CULTURE AND ADOLESCENTS’ CONCERNS ON SEXUALITY

VOLUME ONE
ASSERTIVENESS

By

GIRLS’ POWER INITIATIVE (GPI) NIGERIA
“towards an empowered womanhood”

Calabar/Benin NIGERIA

Edited and Introduced by
BENE E. MADUNAGU

SEPTEMBER, 1999
CULTURE AND ADOLESCENTS' CONCERNS ON SEXUALITY

VOLUME ONE
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- Volume One: ASSERTIVENESS
- Volume Two: SELF IDENTITY
- Volume Three: BODY IMAGE
- Volume Four: SELF ESTEEM

The present volume, the first, is on Assertiveness:

Social expectation of females is that they should be humble, meek and obedient. All these are excellent virtues for all human beings, men and women, boys and girls. But why, is it required only of females to possess these noble qualities? What society really prescribes for females go beyond these virtues. Females are expected to be passive. Thus females become tools for various forms of abuses and are not expected to react. Culture and tradition are immediately cited to justify why women should remain passive. Where women question the rationality of their being poor in the midst of plenty and why they should not have equal share of the material resources of the society, they are reminded of culture and tradition. Religion is sometimes used to reinforce tradition about women's humility requirements. Many females have dropped out of school for not doing well in school examinations because as humble, meek and obedient creatures, they spend their time on household chores when their brothers are reading. Majority that come from poor homes are to be humble enough to go hawking all
kinds of commodities in season to make up for family needs. Obviously, it benefits no one for this situation to remain.

This publication is an attempt to educate and assist young people, in particular girls, to assert their rights as human rights. If all household members share the household chores, everyone in the household will have the opportunity to do what he/she needs to do for a good future.

BENE E. MADUNAGU
Chairperson
GPI Executive Board
September, 1999
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Training young girls in GPI has revealed how passive girls are socialised to become. In a society of inequalities, females form the larger majority of the underprivileged and as long as they remain passive, their lives will not be improved. The experiences brought into GPI by adolescent girls created the need for the publication of a book on assertiveness. Much thanks therefore go to GPI girls - graduands as well as those still in the programme. The editorial committee that assisted to put together the initial text for editing consisted of Diana Ibok as Secretary, Assumpta Ekpenyong, Imoh Bernard, Victoria Edet and Eka Bassey as members. While Imoh Bernard further reviewed the manuscript, Diana Ibok did the proof reading. I thank them all for their imput in the publication of this book. Much thanks also go to our colleagues in South West zone of GPI for the experiences they shared with us on this topic.

BENE E. MADUNAGU
DEDICATION

To the upliftment of girls and women above the social expectations of remaining passive towards acknowledging and experiencing their human rights.
INTRODUCTION

Are you always doing what everyone wants you to do even when you feel differently? Have you ever felt like requesting to carry out an assignment at another time because there is something more important and more urgent you must finish first? In such situations do you just leave what you needed to finish first to take on something else because you have been so directed? Do you know that you could actually express your opinion politely while not refusing the directive of a senior person?

Are you tired of being cheated or manipulated? Do you politely express your beliefs and opinions, and stand up for your rights? Can you say No! and stick to it?

Assertiveness is the key word that will help you express your opinions, feelings as well as help you to improve your personal, and social relationships.

Assertiveness will help you believe in your natural capabilities and acquired skills. It will make you value what you know and what you have to say. It will also make you stand up for what you are convinced is right, know that you have the right of personal choice and that you bear the responsibility and consequences of your choices. What you need is correct information to assist you take responsible decisions.

You will learn to feel good about yourself, your feelings, thoughts and express them for your positive development and responsible behaviour.

You will learn to stop letting people walk over you, manipulate
you, and or take advantage of you. Rather you will make meaningful contributions in your home and community.

In a given situation, someone can just give up any effort to stand up for a correct intervention. This is being passive when one fails to utilise the opportunity to express ones right. Someone can be rude, abusive, quarrelsome in response to a given situation. This is being aggressive. Neither being passive nor aggressive can change a situation positively. However, the choice of acting firmly and correctly but politely, that is, being assertive can be very empowering.
CHAPTER TWO

STORY LINE

Joy has been standing in line for over two hours to buy a ticket for a play. The rule is, one person, one ticket. Her feet are hurting and she knows she is in trouble with her mum, who expected her home by now. But there are only five people left in front of her and she is sure she will get a ticket. Out of nowhere, two girls from school walk up, make a big deal about meeting up with their friend who happens to be standing in front of Joy and take places in line in front of her. What do you think Joy should do?

Response:

If Joy behaves passively, by standing in line and not saying anything, she will probably feel angry with the girls and herself. If the ticket officer runs out of tickets before she gets to the head of the line, she will be furious and might blow up at the girls after it’s too late to change the situation.

If Joy, knowing that the girls want to play a fast one on her, tells them she knows their trick or quarrel with them because it is her right, she may feel strong for a moment, but there is no guarantee she will get the girls to leave. More importantly, the girls and their friends may also respond aggressively through a verbal abuse or physical attack on Joy.

Finally, if Joy does not hurt them but tells the girls they needed to go to the end of the line because other people have been waiting, she will not put the girls down, but merely state the facts of the situation. She can feel proud for standing up
for her rights. At the same time, she will probably be supported in her statement by other people in line. While there is a good chance the girls will feel embarrassed and move, there is also the chance that they will ignore Joy and her needs won't be met. With this we have introduced the three behavioural patterns namely: passive, aggressive and assertive behaviours. Let's take a look at them one after the other.

Passive behaviour: Why are many girls and women passive? Listen to 11 year old Atim’s story.

"I am the youngest among my parents' four children and the only female. I felt ignored, so I decided to be perfect, nice, submissive and please everyone. I do what everybody says so they would love and accept me. I held back my hurt, and never asked for anything. At school and in any other place, I find myself doing or behaving exactly the same way. As a result, I get extremely depressed and frequent headaches."

Atim, like other girls was told right from childhood to be nice, be a good girl, meaning she should not talk or argue or have a misunderstanding with anyone because a good girl or woman should be meek, passive and submissive. The society also frowns at women who are assertive and blames them for trying to compete with or overthrow men.

Generations of girls, have grown up hearing messages like:
- It's a man's world
- Girls are expected to be seen not heard
- Girls are expected to be nice and pay more attention to other people's wishes and needs rather than pay attention to their capacities to be achievers.
As a result, the girls start behaving passively and live their lives for others. They are the caregivers and work persons of every household chores. They are the ones for which the adage; “suffering and smiling” goes for.

Many girls accept this positions because they may have had less education, are economically dependent or are afraid of being alone, or may feel insecure. These insecure feelings result in holding back or not expressing their feelings, as a result of domestication. Being nice or good in order to get positive reactions at the expense of their own feelings or thoughts, would make the girls and women in the long run feel like ‘doormats’.

Passive behaviour is often linked with women. It involves getting out of an unpleasant situation by lying. It also involves giving in to someone else’s wishes at the risk of displeasing oneself. It is passive to accept an invitation you don’t want or to reject it by saying you are going to be out of town that week, even though you are not. When you respond passively, you avoid immediate conflict but you may be upset because you have not expressed your true feelings. Listen to 15 year old Queen’s story.

“One morning, I went to fetch water and we stood on queue as usual. A man also came to fetch water. Instead of joining the queue, he took his container to the front of the queue and kept it on top of his friend’s bucket. Instead of pointing out his mistakes I kept mute like others, so that I would not be beaten up. When I reached the house, I felt bad because I did not correct the mistake”.

- 10 -
You can avoid this kind of situation if you have confidence in yourself and learn to express your true feelings.

Assertiveness is expressing your feelings and making known your needs while considering and respecting the rights and opinions of others.

An assertive person says what he/she wants or means but in a way that doesn’t hurt or attack the other person.

Assertiveness also means being able to make your points and views known politely in a firm and in a non-abusive manner. Assertiveness stays in the middle of aggressiveness and passiveness. It should be noted however, that all three styles may be used from time to time. Sometimes you may choose to give in to another person’s wishes, or you may run across people for whom anything less than an aggressive response is suitable. Most of the time though, assertiveness is the best tactics.

**IMPORTANCE OF ASSERTIVENESS**

- Assertive behaviour makes one feel powerful standing up for oneself without showing disrespect to others.
- Makes one stand up for oneself.
- It will give you confidence to say “No” without attacking your friends.
- It makes you to accept human error as part of life.
- It enables you to decide or realise that you are the most important person you know.
- An assertive person says what she wants or what she means, but in a way that does not attack or insult the other person. Here is an example: “The time was quarter past nine, I
was walking with my cousin along Atamunu Street. When we heard voices behind us, insisting that we should stop, we continued on our tracks. Not too long, four police officers with guns blocked our path and asked why we did not stop when we were told to do so. We defended ourselves by saying that we were not sure of who the callers were. They later started searching my cousin purportedly for cocaine and other drugs but found none on him. They started interrogating him, since the boy could not express himself well, I assisted him to answer some of the questions. The police officers tried to shout me down but I refused to keep quiet. Later they said they were going to detain my cousin and that he should go with them. I again argued with them and demanded to know the reason why he should be detained. Immediately I went on to educate the police officers on the rights a citizen has, particularly in a democratic setting. The police officers started calling me a harlot because he said only harlots are bold enough to answer people. I challenged him by saying that if I am a harlot, then his own daughter is also one. Several women tried to hush me, telling me that it was the general name for women. I disagreed strongly and continued by telling the police officer that men could also be harlots. At the station, they reported me to their superior officer who wanted to know the cause of the commotion. I narrated the whole story to him and he ordered the police officers to set my cousin free. This they did, all because I was able to use my GPI experience lessons on assertiveness, rights and responsibilities”.

Arit, 16 years
AGGRESSIVENESS

A person behaving aggressively states her/his feelings directly, but she/he violates the rights of others. In aggressive behaviour, you make your feelings known, but in a way that offends or does not take into account the feelings of others. It involves the use of abusive language. It could also involve physical injury.

The aggressive person is always getting angry and being abusive. She is always ready to attack people.

The aggressive person feels loaded with hurt, which she/he pours onto others. She or he blames others for mistakes and does not take responsibility for the unpleasant situation she or he may have caused. It is a sign of insecurity and lack of self confidence.

CONSEQUENCES OF AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOURS

A person who continually releases feelings of anger or frustration on others while ignoring their feelings may find she or he is alone and unfriendly. Such a person cannot sustain friendship. The person is usually avoided or deserted.

BEING PASSIVE:

The passive person on the other hand does not know what to do at the right time. Such a person is not able to stand up for her/his rights and is unable to express her/his feelings. She/he cannot speak out her/his mind and therefore can’t defend self. Such people project a weak image of themselves to the community. Being passive reinforces social violations of the
rights of the poor, the weak, the underprivileged, the vulnerable.

BEING ASSERTIVE:

The assertive person is able to express the four basic feelings of sadness, anger, happiness, and fear, says what she means and means what she says.

**Note:** Assertive responses do not always prevent unpleasant situations. Often you must decide whether or not it is wise to let others know how you feel in some situations, though being honest to yourself and others is beneficial to all in the long run.

It makes one feel confident, empowered and able to stand on ones ground. It shows strength of character when one is able to state one’s conviction where others cannot.

Assertiveness allows individuals to feel good having expressed their need, thoughts and feelings about making their own choice. Listen to Stella a 14 year old adolescent girl:

“I was once returning from a GPI meeting and I met a boy in a taxi when he saw my GPI newsletter and I told him I was a GPI and explained what it meant and its objectives, he then told me that he had heard of something like that and that he was a sociology student in the university. He said that it is really very interesting to study about women and how they are struggling for their rights but that it seems they have not been given their rights. I replied that he was wrong, that women’s rights are human’s rights and we are not fighting, but are trying to make people aware of our rights and educate ignorant people about it. My assertiveness paid of as agreed with me and said he was going to be a feminist advocate. I congratulated him on his good...
and sensible choice and wished him luck. I soon reached my destination and we parted.”

Through being assertive Stella was able to defend women’s rights. She also educated the boy without insulting him.

Assertive communication skills can help you have confidence and say ‘no’ without attacking your friends or family members. It can also help adolescents keep away from succumbing to premature sex, drugs or alcohol. Here is a case study as an example. “I met one of my old friends and as we were discussing she told me that there was a boyfriend of hers that always demanded for sex. But she had her values and she didn’t want to have sex with him anyway. She told me that she is timid to let the boy know her mind.

I told her that she should be bold to express her feelings, to let the boy know that there are so many ways one could express love to another without having sex. I told her if the boy still pressurises her to have sex with him then she can take her decision taking many things into consideration which are early motherhood, contacting STDs, unsafe abortion, and even the dreaded HIV/AIDS etc.

After our discussion, she told me that no body has ever given her such clear information and truly she was convinced that sex is not love. She said that she will let the boy know all that I had told her. I later told her about GPI, from where I got my information and lesson on assertiveness.

Finally, all three styles of communication can be used interchangeably. But being assertive is the best way of behaving
and communicating with other people, as it produces the desired results more frequently than passive or aggressive behaviour.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY (I)
DO IT YOURSELF TEST

Classify these behavioural patterns in the stories into: aggressive, passive, and assertive.

1. Ekaete’s father had just bought her a new biology textbook. Her friend ‘Nene comes to borrow the textbook. Ekaete hides the textbook in her locker and tells Nene she had forgotten it at home.

Questions: (a) What do you think about Ekaete’s attitude?
(b) Do you think she did the right thing?
(c) If you were Ekaete, how would you have behaved?

2. Mr and Mrs Udoh had been married for nearly 5 years without any children. Ufok-enyong (Mrs Udoh) had not known peace for all these years. Her mother in-law and sister in-law had been harassing her to give birth to a son for them. On several occasions, Ufok-enyong had been beaten and called names by her husband who also threatens to throw her things out of his house. She was also mocked by her “friends”. One day a close friend of Ufokenyong advised her to go for a medical test with her husband. This request provoked the husband who gave her another round of beating, but eventually he agreed to go for a test with her. When the result was out, the husband Mr Udoh was sterile. Ufok-enyong collapsed on hearing the result of the test.
Question: If you were Mrs Ufok-enyong Udo, what would you do when you regain consciousness?

3. Nkoyo was given assignment in school. Just as she started working on her assignments, her mother called her and asked her to wash the dishes. She politely explained that she had already started her home work which she must submit next day as part of her continuous assessment and it needed to be finished before electrical power failure since it was getting dark. She therefore promise to do the dishes later on completion of the assignment.

Questions: (a) What would you have done if you were Nkoyo?

(b) How do you communicate with your parents at home in what affects you directly?

4. Okon had just returned from work when his younger sister Uduak needed a pen to write with. She knocked on her brother door to request for one. Okon opened the door and screamed “how dare you disturb my sleep!”, without asking what his sister wanted, thus discouraging Uduak from explaining what she wanted.

Questions:

(a) How will you describe Okon’s behaviour?

(b) What kind of response do you think he will get from the sister?

(c) If you were the sister, how would you respond?

(d) Do you think Uduak will like and respect Okon again, Why?

5. At an extra-mural class, a teacher who was taking a lesson on HIV/AIDS informed his student that the AIDS virus is contacted
only through sexual intercourse. A GPI girl raised her hand indicating that she had additional information on the issue but the teacher refused, saying that he does not entertain questions from women/females in his class. When the GPI girl insisted, the teacher asked her to leave the class and she did. Later on the teacher asked her in and allowed her to say what she had in mind.

This gave the GPI girl the opportunity to correct the misinformation and educate her teacher on the modes of transmission of HIV/AIDS to the amazement of other students. The teacher has since been friendly towards her and other females in the class. Her self-esteem was also greatly raised by her assertive behaviour.

**Question:** What lessons can you learn from this story?

6. It happened when I was coming back from a girlfriend’s house. Ahead of us, we saw two boys who dashed into a bush when they saw us. When we got to that spot, I saw the two boys and a girl inside the bush. My partner on recognising the boys fled the scene leaving me alone with this group. I asked one of the boys if they had any problem but he just told me to leave the scene. I refused.

The girl pleaded with me not to leave her alone but to help her. "In what way should I help you" I asked she refused to tell me the problem.

One of the boys ordered me to move on before the count of three, and actually started counting. I still refused to leave since it was daytime and the bush was along a street, I was very familiar with. After counting three, thrice he asked me if I was a student
in the University. When I said no, he verbally abused me.

"You have no right to give me names just because you are a student", I told him. He was shocked and ashamed.

I educated them on rape as a violent crime and on STDs including HIV/AIDS which one of them said he knew, but strongly believed he would not be infected. They later released the girl and went away after educating her on her right to seek redress for abuse and assault.

So I was able to rescue someone from being raped. They were able to sort out their differences without violating the girl's rights as a human being or hurting her.

Questions: (a) What do you think about the boys' behaviour?
(b) How would you describe her friend's behaviour?
(c) If you were the GPI girl, how would you have behaved?
(d) What did you learn from this story?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY (II)
ASSERTIVENESS RATING SCALE
(Tick the one that applies to you)

(1) I often have a hard time saying No....
(2) I let others take advantage of me often
(3) I am afraid to express my feelings.
(4) I avoid confronting other people when they hurt me.
(5) If a close and respected relative is annoying me, I conceal my feelings rather than express my annoyance.
(6) I avoid asking questions for fear of saying something stupid.
(7) When I have done something important or worthwhile, I
manage to hide it from others so I won’t feel embarrassed.

(8) During an argument, I am afraid that I will get so upset, I will shake all over.

Do you find yourself expressed in this rating scale test? If yes. then you’ve got to listen to this:

If you continue pleasing others you will feel unworthy and unloved. And because you don’t love yourself, people will treat you like a doormat.

Secondly, holding back your feelings causes anxiety and inner tension to build up which makes you feel frustrated and angry with yourself. So build up confidence and be empowered by being assertive!

GLOSSARY

Interchangeable:- Possessing the mutual ability to be used one for the other
Abortion:- Natural or induced expulsion of a foetus from the womb
Pressurise:- To continue to force, coerce and persuade a person
Succumbing:- To surrender
Adolescent:- Person between childhood and adulthood
Premature:- To occur before the proper time
Feminist:- Person who supports women’s rights, gender equality and equity and social justice.
Ignorant:- A person who lacks knowledge of a fact or subject
Empowered:- Person who has confidence, knowledge and authority to assert his/her rights.
Confident:- Feeling or showing boldness; have a sense of self-reliance
Sociology:- The study of society and social problems
Violate:- Having disregard or treating a person in a disrespectful way. Forcing someone into an act against one's wish or desire.
Anxiety:- Being worried, concerned or troubled
Frustrated:- Being prevented from achieving her purpose or aims
Embarrassed:- Feeling awkward or ashamed, discouraged and unsatisfied.
Confronting:- To face up challenges
Ascertain:- To find out so as to be convinced
Doormat:- A submissive person
Harlot: "Prostitute", commercial sex worker.
Responsibility:- Being respectable, trustworthy
Abusive:- Insulting or offensive
Unworthy:- Not deserving of respect.

REFERENCES
Carol J. Eagle, Ph.D. and Carol Colman (1993) All that she can be: Helping your daughter maintain her self-esteem. Published by Simon and Schuster. PP 139 - 141
WHAT IS GIRLS’ POWER INITIATIVE?

Girls’ Power Initiative (GPI) is a non-governmental, not-for-profit development organisation that equips adolescent girls between the ages of 10 - 18 with sexuality, human rights, reproductive health/rights information; leadership, economic and other life skills to cope with growing-up, thus laying the basis for ensuring the enjoyment of healthy sexuality, womanhood and social justice for future generations of Nigerian women.

OBJECTIVES

- Building and increasing the capacity of Nigerian adolescent girls to articulate and critically analyse issues that impact on their health and enjoyment of human rights.
- Increasing the access of adolescent girls in Nigeria to comprehensive and non-judgmental information on health, human rights and sexuality from a gender perspective.
- Developing the capacity of adolescent girls to overcome gender prejudices and grow into self-assured active women involved on equal basis with men in development.
- Increasing the number of informed and gender sensitive adolescent girls towards decreasing the gender gap in social, political and economic sectors.
- Sensitising the public and creating awareness towards the elimination of gender prejudices to build gender equality.
- Building the foundation for the creation of a gender/activist institute in Nigeria.

VISION

A strong and empowered feminist institution with critical consciousness and capacity for analysis on social and gender prejudices, committed to managing and educating girls into healthy, self-reliant, productive and confident women for the achievement of positive changes and transformation of patriarchal values in Nigeria.
# GPI TEAM

## National

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<th>Name</th>
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