



CORRELATES OF PREFERENCE FOR CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH OLDER MEN AMONGST FEMALE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined correlates of preference for close relationship with older men among undergraduate students. The study adopted correlational survey design. A total number of four hundred and ninety-three (493) undergraduate female students were selected by the researcher for the study using stratified sampling technique. The participants were drawn across diverse demographic characteristics from all existing faculties and across levels of study in Lagos State University and University of Lagos. The mean age and standard deviation of participants were 20.0 years and 2.4 respectively. Two hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using Pearson correlational matrix and regression analyses. The results revealed significant positive correlation between close relationship with older men and self-concept ($r=.71, p<.01$) and significant negative relationship with spirituality ($r=-.62, p<.01$). In addition, significant joint prediction of self-concept and spirituality was observed on relationship with older men [$R^2=.029, F=7.43, P<.01$]. The predictor variables accounted for 3% of the total variation on relationship with older men. Independently, self-concept [$\beta=.126; p<.01$] and spirituality [$\beta=-.166, p<.01$] significantly predicted close relationship with older men. Implications of these findings were discussed and recommendations were made by the researcher at the end of the study.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Dating and romantic relationships are normal, yet essential, part of life during adolescence and early adult years. It presupposes two individuals going out, having dinner and other activities to spend time together and seeking romantic relationship. Beyond the basic desires which most individuals experience during adolescence, studies have shown the relative significance of dating, not only for individuals but also for societies. Dating defines what is expected of females and males in dyadic social interactions that hold the potential for romantic involvement and are aligned with gender roles and sexual scripts; hence it is viewed through the lens of heterosexuality (Collins & Stroufe, 2005). Surprisingly, in spite of the fact that many young people now reject the term “dating” in favor of terms such as “hooking up” or “going with,” there have been remarkably few changes in the pattern and dimension of dating, particularly among young females in the last two decades (Bartoli & Clark, 2006). The reality of this is that attachment behaviour is a social interaction and it characterizes human beings, in particular, from cradle to the grave (Bowlby, 1979).

The initiation and maintenance of intimate, romantic relationships have been linked with improved physical and emotional well-being, stronger perceptions of community attachment, and better developmental outcomes for the individuals (Amato 2010). During adolescence and the early adult years, dating enhances identity formation for individuals and provides socialization experiences which are necessary to forming and maintaining intimate and interpersonal relationships in life (Yoshida and Busby 2012). This is firmly buttressed and explained by reasoned action theory (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) which predicts that adolescents and young adult engagement in social behaviour as a function of their intention to engage in that behaviour. This intention to engage in social behaviour is a function of adolescents' attitudes toward dating behaviour and the subjective norms about socially desired relationship held by their peer or family. Aspects of dating, such as appropriate behaviour within dating and



the appropriate age at which to begin dating, are greatly influenced by the larger social context in which they occur (Chen, Periquet, Wang, Negro, McLean, Hyman, Feany, 2009). Similarly, researchers have noted that attitudes and expectations concerning dating and intimate relationships are also affected by the larger cultural context (Hynie, Lalonde, and Lee 2006).

One of the major social concerns recently to receive notable attention has to do with the changing attitudes and behaviour related to human sexuality, and the appropriateness of educating youth on family living and human sexuality. Nowadays, in most developing countries of the world, Nigeria inclusive, it is not uncommon for younger ones, particularly female undergraduate students having relationship with older men in exchange for sex or material benefit, otherwise referred to as “Sugar Baby”. This practice has been found to be synonymous with prostitution (Miller 2011). It is opined that this change within the romantic realm would not be unconnected to the intrinsic benefits of close relationships and dynamics that centre on issues of intimacy, social relationships as well as extrinsic or tangible benefits (Chou, 2017). This implies that social behaviour is the result of an exchange process with utmost intention of maximizing benefits and minimizing costs. This is consistent with observation made on close relationship among partners which makes it clear that some partners base their evaluation of romantic relationships on rewards and costs, reflecting social exchange of tangible and intangible assets (Emerson, 1976). Therefore, it would appear that some people do stay in their current relationship while it remains more profitable than the alternatives. It is also important to note that the environment, in which an individual finds himself, influences his behaviour the same way his behaviour influences the environment. These young adults adapt their behaviour and/or attitudes to what is going on around them as they have a tendency of imitating what they see being done by those people who have the power to influence them, including their peers (Bandura, 1963, 1986).

In a typical Nigerian society, perception and thinking about close relationship have been shaped to a large extent by religion and spirituality. For instance, a highly religious and spiritual person tend to be more closely related with people than someone who is not religious/spiritual because spirituality itself involves gathering of people who share the same religious experience, belief and feelings and this make them to be closely related to each other. This can also be explained with female students’ attitude towards experience close relationship with adults. A religious and spiritual female student for example may develop friendship relationship with an older adult which may be due to religious background and experience she shares with the person but some females may develop emotional close friendship with adults which may involve sexual activity as a result of fixation (unresolved conflict during childhood) or may be as a result of searching for protection, wealth or fame from older adults (Sagar, Jones, Symons and Bowering 2015). Despite the relatively consistent findings with individual spirituality and quality of marriages, there has been a call for research to examine spirituality in the context of dating or premarital relationships (Braithwaite, Scott, Gwen, Kersti, Will, Austin, Kelli, Cassidy and Dustin, 2015). Aside from this, an individual’s opinion of her/himself, otherwise known as self-concept, could change as it can expand to include new traits or to make existing traits more prominent in the course of close relationship. Despite advances in the literature, most of the research on individual and partner spirituality was conducted with married couples and less attention is focussed on young females who are involved in dating relationship with older men. It stands to be reasoned that this pattern of relationship among some Nigerian female undergraduate students which cut across diverse ethnic boundaries could have bearing and leverage on demographic and personality characteristics of these young adults, particularly female undergraduate students. This invariably forms the bedrock of this study as the researcher strives to fill the gap in knowledge in dating relationship among young females with older men.



Empirical studies

Ever since Kelley (1983) led a team of social psychologists in producing a seminal book entitled “Close Relationships” which presented the first full-blooded treatment of close relationships from an interactional, social psychological perspective, a lot of studies had been conducted on issue bothering on close relationship. Although researchers have directed their efforts toward a better understanding of the dynamics and pattern of dating and partner selection, focusing upon the influence of such elements as the family environment (e.g., parental divorce, parental marital quality, parent-child relationships), peer relationships, and community factors (Bryant and Conger, 2002), the majority of studies focusing upon dating and romantic relationships have utilized samples of western youth. Quite a lot of research works have been carried out by researchers in the areas of interpersonal relationship, dating and romance.

McIntyre, Mattingly and, Lewandowski (2014) conducted two studies examining the connection between self-concept change and relationship outcomes: In the first study, 55 adults involved in romantic relationships, 69% of them married, completed questionnaires about their self-concept and relationship at two time points, six weeks apart. Greater self-expansion and pruning in the first survey were associated with greater relationship satisfaction six weeks later. Conversely, negative self-concept change, in the form of self-contraction and adulteration, was associated with less satisfaction six weeks later. There were similar results for relationship commitment, except self-pruning was unrelated to commitment. This suggests that these self-concept changes occur throughout the course of the relationship and continue to exert an impact over time. In the second study, 147 adults in relationships, 76% of whom were involved in an exclusive relationship, completed a one-time survey about their relationship and self-concept. Those who experienced more self-expansion and pruning and less self-contraction and adulteration—that is, those who experienced more positive and less negative self-concept change which tended to have more positive outcomes in their relationships. They were less likely to consider ending the relationship, paid less attention to alternative partners and showed a greater willingness to sacrifice for and accommodate their partners. These results also showed that part of the reason for this was that these self-concept changes were associated with levels of commitment to the relationship. Thus, the impact an individual relationship has on his self-concept will in turn affect how he feels about his relationship. More than that, it will also affect how he treats his partner and the efforts that he makes to maintain the relationship (McIntyre et al, 2014).

There is much discussion about whether or not dating older men is simply glorifying prostitution and some “sugar babies” have argued that sex is not always part of the arrangement (Chou, 2017). There are accounts from women who claim that sex is not in their agreement that their services consist mostly as being ‘arm-candy’ or company at special events and dinners. Some accounts from women who have had long careers in sugar dating have described their relationship as way to network for future career opportunities as well as more of a mentorship than an intimate connection. Young women who engage in sugar dating may view their relationship as a great paying job or career opportunity. It is indicated that the sugar arrangement is something a sugar baby uses to enhance her social and financial capital in life (Chou, 2017). However, some sugar babies have found the work to be ‘trapping’ in that the money becomes so good, they do not want to stop. There are cases of women who began a career of sugar dating while in college but did not stop sugar dating after graduation. They choose to keep their sugar relationship completely private from friends and family (Sagar, Jones, Symons and Bowring 2015).



Research to date has outlined how religion positively impacts the quality and stability of married couples through high frequency and quality of individual prayer (Stafford 2016), high levels of spouse spirituality (Perry 2015), and increased frequency of attending church together or praying together. However, not much is known concerning the role of spirituality in the quality of dating relationships that commonly precede marital relationships (Braithwaite et al, 2015), leaving a gap in understanding the centrality of spirituality within romantic relationships. Contemporary studies have shown that spirituality plays a significant role in romantic relationship maintenance for married couples, particularly in attendance to religious services, and individual religious activities, such as praying (Fincham, Frank, Christine, and Beach. 2011) as important for maintaining or raising marital quality.

Furthermore, researchers have noted that married couples who have the same religious affiliation, commonly referred to as homogenous couples are more satisfied within their marriages (Braithwaite et al 2015). In the same vein, Fincham, Frank, Christine, and Beach (2011) found that within a large group of African American couples, husbands' spirituality was not only important for relationship satisfaction, but also to their wives' relationship satisfaction. However, research works on influence of partner spirituality for relationship quality has produced mixed results. While some studies demonstrated that partners' spirituality was positively associated with close relationship (Clements, Scott, and Howard, 2004; Perry 2015), other studies displayed no significant effects of partner spirituality for relationship quality (Mahoney 2010). Gender appears to provide an explanation for this discrepancy, as some studies illustrated that women benefited more from having religious partners than men who have religious partners. Generally, there are some evidences that partner spirituality is positively associated with close relationship, but this finding may be attributable more to women than men (Lopez, Shelley, Sara, and Joshua, 2011).

In an analysis of these relationship skills among early adolescents, teenage male respondents compared with their female counterparts reported lower confidence navigating adolescent romantic relationships (Giordano, Longmore and Manning 2006). Prior researches have shown that boys frequently score higher on scales measuring general self-esteem and self-efficacy (Gecas and Longmore, 2003). Researchers also observed that younger adolescents more often listed status and recreation as reasons for dating, while late adolescents more often listed sexual activity, companionship and having goals for the future as important considerations. In fact, analyzing gender differences of online identity reconstruction in an online social network revealed that men value personal achievements more while women value support and physical attractiveness more (Huang, Kumar and Hu, 2019). In the same vein, Seiffge-Krenke (2003) in a prospective study of 103 German adolescents found that romantic partner's perceived social support was significantly higher at age 21 compared with responses provided during earlier assessments (at ages 13, 15, and 17).

METHOD

Research Design

The study adopted correlational survey design to investigate self-concept, spirituality, religion, family background and relationship with older men. The independent variables are self-concept, spirituality, religion, family background while the dependent variable is relationship with older men.



Research Settings

The research was conducted within the main campuses of Lagos State University, Ojo and University of Lagos, Akoka. This is with a view of spreading the coverage of the study among undergraduate students.

Participant and Sampling technique

The participant for the study which comprised of four hundred and ninety-three (493) female undergraduate students was selected by the researcher from among undergraduate female students of Lagos State University and University of Lagos using stratified sampling. Out of which; 41 are under 18 years, 396 are 18 -25 years and 56 are 26years above; 57 are in 100Level, 78 are in 200Level, 57 are in 300Level, 301 are in 400Level; 161 are Muslim, 314 are Christians and 18 belonged to other religious denomination; 314 are from monogamous home and 179 are from polygamous home.

Instruments and Psychometric Properties

The researchers used questionnaire for data collection. The instrument was divided into different sections:

Section A consists of items relating to socio-demographic information about respondents which comprise of age, level of study, religion and family background.

Section B consists of 15-item self-concept scale developed by Akinboye (1975) with a five-point Likert scale 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= undecided, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree. The researcher reported test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.75

Section C consists of 10-item spirituality perspective scale developed by Reed (1987) to measure participants' perceptions of the extent to which they hold certain spiritual view. It is rated on five-point Likert scale from 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= undecided, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree. The scale has criterion Cronbach's alpha of 0.90, inter-rater correlation ranging from 0.54 to 0.60 across adult group. For the purpose of this study, the researchers established Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of .81 using Nigerian sample.

Section D consists of 29-item experiences in close relationships – revised (ECR-R) questionnaire developed by Fraley and Shaver (2000). This measure of experiences in close relationship is rated in 8-point Likert scale, with reliability coefficient of .74. For the purpose of this study, the researchers established Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of .68 using Nigerian sample.

Procedure

The participants were contacted in their various departments and faculties within the main campuses of Lagos State University and University of Lagos. The researcher explained the essence of the research to the participants with a view of getting their consent to participate in the study. The assurance of confidentiality of their responses was also stressed before the researcher administered the questionnaire to the participants. Out of five hundred and fifty questionnaires administered, only four hundred and ninety-three were properly filled. These were coded for analysis.

Statement of Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested:

- i. Self-concept, spirituality, religion affiliation and family background will be positively related to attitude towards close relationship with older men.

- ii. Self-concept and spirituality will jointly and independently predict attitude toward dating older men.

RESULTS

Hypothesis One

The hypothesis which stated that there will be significant positive correlation amongst self-concept, spirituality, religion, family background and experience in close relationship with older men was tested using Pearson correlation matrix. The result is presented in table 1:

Table 1: Pearson correlation matrix showing relationship among self-concept, Spirituality, Religion, Family background and experience in close relationships

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Self-concept	40.53	6.00	-				
2. Spirituality	30.88	10.24	.33*	-			
3. Religion	1.71	0.53	.27*	-.17*	-		
4. Family background	1.59	0.76	-.062	-.01	-.06	-	
5. Preference for close relationship with older men	113.68	24.57	.71*	-.62*	-.03*	.01	-

*p<.01

The results of inter-correlation of variables of study revealed that undergraduate students' preference for close relationship with older men is inversely related with religion ($r=-.03$) and spirituality ($r=-.62$, $p<.01$). On the other hand, self-concept has direct linkage with spirituality ($r=.33$, $p<.05$), religion ($r=.27$, $p<.01$) and preference for close relationship with older men ($r=.71$, $p<.05$).

Hypothesis Two

The hypothesis which stated that self-concept and spirituality will jointly and independently predict experience in close relationship with older men was tested using regression analysis. The result is presented in table 2:

Table 2: Summary Table of Multiple Regression showing Independent and Joint prediction of self-concept and spirituality of relationship with older men

Variable	R	R ²	F	p	β	t	p
Self-concept					.126	2.678	<.01
Spirituality	.172	.029	7.43	<.01	-.166	-3.507	<.01

The result in the table shows that self-concept and spirituality jointly predicted experience in close relationship with older men [$R^2 = .029$, $F = 7.43$, $P < .01$]. The predictor variables accounted for 3% of the total variation on experience in close relationship with older men. Independently, self-concept had significant positive prediction ($\beta = .13$) and spirituality had significant negative prediction ($\beta = -.17$) on female undergraduates' preference for close relationship with older men. The stated hypothesis is hereby accepted. This implies that the higher the self-concept, the greater the disposition of female undergraduates to engage in close relationship with older men and vice versa. Conversely, the higher the level of spirituality, the lower the disposition of female undergraduates to engage in close relationship with older men and vice versa.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first hypothesis which stated that there will be significant positive correlation amongst self-concept, spirituality, religion, family background and experience in close relationship with older men was partially accepted. The result revealed that undergraduate students' preference for close relationship with older men is inversely related with religion and spirituality. It further showed that self-concept has direct linkage with spirituality, religion and preference for close relationship with older men. These findings run at variance with behavioural outcomes of some studies which revealed that partners' spirituality was positively associated with close relationship quality (Clements, Scott, and Howard, 2004; Perry 2015) while others displayed no significant effects of partner spirituality for close relationship quality (Mahoney 2010). Research to date has outlined how religion positively impacts the quality and stability of close relationship through high frequency and quality of individual prayer (Stafford 2016), high levels of spouse spirituality (Perry 2015), and increased frequency of attending church together or praying together. Generally, there is some evidence that partner spirituality is positively associated with relationship quality, but this finding may be attributable more to women than men (Lopez, Shelley, Sara, and Joshua, 2011). The various findings of this present studies have clearly shown that the dimension contemporary dating among young adults, particularly undergraduate students is quite different from adults dating and close relationship.

The hypothesis which stated that self-concept and spirituality will jointly and independently predict experience in close relationship with older men was also accepted. The result shows that there was significant joint prediction of relationship with older men by self-concept and spirituality. The predictor variables accounted for 3% of the total variation on experience in close relationship with older men. It could be observed that the largely unaccounted joint influence of the two predictors (97%) can only be attributed to factors that are outside of this study. Independently, self-concept and spirituality significantly predicted experience in close relationship with older men. This finding is partly supported by outcome of research conducted by McIntyre, Mattingly and, Lewandowski (2014) to examine the connection between self-concept change and relationship outcomes among fifty-five (55) adults that are involved in romantic relationships, 69% of them completed questionnaires about their self-concept and relationship at two time points, six weeks apart. These researchers observed greater self-expansion and pruning with greater relationship satisfaction six weeks later. However, research works on partner spirituality on relationship quality has produced mixed results. While some studies demonstrated that partners' spirituality was positively associated with close relationship (Clements, Scott, and Howard, 2004; Perry 2015), other studies displayed no significant effects of partner spirituality for relationship quality (Mahoney 2010).

Conclusion

The behavioural outcome of this study brought to limelight the difference between adults' dating and the contemporary preference for close relationship with older men by female undergraduate students. It becomes obvious that female undergraduate students' preference for close relationship with older men is associated more with low level spirituality, less religiosity and high self-concept. In other words, quite a large number of female undergraduate students that preferred having close relationship with older men are those with high self-concept, low level religiosity and spirituality. It was observed that self-concept and spirituality jointly predicted preference for dating older men among undergraduate students. It could be observed based on related empirical literatures that high self-concept and high-level spirituality predispose adult females, to a large extent, to engage in close relationship with older men.



Recommendation

Base on the findings of this study, the following recommendation are made:

- i. It is recommended that single female should be counsel on how best to handle relationship affair and also should be guided either by parents or significant others on the need to build up their level of spirituality so that they can avoid dating or being in relationship with older men especially irresponsible older adults so as not to jeopardize their future.
- ii. Also, female undergraduates should be very watchful, careful and look out for the kind of relationship they want to have and seek for counsel and direction from counselor on close relationship/marital issues so as not to fall prey.
- iii. Also, female undergraduates should learn more about how singles can best develop sound premarital relationships that could lead to healthy marriages, thus reducing the risk of divorce or marital distress, dissatisfaction or violence in their marriages.

Limitation of the study

This study, like any other research, has its own limitations that may have potentially impacted the findings. Firstly, results of the study suffer from low external validity as the sample was limited to only undergraduate students from two public tertiary institutions in Lagos State. There is the need to extend frontier of knowledge in this area by expanding the focus to cover tertiary institutions across all geographical zones of the country to enhance generalization of findings. In addition, the need to spread research variables to cover parental background characteristics of these female young adults would equally add to the emerging pattern of dating preference among these young adults.

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