at $r = 0.80$ which by all interpretations is a significantly positive correlation. The correlation coefficient between the scores on self as perceived by subjects (AA) and the real self (CC) stands at $r = .86$, an equally significant relationship. These findings point attention to the fact that subjects have a stable and unbiased self perception. With this finding the first research question is answered in the affirmative. In order to answer the second research question which seeks to know the extent to which the Nigerian commercial sex workers attribute their self perception to associated causes, culturally favoured causes accessible causes and salient causes. Table three below displays the graphic presentation of the percentage distribution of subjects' scores as they pertain to each of the causes.

DISCUSSION

When the inter item correlation of the self

Table 3: The percentage score of subjects on each attribute when measured against each value label subjects were asked to indicate which of the options out of the four value labels (i.e. 1- salient causes, 2 - culturally favoured causes, 3 - Associated causes and 4 - accessible causes).

<i>Behaviour attribute</i>	<i>Value Label</i>	<i>Percent</i>	
Shake Hands	1	55.7	N - 132
	2	31.4	Mean - 1.530
	3	2.9	SD - 766
	4	4.3	
Attend Parties	1	52.9	Mean - 1.864
	2	21.4	SD - 1.184
	3	20.0	N - 132
	4	5.7	
Received Visitors	1	78.6	Mean - 1.288
	2	10.0	SD - .757
	3	5.7	N - 132
	4	5.7	
Kiss lovers	1	70.0	Mean - 1.62
	2	7.1	SD - 1.15
	3	17.1	N - 132
	4	5.7	
Ambitious	1	72.9	Mean - 1.485
	2	2.9	SD - .945
	3	12.9	N - 132
	4	5.7	
Persistent at tasks	1	65.7	Mean - 1.803
	2	1.4	SD - 1.263
	3	7.1	N - 132
	4	20.0	
Lose interest easily	1	50.0	Mean - 2.188
	2	5.7	SD - 1.396
	3	4.3	N - 132
	4	31.4	
Aspire to be famous	1	67.1	Mean - 1.545
	2	8.6	SD - .944
	3	12.9	N - 132
	4	5.7	
Wish to be respected	1	67.1	Mean - 1.462
	2	12.9	9*0SD - .845
	3	8.6	N - 132
	4	4.3	
Wish to be fondly remembered	1	64.3	Mean - 1.5
	2	14.3	SD - 1.003
	3	5.7	N - 132
	4	10.0	
Strive to be efficient	1	57.1	Mean - 1.652
	2	20.0	SD - .949
	3	10.0	N - 132
	4	7.1	
Desire to be dependable	1	62.9	Mean - 1.576
	2	15.7	SD - .942
	3	8.6	N - 132
	4	7.1	
Wish to accomplish tasks	1	65.7	Mean - 1.500
	2	14.3	SD - .860
	3	10.0	N - 132
	4	4.3	
Eager to compete	1	57.1	Mean - 1.773
	2	14.3	SD - 1.102
	3	10.0	N - 132
	4	12.9	
Desire success at all cost	1	54.3	Mean - 1.848
	2	14.3	SD - 1.136

Table 3: Contd...

<i>Behaviour attribute</i>	<i>Value Label</i>	<i>Percent</i>	
	3	11.4	N - 132
	4	14.3	
Fear the consequences of failure	1	52.9	Mean - 1.894
	2	15.7	SD - 1.174
	3	8.6	N - 132
	4	17.1	
Attracted to the opposite sex	1	52.9	Mean - 2.0
	2	11.4	SD - 1.341
	3	1.4	N - 132
	4	28.6	
Use symbols such as Height or Weight to describe beauty	1	54.3	Mean - 1.970
	2	12.9	SD - 1.284
	3	2.9	N - 132
	4	24.3	
Compliant	1	40.0	Mean - 2.258
	2	21.4	SD - 1.311
	3	1.4	N - 132
	4	31.4	
Submissive	1	55.7	Mean - 1.862
	2	14.3	SD - 1.218
	3	2.9	N - 132
	4	20.0	
Co-operative	1	62.9	Mean 1.636
	2	15.7	SD - 1.058
	3	2.9	N - 132
	4	12.9	
Disobedient	1	45.7	Mean - 1.636
	2	15.7	SD - 1.314
	3	4.3	N - 132
	4	28.6	
Disagreeable	1	32.9	Mean - 2.538
	2	17.1	SD - 1.353
	3	2.9	N - 132
	4	40.0	
Fanatical about religion	1	31.4	Mean - 2.561
	2	18.6	SD - 1.322
	3	4.3	N - 132
	4	40.0	
Take religion lightly	1	45.7	Mean - 2.152
	2	17.1	SD - 1.310
	3	2.9	N - 132
	4	28.6	

Summary of the above table

<i>Value label</i>	<i>Percent-age</i>	
Accessible reasons (i.e because it is the right thing to do)	60.2	Mean = 1.8
Culturally favoured causes (because it is a culturally right thing to do)	15.0	SD = 1.1
Salient causes (because successful people do it)	05.8	N = 132
Associated causes (circumstances make people do it)	18.8	

perception source factors were undertaken (i.e. A – self as perceived by subject, B – self as perceived by others and C – self as it is i.e. real self), a significant relationship exists between the three dimensions of self perception. This result outcome provides the answer to the first research question in the direction that Nigerian commercial sex workers possess an unbiased and stable self perception attribute. There appears to exist a degree of contradiction here, particularly when viewed against the backdrop of the assumption that engagement in a commercial sex work is frowned upon in the society coupled with the fact that prostitution cannot be justified by any logic in a society where the attribute is considered abnormal. It can therefore be safely assumed that individuals who have chosen to work against and disobey a social norm would adopt a self perception that would in itself be a defense mechanism which would sustain their continued activity – the chosen antisocial direction. But as the findings have shown that the self perception profile exhibited by the Nigerian commercial sex workers is considered unflattering, unbiased and stable, the reasons for their engaging in an occupation not encouraged by any societal norm is definitely located outside self perception related problems.

The second research question which aspires to know the primary factors to which Nigerian Commercial Sex Workers (CSW) attribute their self perception was tested and the analyses yielded by the data collected revealed that the CSWs have a positive bias to accessible reasons (i.e. the right thing expected to be done) meaning that they considered their action in respect to the selected social behavioural cues as having been prompted by what the societal norm prescribed as a standard response to each of the cues as presented. This appears to be in agreement with the observations of Rholes and Pryor (1982) that the more accessible a potential cause is, the more likely that it will be cited as an explanation of behaviour. In most African cultures, attitude to objects and the behaviours that are attendant on them are largely a function of how they are prescribed by the existing norms and mandated by the significant – others that operate in the individual's social space. The child has a direct access to his parents first, later, to his peers and to the larger society much later in

life. Those values to which high profile behavioural labels are attached are expected to be adopted by the individual for his daily behavioural transactions. This may further explain why subjects have a bias for accessible causes more than any other cues presented to them.

Hence when stimulated to action by each cue presented, the CSWs favours the action that will be in compliance with what the societal norm prescribes or what they think amounted to a favoured behavioral response to a stimulus presented. This goes to validate the self perception paradigm of the CSWs which has been labeled stable and pro-social. If the CSWs do not see the reasons why they think people do what they do because of cultural mandate (B), for extrinsic reasons, i.e. because successful people do it (C) or because situation specific circumstances make people do what they do, but only because they think it is what is reasonable norm-wise to do, then attributional behaviour, in accordance with the findings of this study is norm-sensitive. The findings pertaining to the two research questions have clearly shown that rather than a skewed self perception default or wrong attributional behaviour the Nigerian CSWs have other motivating reasons for adopting a socially unacceptable pastime for their main occupation. In this light a clue can be searched in the direction of economic needs and flagrant abdication of responsibility by the government who ought to have an elaborate welfare programme for unemployed virile youths. These areas are suggested as the next area of research concerning the thrust of this study.

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