

## **Nigerian College Students' Attitudes about Love, Marriage and Sexual Relations: Implications for Family Counselors**

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### **Abstract**

214 (116 females and 98 males) Nigerian college students enrolled in three Nigerian universities responded to a questionnaire designed to replicate a previous study of African-American college students' attitudes about love, marriage and sexual relations. The results showed that in agreement with previous studies, none of the variables of love and marriage were significant for gender. However, when controlling for educational level, the graduate students were more likely to answer "No" to the question "Would you marry someone for qualities other than love?" and reported being more influenced by the media in relationships. A significantly higher number of females more than males agreed on the value of a satisfying sexual relationship due to love but more males than females responded "No" to the statement "Love is important to satisfying sexual relationships". The premarital and marriage counseling implications were discussed.

**Keywords:** Nigerian college students; attitudes; love; marriage; sexual relationships; counseling

### **Introduction**

A lot of cotemporary psychological research works have been carried out in the area of African Americans' attitudes towards love and marriage but there is still a dearth of such research at home in African Countries of which Nigeria is one (Stones & Philbrick (1989) Hence the motivation for this study which is an attempt to replicate the earlier study carried out by Parmer and Tam (1992) on the African-American College Students' attitudes towards love, marriage and sexual relations. Philbrick & Opolot (1980) observed this trend over 20 years ago and commented that even though information is being obtained about the increasing research on love and about attitudes toward love among various American population, a review of literature suggests only very limited data on attitudes toward love in African culture.

**Love:** There might be many answers to the question, “What is love?” depending on the convictions of the person answering the question. Sometimes love is seen as selfless giving, sometimes as selfish clinging and self-centeredness. Sometimes love is conditional, as in Fromm’s (1974) “father’s love” which by implication could border on, “I’ll love you if you don’t talk back; if you stay a virgin; and if you accept my values.” Other love is unconditional (such as Fromm’s analogy of “mother’s love”) where the pervading comments would connote “I will love you regardless of what you do because you are my son/ daughter/father/brother/ friend.” Makinde (2004) describes love as a word that covers a broad spectrum of attraction, liking, respect, and positive interpersonal relations while Ross & Davis (1996) define love as the junction of two variables which are “caring and attachment”.

Loving ourselves is sometimes seen as an impossible barrier to loving others; others see it as a necessary step towards being able to love others, as in the popular saying, “You have to love yourself before you can love others.” Clearly both excessive self-love and self-scorn can kill romance. General self-tolerance probably facilitates the acceptance of a lover’s idiosyncrasies. Human love relations involve very complex dynamics. Different kinds of lovers mean different things when they say, “I love you.” We all would like to think we know the real thing, real love, but do we? We assume everyone loves the way we do. This may not be completely true. Also, we usually give love in the way we want to be loved, not in the way the lover wants to be loved. What kind of lover are you? What kind of love do you want from your lover? What does your partner want?

You learn to love by paying attention and doing what you discover has to be done. Lasswell & Lobsenz, (1980) record the six kinds of lovers described by a Canadian sociologist, John Lee:

- (a) Romantic love is evident with a lover who thinks constantly about the loved one, is jealous, unrealistic, will tolerate anything, is sexually attracted by physical appearance, needs repeated reassurance he/she is loved in return. Typically lasts a few months or a few years (some anthropologists say it lasts 4 years, i.e. until the baby is through nursing and can walk and run. Then the love bond releases the more powerful males to find another female to impregnate with his genes.)
- (b) Best friend or companionate love is demonstrated by a lover who enjoys the companionship and intimacy of a close friendship. It is a comfortable, slowly developing, trusting, committed relationship, not intense excitement, desperation, or sexual obsessions.
- (c) Unselfish love shown when the lover is devoted and self-sacrificing to the loved one, gives without expecting anything in return, is gentle, caring, and dutiful.
- (d) Logical love is demonstrated when the lover carefully selects the “right person” logically, looking for someone with compatible interests, similar education and religion, a harmonious personality, common values, and long-term goals.
- (e) Game-playing love occurs when a person who may be charming is hardly a lover; he/she merely enjoys the dating game. He/she relishes the meeting, the impressing, the seducing, the challenge of a conquest but usually makes it clear there is little or no long-term

commitment to the other person.

- (f) Physical ideal lover searches for a great body or some specific bodily feature—or the one who is so possessive he/she wants to control the other person and gets physically sick or depressed or does foolish things when the relationship seems threatened.

According to Lasswell and Lobsenz, best friends' partnerships work well, so do two logical lovers or a best friend-logical combination. A romantic and a best friend (or a logical) lover may have problems because they certainly do not show love in the same ways. One wants to be wooed with candlelight dinners and passionate love-making; the other wants to have a quiet evening at home reading and planning a trip or a new house. Even a romantic lover may not please another romantic; indeed, romantic lovers will be unhappy if they do not find new ways to show love after three or four years when the thrills and sexual throbs have subsided (Lasswell & Lobsenz, 1980). Likewise, the combination of a possessive and a best friend will be a clash of styles (one stormy and one easy going). If the possessive is gone for a while, she/he will be bothered that the best friend didn't miss her/him more, "If you loved me, you would have missed me a lot!" As one would expect, game players and possessive lovers are hard for anyone to love. Many lovers don't clarify what they need; they expect the lover to read their minds. They hesitate to say, "You can do this to make me feel loved" and eventually end up saying, "When you do this I know you don't love me."

At times women may give sex to get love while men may give love to get sex. People who are too sensible about love may be incapable of it (Hunt, 1975). Sternberg (1991) has a theory that there are three components to love:

- (1) Intimacy = baring souls, sharing, liking, and bonding (a slowly developing emotional-interpersonal involvement, as in a friendship).
- (2) Passion = sexual attraction (an instant or quickly developing motivation or addiction which usually declines over the years to a stable level).
- (3) Commitment = stable, dependable devotion (a slowly developing cognitive decision to stick by the other person in bad times, as in a marriage).

An ideal arrangement, according to Sternberg, could be when both partners want, receive, and give the same amounts of the three ingredients, i.e. they both have the same kind of love in about the same intensity. However, as the partners' three dimensions of love differ more and more from each other, especially in terms of total investment, the quality of the love relationship deteriorates. For example, within limits, partner A can be primarily interested in sex (passion) while partner B is more interested in love (intimacy), providing both A and B are devoted to each other. But there are three threats to the relationship: if A loses sexual interest or B falls out of love or if either decides to "look around" for the ingredient they aren't getting, then trouble would start in that relationship.

No matter how successful they have been career-wise, most people would say their loves (and the resulting family) were the most important happenings in their lives. Love is so universal, and we experience the need to be close and affectionate; we need to share our

experiences and feelings; we need the security of being cared for; we enjoy caring for others; we need to be reassured that we matter; we need to be touched, stroked, and kissed; we need sincere affection and passionate sex.

To get the acceptance and love we need, we should understand love relationships. They are complex, sometimes starting with infatuation and sometimes with friendship. After several months, the relationship may evolve into secure, comfortable, warm attachment. Later, love may keep or lose its passion, may gain or lose commitment, may retain its positive intimacy, fade away, or become a hotbed of smoldering resentment. Love is also paradoxical. Like most things that give us great joy, love can also cause us great pain. Thus, we are excited but scared to ask for a date; we are crushed when a boy/girlfriend leaves us; many marriages end in painful divorce, other marriages are “empty;” we are disappointed when passionate love turns to boredom; we are flooded with anger and an awesome sense of loss when a spouse is unfaithful; we may feel sexually inadequate even with our spouse; our greatest frustrations and resentments are often with our lover; the death of a loved one is our worst moment. We often hurt the people we love. Although the threat of pain shouldn’t stop us from loving, but sometimes it does. Love is now a priority for most Nigerian women contemplating marriage (Makinde, 2004).

**Sexual Relationship:** Not much has been documented about sex and sexual relationships among Nigerians. This is because Nigerians prefer not to talk about sex openly as if it is a “taboo” or “indecent” for them to do so. Parents would rather hide sexual issues from their children because they believe such information could make them want to experiment with sex. Traditionally, Nigerians perceive sex as being necessary mainly for the purpose of procreation and that was one of the reasons for polygamy (Rasaq, 2005). When a wife has passed child-bearing stage and the husband want sexual relationship, he would just go ahead and marry another woman. This trend usually continues until the man becomes very old. It was not uncommon to find a man of over 70 years marrying a third or fourth wife and having as many as 20 children or more. Currently, sexuality education is being introduced into the high schools curricula. This became imperative because of the current emphasis on sex in the media and the epidemics of sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV/AIDS.

**Marriage:** Nigerians and Africans generally place a huge value on marriage but marriage stability is fast diminishing. The family constituents are changing. Some fifty years ago it was the extended family system consisting of father, mother, five or more children, grandfather, grandmother, uncles, aunties, cousins, nephews and nieces living on the same big compound. Divorce was like a taboo. The extended family kinship was highly respected (Maisamari, 2005). But now with civilization, industrialization, and technological advancement leading to rural-urban migration came the break down of the extended family system. The nuclear family system predominates with just the father, mother, and three or four children. Some families are made up of the mother, step-father, two or more children, and one or two from a former marriage. Many children are living with step or single parents. Not only are the actors different, but the roles have changed in the last 30 years too. We

have fewer children, so father and mother's relationship with each other is more important and more intimate. When there were eight or ten children, mother was very busy with house work, child care and petty trading/farming. Traditionally, marriage was for survival. A typical Nigerian (African) man could marry as many wives as he wanted under the native law and custom. Polygamy was very common in the past and even presently, a man is not sanctioned for marrying more than one wife. But the woman must marry just one husband at a time and such husband could have been the father's choice for his daughter without consideration for the feelings of the daughter in question

Marriages today are mostly entered into for love. But with women education evolves the family planning awareness resulting in fewer children and most mothers now go to work outside the home. Consequently, mother and father share the financial responsibilities. From there, marriages develop in many different directions, including about half heading towards anger and divorce. Spouses are now asked to be more than "good providers" and "good homemakers," they are expected to be faithful lovers, fun companions, best friends, co-parents, and wise, understanding mutual helpers. Marriage is for intimacy, not just for economic security and not just for "a good mother to my children." Love is very much alive. Love has become more complex, more challenging, and, perhaps, more valued. For example, in the 1950's people strove to do a good job (doctor, lawyer, housewife, mother), now we seek to enjoy our jobs, friends, loves, family, and leisure time (Veroff, & Feld 1975).

Many Nigerians now believe they are free to change partners if they are not getting what they want out of their relationships because social prohibitions against divorce are less, because people now have fewer children later in life and because economic conditions are better. Also because women are personally and economically more independent, they choose whosoever they think they love (Rasaq, 2005) Nigerians are changing partners more frequently than before the 1980s, but not without pain.

Ugwuegbu (1981) declares that Nigerian university students recorded positive attitudes toward husband-wife relations. Also Stones (1992) is of the opinion that love and romance are very important facts of the interpersonal sphere as they play very influential roles in a lot of human relationships.

**Method:**

The volunteered respondents were a total of 214 (124 undergraduates and 90 graduate) college students enrolled in three Nigerian universities. They were made up of 116 females (64 undergraduates and 52 graduates) and 98 males (60 undergraduates and 38 graduates). All the respondents were Africans with the age range of 17 to 49 years. The mean age was 27 years. Descriptive information showed the composition of the respondents to be undergraduates 58% and graduates 42%; females 54% and males 46%; undergraduate females 52% and undergraduate males 48%.

**Instrument:**

The research instrument was a Questionnaire compiled from a survey developed by Allgeier and Wiederman (1990) which was modified from questionnaires by Kephart (1967) and Simpson et al. (1986). The questionnaire consisted of a total of 22 items requesting information about demographics, love and marriage and mate selection. Demographic questions sought for students' responses to get information regarding their sex, age, educational classifications, and expected income after graduation. Students were asked to respond to the question first posed by Kephart (1967): "if you had all of the qualities you desired, would you marry this person if you are not in love with him/her?"

The next set of questions include: "If love has completely disappeared from marriage, I think it is probably best for the couple to make a clean break and start new lives" and "in my opinion, the disappearance of love is not a sufficient reason for ending a marriage and should not be viewed as such". Other items added by Parmer and Tam (1992) required the participants to respond to the questions "Do you think the media has influenced your perceptions about marriage?" "Do you think that a satisfying sexual relationship is important to a good marriage?" and "Do you think that love is important to having a satisfying sexual relationship?" Simple "No"/ "Yes" was required as response to each of the questions.

**Results:**

**Table 1.1: Chi-square for influence of Love on Marriage by Gender - All the Qualities and No Love would you Marry?**

Gender	No	Yes	Total
Female	94 (89.4)	22 (26.6)	116
Male	71 (75.6)	27 (22.4)	98
<b>Total</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>214</b>

**Pearson Chi-Square = 2.31; df = 1; P = .95**

**Table 1.2: Chi-square for influence of Love on Marriage by Gender - Love Disappear from Marriage, make a Clean Break?**

Gender	No	Yes	Total
Female	49 (60.2)	67 (55.8)	116
Male	62 (50.8)	36 (47.2)	98
<b>Total</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>214</b>

**Pearson Chi-Square = 9.51; df = 1; \*\*\*P = .005**

**Table 1.3: Chi-square for influence of Love on Marriage by Gender - Disappearance of Love Not Sufficient for Ending Marriage**

Gender	No	Yes	Total
Female	64 (56.4)	52 (59.6)	116
Male	40 (47.6)	58 (50.4)	98
<b>Total</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>214</b>

Pearson Chi-Square = 4.34; df = 1; \*\*P = .05

**Table 1.4: Chi-square for influence of Love on Marriage by Gender - Media Influenced Perception of Marriage**

Gender	No	Yes	Total
Female	13 (23.9)	103 (92.1)	116
Male	31 (20.1)	67 (77.9)	98
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>170</b>	<b>214</b>

Pearson Chi-Square = 12.17; df = 1; \*\*\*P = .005

**Table 1.5: Chi-square for influence of Love on Marriage by Gender - Love is important to Satisfying Sexual Relationships**

Gender	No	Yes	Total
Female	9 (20.6)	107 (95.4)	116
Male	29 (17.4)	69 (80.6)	98
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>214</b>

Pearson Chi-Square = 17.31; df = 1; \*\*\*P = .005

**Table 2.1: Mantel Haenszel Chi-Square for Influence on Love and Marriage by Gender and Educational Level - All the Qualities and No Love would you Marry?**

Gender	Undergraduates		Graduates		Total
	No	Yes	No	Yes	
Female	53 (48.5)	11 (15.5)	41 (41.0)	11 (11.0)	116
Male	41 (12.9)	19 (14.5)	30 (30.0)	8 (8.0)	98
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>214</b>
<b>?</b>	<b>1.29</b>	<b>0.58</b>	<b>1.37</b>	<b>1.38</b>	

Mantel Haenszel Chi-Square = 1.67; df = 1; P = .197

**Table 2.2: Mantel Haenszel Chi-Square for Influence on Love and Marriage by Gender and Educational Level - Media Influenced Perception of Marriage**

Gender	Undergraduates		Graduates		Total
	No	Yes	No	Yes	
Female	21 (12.1)	39 (47.0)	10 (8.0)	28 (30.0)	116
Male	4 (12.9)	60 (51.1)	9 (11.0)	43 (41.0)	98
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>214</b>
<b>?</b>	<b>5.25</b>	<b>0.65</b>	<b>1.11</b>	<b>0.65</b>	

**Mantel Haenszel Chi-Square = 12.35; df = 1; \*\*\*P = .005**

Participants' Descriptive Profile: The descriptive data revealed that students were expecting to earn a mean income of N580,000.00 (about \$4,000.00) per annum. Majority of the males indicated that their current status involved 'casual dating' (41.6%), 'steady dating' (30.5%), 'not dating' 27.9%: while the females reported 'casual dating' 16%, 'steady dating' (25.9%), and 'not dating' (58.1%). The mean for the ideal age of marriage was 27years for males and 25.5 years for females. Males reported that four to five years from the time of the survey, they were very likely to (19%), likely (24%), somewhat likely (30%) and unlikely (47%) to be married; while females opined that they were very likely to (33%), likely (41%), somewhat likely (25%) and unlikely (11%) to be married. With regard to the likely number of children desired four to five years from the date of the survey, male reported an average of three while females prefer an average of 3.5. Also, a satisfying sexual relationship was considered important by most males (91.2%), and females (68%). Both males and females agreed that love was important to a satisfying sexual relationship (70%) and (92%) respectively.

Love and marriage variables by Gender: Separate Chi-Square analyses were carried out for responses to the love questions. The Pearson Chi-Square statistics were not statistically significant for the section on "All qualities and no love will you marry?" (Pearson Chi-Square (χ<sup>2</sup>) = 2.31; the degree of freedom (df) = 1; P = .95 See Table 1.1); The analysis of the data regarding the responses to the question "Love disappear from marriage, make a clean break?" was statistically significant (Pearson Chi-Square (χ<sup>2</sup>) = 9.51 = df = 1; \*\*\*P = .005 See Table 1.2); Regarding the question "disappearance of love not sufficient for ending Marriage?" a statistical significance was observed (Pearson Chi-Square (χ<sup>2</sup>) = 4.34; df = 1; \*\*P = .05 See Table 1.3); Also a statistical significance was recorded for the media influenced perception of males and females; (Pearson Chi-Square (χ<sup>2</sup>) = 12.17; df = 1; \*\*\*P = .005 See Table 1.4); a statistical significance gender was also recorded in the data analysis of the responses to the statement "Love is important to satisfying sexual relationships" (Pearson Chi-Square (χ<sup>2</sup>) = 17.31; df = 1; \*\*\*P = .005 (See Table 1.5).

Love and marriage variables by Educational Level and Gender: Re analyses, subsequently carried out using Mantel-Haenszel Chi-Square statistics to control for educational levels

(undergraduates and graduates) showed no statistically significant relationship between the male undergraduates and the male graduates and also the female undergraduates and female graduates in the responses to the question "If your partner satisfies all other qualities, but there is no love, would you marry him/her?" Mantel Haenszel Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ ) = 1.67;  $df = 1$ ;  $P = .197$  (See Table 2.1). However, a statistically significant difference was found when the data on the media influenced perception on marriage were also subjected to the Mantel-Haenszel statistics indicating that the pattern of relationship between gender and the responses depends on the level of education of the respondents (Mantel Haenszel Chi-Square = 12.35;  $df = 1$ ;  $***P = .005$ ; See Table 2.2).

The symbol "?" in Tables 2.1 and 2.2 is an indication of the odds of female against the male responses for each of the two educational levels. For example, with respect to the question "If your partner satisfies all the other qualities but there is no love, would you marry him/her?" the undergraduate females are 1.29 times more likely than males to answer "No" while the graduate females are 1.37 times more likely than males to answer "No" (See Table 2.1). Whereas, from Table 2.2, it is shown that the undergraduate females are 5.25 times more likely than males to answer "No" while the graduate females are 1.11 times more likely than males to answer "No". Based on the responses, it could be inferred that educational level might affect the level of media influenced perception of marriage.

#### **Discussions:**

Nigerian males and might have been expected to respond with significant difference on the love and marriage variables, however, their responses on these variables did not differ significantly. Consistent with the previous findings (Parmer & Tam 1992; Allgeier & Wierderman, 1990; Simpson, Campell, & Berscheid, 1986; Wiederman & Allgeier, 1990), neither Nigerian males nor females are likely to marry someone they do not love. This finding may suggest that present day Nigerian males and females align with the notion of romantic love as an important condition for the establishment and the maintenance of the marital relationship which is paramount in western society (Goode, 1968; Urdy, 1974 Rasaan, 2004).

However, when controlling for educational level, the graduate students were more likely than the undergraduate to answer "No" to the question "Would you marry someone for qualities other than love?" When controlling for educational level, the graduate students reported being more influenced by the media in relationships. This finding is at variance with Parmer & Tam (1992) that reported the upper level student group as being less influenced by media in relationships. This could be due to the fact that some of the Nigerian undergraduates might not even have access to the media most of the time, especially if they are from economically disadvantaged families. Female students agreed on the value of a satisfying sexual relationship due to love significantly more than males. More males than females responded "No" to the statement "Love is important to satisfying sexual relationships". This finding supports Makinde (2004) that reported that majority of Nigerian women could stay off sexual relationship for as long as it takes to find a lover. But there are

situation due to economic status when some young females might engage in prostitution without satisfying sexual relationship. Hence implicit in the results obtain on love and marriage in this study might be the question of economic security and gender roles expectations. For example, an average male is considered as the power figure in the home that is supposed to fulfill the provider role (Cazenave, 1984; Tucker & Taylor, 1989; Rasaan, 2004). So it may be that college students could chose to marry for love due to their expected financial adequacy.

**The pre-marital and marriage counseling implications:**

Counseling becomes necessary before and after marriage because of the implicit intricacies. For example, there are a lot of complexities and decisions that should be considered before marriage. Some of them are: How should I find and select a partner? Is it reasonable to expect my potential partner to make major changes if I want him/her to improve? Do I really love this person? When should I make a commitment to another person? When should we have sex? How long should I wait to get married? Should I have more experience with the opposite sex before getting married? Should we get married or live together before marriage? How good should sex be? If our sex should be better, how do we make it so? When should we have children and how many? Is my marriage working okay? What characterizes marriages that last? When should I seek marital counseling? When should I leave the marriage? What are the consequences of getting a divorce? These are life's toughest questions because there are no simple answers. Each individual's problem calls for a unique solution.

Here is a modified version of some revealing questions that Hunt (1975) proposed that each person in courtship should ask herself/himself:

- Would you choose to spend the evening alone with him/her if there were no kissing, no touching, and no sex? If not, it might not be love.
- Are the two of you at ease and as happy alone as you are with friends? If you need other friends around to have a good time, you might not yet be in love.
- Do you get along? If you fight a lot, get hurt and jealous, tease and criticize one another, better be careful, it may not be love.
- Do you treat the other person as a person or a thing? If you go out with him/her because he/she is good looking or just as a way out of financial difficulties, that isn't love.
- Are you still interested in dating others? If so, you might not really be in love.
- Can you be totally honest and open? If either or both of you are selfish, insincere, feel confined, or unable to express feelings, be cautious.
- Is one of you much more of a taker than a giver? If so, no matter how well you like that situation now, it may later become unbearable.
- Do you often think of the partner as being a part of your whole life? If so, that could be a strong indication of love.

There are many differences in how males and females view love and relationships. For women, intimacy means talking; for men, a relationship means doing things together ("all

she wants to do is talk" is a common complaint among men). Women value relationships more than men, especially relationships with parents. Women value most his income potential and fidelity and her ties to family and friends; men value most her sexuality and nurturance and their shared interests.

It is good to know that for every love there is a heart somewhere to receive it but when love meets no heart or stony heart, it can only break the heart from where it is springing.

### **Conclusion:**

The study of Nigerian college students' attitudes about love, marriage and sexual relations is necessary because not much research has been done in this important area that forms the bedrock for the entire Nigerian society. It is important to foster healthier marriages and to reduce marital conflicts because marital distress negatively impacts physical and mental health, work productivity, the lives of the children, and the quality of life.

But the findings of this study might have been influenced by its limitations that may impede its application to the general Nigerian populace, even though the Mantel- Haenszel Chi-square was used to control for that. For instance, only college students participated in the study. Future research that could replicate this study and also compare different college students with people who have never attended any college, would be quite useful.

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