



CHALLENGES OF YOUNG COUPLES IN TRANSITIONING FROM DATING TO MARRIAGE IN MASVINGO URBAN, ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

Using interpretive phenomenology methodology, this qualitative study sought to explore the challenges of young adults in transitioning from dating to marriage. Modern literature suggests that transitional challenges are associated with failure to adjust from the romantic euphoria to a working partnership. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to recruit respondents and ten young couples were interviewed, constituting a total of ten women and ten men who were married for not more than five years. The data were analyzed using a qualitative thematic approach. One central theme that emerged was 'hidden spousal personalities surfacing in marriage', crystalizing the significance of the discovered spousal personalities that were in hibernation during dating and courtship such as promiscuity and unrealistic expectations. Premising on this discrepancy, the young couples carried the weight of transitional challenges that did not meet their expectations of matrimonial bliss. The results from this study revealed that the dissonance between marital expectation and spousal behavioral standards is the hallmark of young couples' challenges in transitioning from dating to marriage.

Keywords: transition; dating; marriage; dual culture; young couple

Introduction

Romantic life is made up of opposites that coexist despite the differences, for instance, love and hatred, husband and wife, fertile and barrenness, health and sickness, life and death, rich and poor, joy, and suffering. The interaction of these

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contradictory elements introduce disorder into the world of interpersonal attraction, bring about changes, hence they are a source of development (Graham, 2017). On a more practical level, these dialectics are conceptualized as inevitable ingredients of marital life. Gowda and Rodriguez (2019) opine that during the early years of matrimony, partners naturally identify new roles, which may be less personal and more mutually dependent, adjust their social networks, and set up a core alliance with each other rather than with their families of orientation. According to Wilson-Kovacs (2016), more than 33 percent of divorces take place inside the first five years of matrimony. This submission illuminates the center for which young couples succeed or fall short in making the transition to secure, enjoyable matrimony, identifies behaviors that place young couples at peril for matrimonial challenges and behaviors that safeguard them from marital misery and break up (Dewaele, 2016). Moreover, Burgess (2018) details that the notion illuminates the impact of outside stressors and identifies the changes that partners may go through in navigating the transitional puzzle to marriage.

Interestingly, transitional bonds are naturally traumatic, given that they oblige pair affiliates towards adjustment to a newly negotiated association category, for instance, an informal way vs. completely dating (García-Andrade & Sabido-Ramos, 2018). These transitions are by and large complemented or followed by some form of disagreement wherein which the young couples spell out the position of their bond. The introduction of those conversations is acknowledged to the extent of meriting an initialism, which is conceptualized as a “define the relationship” chat (Liu, Bell, & Zhang, 2019). Premising on these discussions, spouses bargain not just their present association position, but also the likelihood of the perpetuity of their association in the future (Green, Valleriani, & Adam, 2016). It could also be conceived that the level at which a partner perceives the bond to be, determines his or her responses with regards to such conversations. It is a complex phenomenon to negotiate the future status of a relationship because sometimes spouses possess divergent interests. Visserman et al. (2019) concisely opine that “Situations with conflicting interests involve challenging problems of adaptation”. For instance, in a circumstance where a dating couple deliberates the prospect of marrying each other. One spouse may be pondering on the thoughts of marriage, whereas the other would be conceptualizing the association in terms of a short-term deal (Visserman et al., 2018). Discerning such discordant association objectives require spouses to make a resolution that either supports pursuant of their own goals or revert to their mate's divergent desires (Agnew & Vanderdrift,

2018). To the context of either companion, transitioning from one's perceived association position (*i.e.*, a brief relationship) to their mate's preferred association state (*i.e.*, better commitment) could be the foundation for misery, provided the resolve of the dissonance is considered significant and unattractive altogether (Borders-Shoemaker, 2019).

During and after the transition, the emergence of conflict is inevitable and as Yenet et al. (2017) opines, conflict circumstances appear as if they are on the rise equally on an individual as well as on interpersonal associations. The matrimony institution was founded by the Lord to be a blending of love, bliss, pleasure, and satisfaction (Whyte, 2018). The failure of partners to demonstrate a few or a number of these personalities that weakens the spouses in marriage thus creating conflicting situations. Gorges and Grund (2017) delineated conflict as the pursuit of discordant interests and goals by diverse people. Stomping feet in unison, Reus-Smit (2018) defines conflict in terms tussling for values or claim to status, authority as well as limited possessions such that the objectives of the incompatible parties are not only charged with the responsibility for achieving the preferred value but also to reduce the effect, wound or remove the rivals. Controversies among partners have been perceived in several countries such as Nigeria (Boghirnea et al., 2018). Partners' conflict rises between the parties in a matrimonial association over sexual divergences, children nurturing variances, temperamental dissimilarities, spiritual differences, as well as dissimilarities in interest and morals. According to Renanita and Lukito Setiawan (2018) spousal struggles could be hinged on a few or all imaginable faculties of marked relations for instance financial issues, vacation quests, child upbringing, decision making, discharging of domestic responsibilities, spiritual and/or collective events, coitus issues, in-laws among others. Of note, results of spousal controversies are not only restricted to the partners specifically but overlap to offspring, relatives, and the general public. The controversy is predominantly characterized by squabbles, struggle, uncontrolled tantrums, hostility, aggression, resentment, and extreme dislike (Liu & Chang, 2017). Upon reflection, however, spousal interactions can either weaken or fortify the association. In a similar vein, it could also be fruitful, promoting understanding, intimacy, as well as admiration or they, could be damaging, resulting in anger, aggression, disconnection, or separation (Straus & Gelles, 2017). In a sense, how the controversies usually get resolved and not essentially the frequency it transpires is the defining factor in well to do and unhealthy associations. In an endeavor to perpetuate sound marital relationships,

partners must try to embrace applicable conflict resolution strategies to resolve several aspects of controversies perplexing their blending.

Van Winkle (2018) claims that the family life cycle is supposed to be made all the world enquires. Ideally, it must be analogous to the heavenly environment though established on earth, the platform where the affections are cultured instead of being studiously subdued. In a sense, contentment is subject to the depth of love, empathy, and true courteousness to one another. Marriage must be the most pleasurable institution in young couples' lives, in that, the greatest attraction is the presence of the spouse. Spouses have responsive and loving propensities that are easily satisfied and easily made unhappy. Married couples, indeed, easily lose a bit of that honeymoon euphoria while failing to appreciate the natural transition from "romantic relation" to "working partnership." This study sought to establish the stage at which challenges manifest in marriage and investigate the process whereby hidden aspects of spousal personalities emerge. Also, it sought to describe the impact of dual-culture on marriage. To wind up, particular attention shall be directed to the ability of young couples to navigate the transitional puzzle from dating to matrimonial life. According to Rubio-Garay et al. (2017) transition to marriage is one of the most critical psychosocial adjustments in adulthood. To this end, the study will attempt to identify the challenges of young couples in transitioning from dating to marriage.

Objectives

1. To establish the stage at which challenges manifest in a marriage.
2. To investigate the process whereby hidden aspects of spousal personalities emerge.
3. To describe the impact of dual-culture on marriage.

Method

Population

In qualitative research, the selection of the unit of study is based upon "purposeful" (Kashmirian et al., 2016) rather than random sampling. In this case, the study was carried out on young couples of Masvingo urban. These couples had vivid experiential testimonies of matrimonial experiences in their lives. The population is comprised of ten young couples who have been in the marriage falling in the range of one to five years. Furthermore, they are one community of

significance because the spouses come from different specific frames of reference. Thus, the community is a spousal study outcomes assessment pioneer in the Zimbabwean context. The target number for “spousal differences” was a cause for gender balance. A challenging but important part of the sampling process was to obtain a diverse mix of gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status within the sample.

Instruments

The primary data gathering technique was largely the *interview*. According to Mudau et al. (2019), an interview is a two-way conversation in which the interviewer asks the participant questions to collect data to learn about the ideas, beliefs, views, opinions, and behaviors of the participant. The interviews were in-depth, semi-structured, and interactive.

Research approach

The research approach implemented for this study is qualitative. Mokoena (2017) delineates a qualitative approach as one in which the processes are formalized and spell out in a not so strict fashion, but in which the scope is less well-defined and in which the scholar does his or her inquiry more philosophically. This approach aims to understand the romantic cultural contexts of the young couple’s family life cycles and investigate the ‘*why*’ questions instead of the ‘*how*’. The emphasis, for that reason, is on the quality and depth of data instead of on the scope or breadth of data. The approach helps the scholar to gain new insights about a specific phenomenon, (Kankam, 2020). The major concern was to appreciate the romantic and family life worldviews of young couples. Their interactional patterns were analyzed for content analysis and determination of resolution patterns.

Research design

The underlying philosophical assumptions in this research are phenomenological. According to Levy (2017), the emphasis of the phenomenological doctrine is on events, incidences, actions, and so on, as the individual experiences them. Howell (2016) opines that phenomenological study endeavors to understand people’s perceptions, perspectives, and understandings of a specific situation.

Data analysis process

A thematic approach was used in this study. According to Neuendorf (2019), the thematic approach analyzes classifications and contemporary themes

(patterns) that relate to the facts. The thematic approach was considered the most applicable for this research for the reason that the researcher was seeking to discover the challenges of young couples in transitioning from dating to marriage using interpretations. It was also chosen because it confers accuracy and intricacy and enhances the study's whole meaning. According to Shaw et al. (2019) thematic analysis allows understanding the potential of any issue more widely. In this way, the thematic approach enhances the researcher to perceive and recognize, for instance, causes or variables that encourage any matter spawned by the partners.

Results and discussion

The manifestation of challenges in a marriage

The results of the study revealed that the marriage institution can be plagued by a lack of trust and jealousy from the spouse's operational duties at work. The finding is in line with Wheeler and Kerpelman (2016) in detail that the attending label of "husband" or "wife," new partners start to function in agreement to the social norms and structure attached to those new roles and incorporates them with other cross-institutional norms in their lives, such as those dealing with employment. Despite the difficulties of this adjustment phase, partners classically testify being most gratified initially in their marriages before a successive dropping off of contentment. Accordingly, promotions and achievements at work which were thought of facilitating marital bliss, are fast becoming instruments of matrimonial blisters. This proposition fits well in the framework of cognitive dissonance. The study also revealed that the invention of social networking has made it easy to communicate and connect people as evidenced by the ability of these platforms to create unintended consequences of social networks and that they have become places to resurrect old flames. This is consistent with Yellin and White (2018) who say infidelity is one of the predictors of marital blisters. According to Choi and Cheung (2017) at least one-third of marital challenges, one or both partners had been tangled with another person before their matrimonial challenges. Therefore, the modern advancement in life does not seem to have the same positive impact on the institution of marriage. The study laid it bare that the marriage institution is plagued by gender equal rights upon reflection however, this is inconsistent with Lyakurwa et al. (2019) which says both partners have an obligation over the family and can resolve who will represent the family on a specific issue. In the past women had to exhibit their husband's consent relative to various family decisions. Young couples' worldview of marriage is delineated in

terms of equal rights yet these gender equal rights do not always perfectly apply to all settings. The study also revealed that the financial variable plays a pivotal role in strengthening the marriage bond. This resonates well with Ravhengani (2014) who aptly posited that many times couples' love is short term, periodic, or rest on circumstances it only lasts as long as the financial or material things last. Results of the study reflected that their spouses had problems in "leaving" their families of orientation and "cleaving" to their marital partners despite how far their parents would be, spouses remained connected with their parents to everything that happens in their marriage. This is consistent with Franklin and Volk (2018) who aptly posit that at some point during young adult years the parent-child bond is altered. This is also consistent with the identity theory and the cognitive dissonance theory.

Hidden spousal personalities surface in marriage

The present study examined the personality-specific correlates of spouses in transitioning from dating to marriage concerning literature citations. Findings corroborate the earlier literature in terms of prevalence rates of emerging of spousal personalities that were in hibernation. This resonates well with Cliquet and Avramov (2018) who claim that this exclusivity norm has been told across a multiplicity and a diversity of cultures and has been found to occur in diverse types of affairs. It was submitted that secondary relationships and emotional affairs are sources of disaster in young couples' marriages. The study also revealed that partners invest more of their emotional energy outside marriage and this was consistent with Cliquet and Avramov (2018) who opines that in modern societies, although young adults lack perfect guidelines and expectations for dating, sex, and other intimate behaviors are still anticipated to be limited to the primary relationship. Toward this end, it seems safe to suggest that emotional affairs and secondary relationships significantly dilute the climate of a pair's romantic bliss it used to experience during dating and courtship. The study also revealed that dissonance in attitudes and personality between spouses was a source of challenges in transitioning from dating to marriage. This is consistent with Muchena et al. (2018) who aptly posits that the relations between family practices and child outcomes away from selection bias have several types of mechanisms that contribute to the influence of family structure on children's outcomes. It was noted that the romantic life cycle completely changes following a switchover of a partner from being a sweet spouse to a sexual marrone. This is consistent with Floyd

(2018) who detailed the significance of physical and verbal affection in a pair relationship. Toward this end, it could be suggested that the disillusionment is a by-product of cohabitation which creates the transition to marriage considerably less of a defined turning point in the pair's life than in the past. The study also revealed that couples expect their partners to buy them expensive clothes and provide financial support for a high social life. This is consistent with Khan (2016) who claims that when partners impose unrealistic expectations on their spouses, like a daydream honeymoon, they are not loving one another, but loving the ideal experience they had hoped to get. The study also revealed that newlywed couples may be vulnerable to experiencing relational challenges in transitioning to marriage because of inaccurate expectations, particularly if such expectations are unrealistic. This is in agreement with Whyte (2018)'s assertion that says the world is full of misery and sin today as a consequence of ill-assorted marriages. Upon reflection, however, hidden spousal personalities such as the will to power entrenched on a financial muscle and unrealistic expectations are sources of challenges for young couples in transitioning from dating and courtship to marriage.

The impact of dual-culture on marriage

This study unpacked that divergent rudiments turned couples' relationships into sour grapes soon after marriage as they were blessed with children. This is consistent with Lucas (2018) who opines that the institution of marriage has been undergoing significant transformations in recent decades, contemporary expectations about marriage may differ from past generations. Additionally, Prakash (2018) also reinforced the study finding as he says there have been general shifts toward gender-role similarity and egalitarianism, romanticism. Culture, in part, has natural laws that must be followed religiously. Getting married is not a guarantee that one will relegate their fundamental belief systems in the background. A contradiction in belief systems is a source of challenges in transitioning from dating to marriage.

Conclusion and recommendations

The study concluded that several factors such as failure to handle family finances and spousal inability to have internal willingness to leave their families of orientation and cleave to the partners were sources of marriage challenges. It was also revealed that the marriage institution is heavily plagued by hidden spousal

personalities that emerge soon after marriage, for instance, promiscuity, unrealistic expectations, a decrease in romantic sweetness that results in one becoming a sexual maroon, and misappropriation of power that brings emotional abuse. Divergent religions and fundamental belief systems in childrearing practices and cultural differences between spouses largely affected spouses in navigating the puzzle of a working relationship. These factors proved to be sources of challenges for young couples in transitioning from dating to marriage. In light of the results obtained and the conclusions made, this study recommends that young adults must thoughtfully and sensitively select potential suitors for marriage and that it is of paramount importance for dating couples to consider critical aspects during courtship. Also, young adults must take into account the issue of cultural differences when it comes to marriage and spouses should avoid involvement and participation of significant others in their matrimonial settlements. Further research is urgently needed to improve the evidence base on transitional challenges of young couples from dating to marriage for producing effective interventions and understanding of the factors that might account for transitional challenges among young adults.

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