

YOUNG ADULTS' CONSTRUCTION OF LOVE RELATIONSHIPS

BY

TSHOABIDI OSCAR SCOTCH MODIPA

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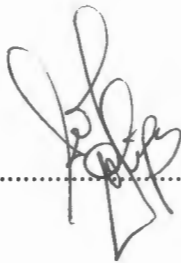
**SUPERVISORS : MS VICKY SEGAMI
DR KELVIN MWABA**

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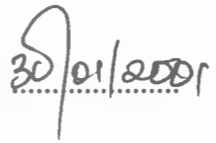
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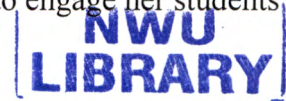
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ABSTRACT

Given the widespread problem of sustaining healthy love relationships among many people, especially young people and the resultant failures in married life, preventive intervention in the form of education to young people about courtship has become necessary.

This study explored the experiences of young people in love relationships with regard to their dating patterns; how they deal with conflict situations in their love relationships, as well as issues about which they would like to be counseled.

Participants in the study were eight female students whose age ranged from twenty to twenty-six and had an average dating experience of six and half years. Relevant data was collected through the individual, semi-structured face-to-face interviews.

Generally participants began dating at an early age and experienced problems in sustaining one long-lasting pleasurable love relationship. On average participants' love relationships lasted for one and half years. The majority of participants received very little or no form of education and guidance before they began dating.

The findings of the study further indicated that for most participants conflict in a love relationship is bad and therefore should be avoided at all costs. Consequently when dealing with conflict situations in their love relationships participants tended to prefer avoidance strategies, for example "*keeping quiet for the sake of peace*".

Regarding premarital relationship preparation programs participants expressed lack of knowledge about such programs. However upon learning about the programs all participants expressed a huge interest to make use of such programs if and when they are made available and accessible to them. Conflict resolution and communication skills were mentioned to be the major issues about which participants would like to receive education and guidance. Detailed findings of the study and their implications are presented in the following chapters.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION

Anyone who has gone through the pain of a broken heart owing to a failed love relationship knows the suffering involved and this makes the need for working on establishing and sustaining long-lasting pleasurable love relationships even more important. Despite the widely reported rate of marital breakdown, many people still seem attracted to marriage, even those who divorced tend to remarry (*Goldman, 1991; Hauck, 1981*).

Over the next few years, it is expected that thousands of young adults will marry with the intention of entering into a union that will last until death. Yet more than half of those marriages may not last beyond five years. This may sound too pessimistic or more of a prophecy of doom but judging from the relatively short lifespan of many marriages and love relationships today, this is a more likely possibility.

Other issues that indicate the sad state of affairs insofar as intimate love relationships are concerned include the widely publicised incidence of homicide, suicide and partner abuse. From the given picture it becomes evident that even though people possess a universal longing to be attached to and to love, maintaining a lifetime attachment to a partner still seem difficult.

It is tragic that despite the centrality of love relationships in the life structure of young adults, virtually no efforts have been made to educate and equip young people with the skills necessary to establish and sustain pleasurable love relationships. Durana (1996) argue that love relationships today require great interpersonal competence and knowledge to survive. In addition Nelson-Jones (1986) believe the said skills are too important to be left to chance.

In their assessment of what makes it difficult for many people, young people in particular, to maintain long-lasting and healthy love relationships, various authors came up with a number of possible explanations. For example, Bloomfield and Vattese (1989) and Hauck (1983) assert that most people did not learn much from their parents about how to build terrific love relationships.

Vincent (*Silliman, 1987*) coined the phrase "naturalistic fallacy" to refer to the notion among many people that love is natural and thus need no external guidance and assistance to grow stronger. As a result, Baron and Byrne (1987) and Cutter (1994) argue that many people are misled to believe that if they fall in love the eventual outcome will be a marriage in which they live happily ever after. The hard reality is that terrific love relationships are created and not found. In fact to relate well and for a long time, partners need to develop and use a repertoire of loving skills, which among others include conflict resolution and communication skills (*Bloomfield, et al, 1989; Nelson-Jones, 1986*).

Among the frequently reported reasons for relationship failures are lack of skills; poor knowledge and education and unrealistic expectations (*Burr, 1976; Cutter, 1994; Duck, 1983; Durana, 1996; Segal, 1996*). Although the common causes of marital and love relationship failures have been identified, it appears the human service profession is slow to respond to the implicit call for intervention. In cases where there is intervention, the approach tend to be reactive (as in traditional marital therapy) rather than pro-active and preventive. This is a source of concern because surely there is a need to save many young people from the pain of entering into rocky and less pleasurable love relationships. The surge of preventive approach to the social problems such as relationship failures, advocates the enhancement of the competencies of individuals to obviate the anticipated pitfalls before they occur. Silliman (1987) referred to this approach as "anticipatory socialisation".

What could be a more promising attack on the problems of marital failures and family life than that of providing the best possible education, guidance and skills training to those contemplating marriage. A critical look at love relationships before marriage as possible points of intervention is thus necessary. If young people are to be educated in the skills of establishing and maintaining healthy relationships, there is a need for the development of programs with a developmental and preventive orientation. The development of such programs need to be informed by research and could be facilitated through generative research endeavours such as this study which involves the accumulation of information and analysis of dating patterns of young people; their expectations and areas in which they need counselling with regard to love relationships. Accordingly this study sought to understand young adults' experiences in love relationships, with focus also on the importance they attach to such relationships as well as their views about premarital relationships preparation programs.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There is accumulating evidence that the quality of the love relationship before marriage is positively related to the quality of married life. (*Gilbert, 1992; Worrell, 1988*). Implicit in this statement is the need and importance of establishing and managing love relationships properly if one is to have a happy married life, yet it is evident that a lot of people do not. The problem of sustaining pleasurable love relationships is widespread among the married and those unmarried or cohabiting. This problem is of great social significance if one considers the emotional costs involved and it thus call for intervention, especially from the human service professionals. It is in fact marriage and divorce that have often attracted more of the researchers' attention whereas premarital love relationships are relegated to the background.

It is also logical to assume that many problems of marriage are "carry overs" from the love relationship before marriage. Cutter (1994) observed that during courtship couples often focus on entertainment and are reluctant to discuss "weighty issues" such as their values and expectations. However, it is not uncommon to find that these issues become major bones of contention later in married life. It is certainly prudent for young people in love to appraise their relationship realistically from the beginning in terms of jointly defining what is acceptable and unacceptable for each other. This may appear commonsensically an easy task but without better negotiation skills many people may have difficulties to resolve their differences.

It is also interesting to note that the society is doing less to equip young people with the skills for building strong love relationships; however. Stern and Bistow (1996) assert that fortunately human beings are blessed with the ability to learn and thus can learn the skills of loving.

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Hauck (1981) maintains that most people have no clear idea of what romantic love relationships and marriage are intrinsically all about. Many tend to have all sorts of nonsensical notions or myths about love relationships. These myths, such as "love conquers all" often overshadow the reality that love relationships are complex and challenging.

Stern and Bistow (1996) further argue that in an ideal world young people should acquire the right skills before entering into love relationships and ultimately marriage, just as it is a prerequisite to learn to drive before one is licenced to drive a motor vehicle. The sad reality is, often young people tend to pick those skills as they go along with the business of dating. This sort of behaviour amounts to trying to build strong foundations for houses in which they are already living.

Today many young people become economically independent at a tender age and some marry earlier. Those who start dating without prior education and parental guidance are more likely to start married life with fewer knowledge and skills, experience countless problems and eventually become one of the statistics of failed marriages. All these paint a gloomy future of the institution of marriage. There is therefore a need to empower young adults with the skills needed to establish and maintain pleasurable love relationships.

Although young people may learn about love relationships by observing those around them, they may not be able to observe all that there is to be observed without distortion. It remains important that systematic efforts be made to train and educate young people in the skills of loving.

The impetus of this study is rooted in the researcher's social and clinical experience. The researcher observed that many young people who consult counsellors and write to popular magazines' advice columns, complain of problematic or sour love relationships. The central thread in their problems is difficulties making certain decisions and unfulfilled expectations which many authors believe are often unrealistic (*Brehm, 1984; Burr, 1976; Cheville, 1955; Nelson-Jones, 1986; and Powel, 1987*). The present study sought to examine young adults' expectations in love relationships in order to appreciate how those expectations affect them in their relationships.

In addition, from social experience, especially as a student at a tertiary institution, the problem of sustaining long-lasting pleasurable relationships was rife among university students. The students' culture of getting involved in the so-called "help-me-through-the-course" type of relationships has become a worrying factor as these young people

are at a greater risk of contracting HIV/AIDS.

Finally, South Africa is daily becoming the newsmaker with her high rate of intimate violence (i.e. violence involving people in love or intimates). News reports in both print and electronic media often contain headlines such as "A 23 years old man shot and killed his 21 years old girlfriend before turning the gun on himself". The story then goes on to say "... it was after they had an argument" (Sowetan, 25 February, 1999).

This is surely the worst possible eventuality people may expect from people in love but it serves to strengthen the argument that young people in love relationship have difficulties in the area of problem solving and need guidance and education to manage their love relationships effectively.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

For a long time dating relationships seemed to be taken to be "play relationships". Many individuals in such relationships seem to think they are there just to while away time whilst waiting to connect with the "right" person. Young-Eisendrath (1993) noted that it is through romance that lifetime partners are found. However, it puzzles what make young people today to hop from one love relationship to the next, as if indeed these relationships are "play relationships" and not worth nurturing.

After exploring hundreds of relationships, McKay, et.al. (1994) concluded that people who make their relationships work have certain skills. Dysfunctional beliefs and unrealistic expectations and lack of skills were identified as some of the many factors that lead to relationship failures (Gerdes, 1988; Segal 1996). If these observations are true what can be said about today's youth who seem to battle to maintain long-lasting love relationships? In an attempt to answer the latter question and understand the young adult in love, the guiding purpose of this study was:

- (i) To explore young adults' conceptions of love relationships: the value young adults attach to love relationships and their level of education insofar as dating is concerned.
- (ii) To describe the expectations and dating patterns of young adults in love

relationships.

Particular attention was also paid to how young adults generally deal with conflict situations in their love relationships. Finally the study tapped young adults' general views regarding premarital relationship preparation programs.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to gain a better understanding of the general experiences of young people in love relationships and how they could possibly be helped to make those relationships more pleasurable, the interview schedule was designed to answer the following questions:

- ! What are the dating patterns of young adults?
- ! How important are love relationships to young adults?
- ! What are young adults's ideas of a healthy love relationship?
- ! How do they generally deal with conflict situations in their love relationships?
- ! What opinions do young adults hold of premarital relationship preparation programs?
- ! What are the issues or problems young adults would like counselling on?

1.4 DEFINITION OF CENTRAL CONCEPTS

1.4.1 *Young Adult*: Since there is no obvious definition of the point when adulthood begins, the definition of exactly who a young adult is has equally been controversial. Developmental theorists also struggled to come to a common definition of a young adult. To illustrate this dilemma, Kimmel (1974) once asked whether the individual becomes an adult when he/she attains physical maturity or is there some social milestone that serve as a pointer or is it when the individual subjectively feel independent and responsible?

For the purpose of this study however the concept of young adult is defined from a developmental frame of reference developed by Havighurst (Rogers, 1979;

Gerdes, 1988) to refer to any person who is above the age of 18 (but not over 30 years) who has a well-developed sense of self and can deal relatively well with social milestones such as forming intimate relationships.

1.4.2 *Construction*: This term derives from the verb "construe" which means "to give meaning" (Webster's Third New International Dictionary, 1993). The International Dictionary of Psychology defines "construction" as a psychological process that involves forming perceptions and expectations about some phenomena, largely as a result of social experiences.

1.4.3 *Love Relationship*: Defining a love relationship is not easy as is defining love. The Cambridge International Dictionary of English (1996) defines a love relationship as the relationship that involves intense emotions of attraction and affection between two adults.

According to Sternberg's Triangular Theory of love (*Papalia, et.al., 1996*) a love relationship (sometimes referred to as romantic relationship) is often characterised by two faces or elements: intimacy (emotional involvement) and passion (sexual desire) but lacks the third element (i.e commitment) which is characteristic of a marital relationship. For the purpose of this study only love relationships involving young adults of the opposite sexes were considered.

1.5 DELIMITATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

! **Delimitations**: The focus of this study was heterosexual in orientation. It was confined to interviewing only young adults who were, at the time of study involved in a love relationship with members of the opposite sex.

The sample included only respondents whose ages fell in the 18-26 years range.

! **Limitations**: The following issues might constitute the limitations of the study.

(i) *Generalisability*: Owing to a small sample and the fact that purposive

sampling procedure was used, the findings of the study may apply only to a similar socio-demographic sample. Therefore generalisability of results to the larger population of young adults is limited.

- (ii) *Experimenter bias*: The subjective nature of the interview technique tends to influence respondents handling of questions. Results obtained through such a technique need to be interpreted with caution as they may be subject to alternative explanation.
- (iii) *Research Instrument*: The instrument for data collection was developed by the researcher and thus not standardised. Although the instrument was pilot tested its reliability could not be guaranteed.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There is a growing volume of literature that has linked the quality of premarital relationship to marital satisfaction and stability (*Flowers & Montel, 1996; Gilbert, 1992; Worrell, 1988*). This finding seems to have had a significant influence on the review of approaches to interventions with problems of married life. Among developments in the field of intimate relationships, is the growing call for preventive and proactive approaches to problems of love relationships and married life.

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Preparation for married life with skills training focus has been advocated by many as one of the most effective ways to reduce the rate of or possibly prevent marital breakdown. (*Bockneck, 1980; De Witt, 1982; Durana, 1996; Feiner, et.al., 1983; Goldman, 1991; Gangsei, 1971; Silliman, 1987*) It is however the opinion of this author that the benefits of such preparation programs can be maximized if they include dating relationships as the starting point. The dynamics of love relationships may not necessarily be the same as those of a marital relationship, however, these kinds of intimate relationships share a lot in common (a further discussion is presented in the literature review section). In fact dating or love relationships may logically be taken as the foundation phase of marital relationship. The experience and skills acquired in the former may at some point, be found to be helpful during the latter period.

Furthermore nowadays cohabitation is increasingly becoming a popular lifestyle, particularly among students (*Papalia, et.al., 1996*). Due to this, it is appropriate to

develop relationship skills training programs which also target those who may prefer cohabitation. The study of how young people experience their love relationships and their general opinions regarding relationship skills training programs is important for a number of reasons:

Firstly, there are virtually no studies that have attempted to document young adults' dating patterns; and expectations in love relationships. The present study thus sought to fill this gap.

Secondly, premarital counselling which has until recently been the province of the ministry, was often criticised for lacking firm research and theoretical base (*Danish, et.al., 1983; Olson, 1990*). It is hoped that this study generate information that will be helpful toward the development of relationship preparation programs.

Thirdly, the documentation of the views of young adults regarding premarital relationship skills training programs may assist practitioners to develop programs that are informed by research and address the real needs of the target consumers.

Finally love relationships among young people have for so long escaped the attention of many researchers. With cohabitation seemingly becoming an alternative to conventional marriage, a study like this is vital in gaining insights into young adults' experiences of such relationships.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since people are important to people, there is just no denying that good relationships are good medicine for many social problems. Powell (1987) assert that healthy long lives are dependent on strengthening our bonds with special people in our lives. The need to relate at an intimate level is one of humans' innate drives. It appears however that this need is not as deeply experienced at any other stage of human development as it is during young adulthood.

According to Papalia, et.al. (1996) for young adults a loving relationship with a partner of the opposite sex is a pivotal element of their lives. It is further argued that how this developmental challenge of intimate relationships is handled has far-reaching consequences for the future well-being and happiness of the individual especially in married life (Gerdes, 1988). Choosing a love partner, however seem to be less of a problem than maintaining a long-lasting and pleasurable relationship with that special person (Stemberg & Barnes, 1988).

This chapter reviews related literature. The first part of the discussion gives a theoretical orientation, whereas the rest of the chapter deals with the critical appraisal of the concept of love relationships in terms of what they are and what they are not (as in common myths and misconceptions). Furthermore, the challenges of love relationships and the building blocks of terrific relationships are looked at.

2.1 THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

The study of love relationships here is approached from two intertwined theoretical perspectives: the developmental and the preventive psychology models. Each model is presented with its major assumptions, rationale for their adoption as well as their implications.

2.1.1 The developmental model

The developmental model is derived from the discipline of developmental psychology. The developmental frame of reference sees human development as a continuous process that involves encountering periods of crisis and tension which often require new adaptations and leads to new insights (*Louw, 1991*).

One of the developmental theorists, Havighurst referred to these periods of crisis and tension as developmental tasks. Developmental tasks are defined as "challenges which arise at or about a certain period of life, successful resolution of which leads to happiness and smooth transition with later challenges, while failure to deal with the challenge leads to unhappiness and disapproval by society" (*Gerdes, 1988; Papalia, et.al., 1996; Rogers, 1979*).

Young adulthood has been found to be characterised by two major related themes: separation and attachment (*Sugarman, 1986*). The former theme involves the young adult's challenge of establishing a self separate from parents, whereas the latter theme centres around establishing bonds outside the family, such as friendships. Among these two themes, developing intimate love relationships has been identified to be the dominant developmental challenge facing young adults (*Louw, 1991; Papalia, et.al., 1996; Segal, 1996; Sugarman, 1986*).

The concept of a developmental task or challenge as defined here seem to apply relatively well to love relationships since this type of relationships constitute the developmental challenges of early adulthood. It is therefore logical to suggest that successful handling of early premarital love relationships increases the chances of happiness and success with the later challenge of marriage. Of course marital relationships may be more complex than love relationships. According to Rogers (1979) in order to master the challenges of young adulthood and succeed in the transition into middle adulthood, the individual must have particular attitudes; competencies and skills. This also holds true for love relationships and therefore helping young people acquire the necessary skills might help to make the transition into married life easy and forestall potential marital problems.

2.1.2 The Preventive Model

Relationship breakdown involving both marital and cohabitation relationships has become such a critical social problem with serious consequences for the mental well-being of parties involved. Rather than waiting to repair the emotional damage it is important to be more proactive in dealing with the resultant distress. Fowers and Montel (1996) and De Witt(1982) agree that reactive intervention such as marital therapy are becoming incapable of improving the situation of relationship failures, and thus the emphasis should be placed on equipping the relationship rather than repairing it.

It was out of these concerns that the preventive model was borne. Felner, et.al. (1983) define preventive model as involving activities directed to specifically identified vulnerable groups. The model is educative in orientation and has got skill training as one of its components (*De Witt, 1982; Wodarski, 1989*).

The preventive model can be described in terms of three interrelated concepts: primary intervention, anticipatory socialisation and empowerment. The most important defining principle of the preventive model is the timing of intervention and its concern with the building of the individual's competencies to enable the individual deal effectively with developmental challenges, and ultimately facilitate development (*Wodarski, 1989*). In essence proponents of the preventive model advocate anticipation of problems and dealing with them before they start.

Corsini (1994) identified primary prevention as the major intervention modality. In terms of primary prevention orientation the focus is on dealing with anticipated pitfalls. Silliman (1987) noted that primary intervention in love relationships should involve providing young people with information that will improve their knowledge and expectations about love relationships and build their skills, as in communication and conflict resolution skills.

As a way of dealing with the problem of love relationships failures, a preventive approach seem to have distinct advantages. For example the idea of anticipatory socialisation as discussed by Silliman (1987) and Goldman (1991) suggests that preparation of young people for the developmental task of establishing love relationships is necessary to assist them in establishing foundations for better married

life.

In support of the preventive model, Goldman (1991) further argued that the period of courtship should be viewed as the important time for the couple to learn about each other in terms of their needs and expectations. For the preventive minded practitioner the emphasis on educating young people prior to their actual involvement in a committed love relationship is necessary as it assist the youth to appraise realistically many of the romantic illusions and the dynamics of the relationship. All of these assumptions of the preventive model has an underlying goal: empowerment.

2.2 DEFINING A LOVE RELATIONSHIP

A love relationship is a relative concept that is sometimes mistaken to encompass marital relationship. Although the two types of intimate relationships share some common features, they also differ to a certain extend in terms of dynamics. The following is a brief comparative discussion of how similar and dissimilar love and marital relationships are.

2.2.1 Love and marital relationships: A comparative analysis

Other terms like "dating" or "courtship" are used to refer to love relationships. Lately cohabitation has been included in the former category of intimate relationships. Irrespective of whatever label is used, one of the major defining characteristics of love relationships is that they are usually not considered official, either socially or legally (*Jasinski & Williams, 1998*). It is love relationship that precede marital relationship.

According to Papalia, et.al. (1996) in terms of dynamics a love relationship is defined by romantic love which involves intimacy and passion as its major components. Love relationships are characteristic of young adults. On the other hand a marital relationship is a socially and legally sanctioned union that is ideally characteristic of adults. In addition to the components of intimacy and passion, a marital relationship has commitment as its major component.

Despite being different in some ways both love and marital relationships share some

common features. Rush (1984) observed that both types of relationships evolve around human needs. They both serve the purpose of gratifying human needs such as sex, need for companionship and validation of self-worth. (Gerdes, 1988; Louw, 1991). Piorkowski (1994) maintain that both love and marital relationships involve a mutual exchange of experiences through which an understanding of oneself and one's partner is achieved. Furthermore love and marital relationships share similarities in terms of basic building blocks and risk-factors (i.e. factors that put the relationship at risk). For example factors such as good communication and conflict resolution skills have been identified as basic building blocks in both types of relationships, whereas their absence is equally responsible for relationship failure (De Witt, 1982; Durana, 1996; Sternberg & Barnes, 1988).

In conclusion, both love and marital relationships appear at face value, to be distinctly different entities but at a closer inspection the two share so much in common. Both evolve around human needs and the extend to which those needs are met determine the quality of the relationship.

2.2.2 Common myths and misconceptions about love relationships and their implications

The Cambridge International Dictionary of English (1996) defines a *myth* as a commonly believed but false idea and a *misconception* as an idea which is wrong and has been based on failure to understand a situation. Love relationships are not exempt from misconceptions and myths. In one of the endeavours to understand the problems of love relationships, Chapman (1995) concluded that loving partnerships are built on reality and thus romantic fantasies can never come to fruition. Cutter (1994) observed that people bring into love relationships many misconceptions and unrealistic expectations most of which they are not aware, are learned so early in life that they become integrated into their thought and behaviour patterns. The following discussion look at some of the most popular and powerful misconceptions about love relationships. Their implications for the development and success of the relationship are also explored.

! Love is forever, no matter what

According to Stern and Bistow (1996) it is common for young people to suffer from a kind of selective blindness when they fall in love and ultimately ignore any potential problems that may arise. No wonder those who hold such an idea of love confuse love relationship breakdown with personal failure. As a result such individuals commit suicide and/or kill their partners when the relationship fails or is terminated.

Hauck (1981) argue that while everyone would wish for a life-long love, in situations of persistent emotional, sexual or physical abuse, it is necessary to terminate the relationship after all else have failed to stop the pain. In fact one can only love so long as the other person remain reasonably decent.

! **Love is enough**

This misconception is closely related to the previous one. It involves holding the idea that no matter what problems partners may have, if they love each other the relationship will still survive (*Cutter, 1994*). It is a pity that as a result people become ignorant of the enormous amount of effort that is needed to maintain a mutually satisfying relationship. The negative implications of this belief is that the couple is likely to care less about examining their relationship realistically in terms of working on problems that arise, believing that love will conquer and cure every problem.

Bloomfield and Vettesse (1989) assert that rather than relying on having strong feelings for one's partner, the couple need to be skilful in communication and problem-solving.

! **My partner is my friend and I don't need any other friends**

The importance of friendships outside the relationship with one's partner have been emphasised by many authors (*Brehm, 1984; Duck, 1983; Wilkinson & Campbell, 1997*). Cutter (1994) observed that after falling in love many people tend to become immersed in romanticism with their partners, gradually sealing

themselves off from others who could be helpful during crisis. The same author argue that not all needs can be met within the love relationship and therefore it is important to have friendships other than with one's partner.

! **Conflict is a sign of a bad relationship**

Baron and Byrne (1987), Cutter (1994) and Hauck (1981) agree that since love relationship evolve around human needs, intimacy cannot exist without some form of conflict. Individuals who subscribe to the notion of conflict as bad tend to avoid the slightest disagreements. Rush (1984) stated that such individuals become dishonest about their feelings for the sake of "peace". Conflict is considered a normal, inevitable integral part of every intimate relationship (*Hewett, 1984; Nelson-Jones, 1986*).

In addition to these, there are surely many other misconceptions people have regarding love relationships. It is these misconceptions that tend to account for many problems in love relationships.

2.2.3 The importance of love relationships

The pain of broken heart owing to a failed love relationship has been highlighted somewhere in the preceding discussion. Despite the said pain, it is amazing how many more people still bother with love relationships and risk emotional hurt.

Powell (1981) maintain that it is very rare to find anyone who actually prefers not to have an intimate love relationship. The rare exceptions seem to be those who have been so badly hurt by rejection that they are afraid to risk it again. Despite the potential for distress, love relationships can be beneficial to the individual's general well-being in a number of different ways.

For most people the most important and emotionally fulfilling experience in their lives is to have a loving relationship with another person (*Forgas, 1985; Stern & Bistow, 1995; Wilkonson & Campbell, 1997*).

According to Brehm (1984) love relationships serve the individual's psychological need such as need for intimacy and sense of belonging. Love relationships provide the vehicle for companionship through which partners can experience the full richness of humanity. Piorkowski (1994) and Worrel (1998) believe that since few adults can thrive on loneliness, individuals in supportive love relationships enhance their response to stress, their self-esteem and resistance to loneliness.

Relating to someone at an intimate level stimulates the process of growth like nothing else (*Stern & Bistow, 1996*). There is also evidence that relationship satisfaction (the degree to which the individual think and feel a relationship is living up to his/her expectations) is positively associated with overall psychological and physical well-being (*Brehm, 1984; Cutter, 1994; Kimmel, 1974; Worrel, 1988*).

Overall, there seems to be distinct psychological and health-related benefits to have someone readily available to share one's troubles with, to celebrate one's happy moments with and just to be there when one needs company. On the contrary, Forgas (1985) observed that lonely people are more prone to suffer hardships such as stress, alcoholism and high suicide risk. It is clear that love relationships add meaning to one's life.

2.3 WHAT MAKE LOVE RELATIONSHIPS GO SOUR



Although the specific dynamics of conflicted love relationships may differ from one relationship to the next, there are several factors whose presence or absence in a relationship seem to be a sure recipe for failure. The discussion that follows illuminate the possible reasons why some relationships last longer whereas others do not.

Research on premarital love relationship development (*Duck, 1983; Hauck, 1981; Segal, 1996; Silliman, 1987*), found that lack of skills, false notions or unrealistic expectations and lack of knowledge about the realities of love relationships are the important reasons for relationship failures. It is skill deficits, as in communication and conflict-resolution skills, that is often cited for relationship failure. For example Duck (1983) suggests that some people are skilled at starting a relationship but lack the skills to sustain the relationship.

Goldman (1991) identified unexpressed differing expectations as critical factors. The failure to express and discuss expectations of each other further signify lack of communication skills and ignorance about the realities of the relationship. Ideally, in the beginning of the relationship partners need to explore expectations of each other and the relationship, adapt initially-held expectations to accommodate the other partner.

In terms of the Social Exchange Theory (*Deaux & Wrightsman, 1984*) a love relationship may go sour if there is no equity, where one partner feels he/she is putting more into the relationship than he/she receives out of it. Rush (1984) also agree that failure to give consideration to the needs of the other partner will erode and destroy the relationship.

Love relationships involve skills: communication and problem-solving skills, and their absence puts the relationship at risk.

2.4 BUILDING TERRIFIC LOVE RELATIONSHIPS

The following are questions surely many people who long to love forever frequently ask: Is it possible to achieve the dream of a healthy, successful love relationship with that special person? If yes, what are the building blocks for such a relationship?

The humanists believe that whatever the human mind can conceive is attainable. The discussion that follow looks at how individuals can build terrific love relationships. Attention is also paid to the challenges in establishing and maintaining happy relationships and the skills necessary to achieve this goal.

2.4.1 Challenges in establishing and maintaining terrific love relationships.

The journey of love relationships never did run smoothly. It is sometimes fraught with difficulties and the challenge is to keep those difficulties to a minimum. Couples in terrific love relationships tend to evoke comments such as "They are so lucky" or "They were meant for each other". The implication is that good relationships are a matter of luck and are not created. Cutter (1994) believe that successful love relationships are

not dependent on connecting with the "right" person, just as breaking up cannot be blamed on connecting with the "wrong" person. McKay, et.al. (1994) explored what people considered important for the success of the relationship and found that some believe it is the strength of one's commitment to the relationship.

Furthermore, in an attempt to demonstrate the amount of effort required to build a successful love relationship, Bloomfield and Vettese (1989) argued that [terrific] love relationships do not just happen, they have to be made : made to start, made to work, made to develop, kept in good working order and preserved from going sour. From the foregoing statements it can be deduced that establishing and maintaining a terrific love relationship is indeed a challenging task.

According to Deaux and Wrightsman (1984) the process of developing love relationships is one of young adulthood's challenging goal. It is a challenge for which there seem to be no role models. The old structures that used to hold our parents' relationships together are no longer as binding as they used to be. For example in the past, marital breakdown used to have a certain social stigma attached to it but judging by how easy it seems for couples to break up, that stigma appears to be no longer effective.

It appears the biggest challenge facing young people in love relationships is dealing with relationship problems or conflict. The high rate of intimate violence as reported in the media bears testimony to that. According to the General Conflict Theory (Cardarelli, 1997) intimate violence is a manifestation of poor conflict management skills and partners who overreact to disappointment in their expectations are usually prone to perpetuate abuse and violence.

There are three major strategies identified to be used frequently in dealing with conflict (Forgas, 1985): Resolution through avoidance where partners strive to avoid the slightest disagreement at all costs; resolution through attacking the partner where one partner wants to win at all costs and finally resolution through compromise which has been found to be positively related to relationship success.

In his study of strategies used by college students to deal with conflict in their love

relationships, Forgas (1985) found that a common dynamic in their conflicted relationships was their inability to communicate and solve problems in more mature ways. As a result avoidance and attacking a partner featured prominently in their responses to conflict situations (*Jasinski & Williams, 1998*).

The preceding picture of how most young people struggle to deal with conflict in mature ways seems to support the argument that many perceive conflict as a sign of a bad relationship. On the contrary conflict has been found to be an integral part of any intimate relationship and can in fact be used constructively to build the relationship (*Cahn, 1992; Hewett, 1984*). There is evidence that there is no relationship that can exist without conflict (*Burr, 1976; Chan, 1992; Forgas, 1985; Hewett, 1984; Rush, 1984*). Dealing effectively with conflict is the hallmark of satisfying love relationships.

According to Rush (1984) the starting point in dealing with conflict is to realise that it is not necessarily bad and can in fact be a source for improving the relationship. Therefore dealing with conflict means dealing with the relationship. Conflict is a means by which partners test their relationship realistically and it sensitise partners to the needs of the other partner.

It is clear that it is so easy to fall in love and yet so challenging to love forever. Stern and Bistow (1996) argue that for a relationship to grow there must be commitment from both partners to develop the relationship over time and the spirit of co-operation between both partners. It is a challenge for young people to realise that a love relationship cannot stay at the mutual co-operation level, sooner or later conflict is bound to arise and the way in which partners respond makes a great deal of difference.

2.4.2 A skills approach to love relationships

Despite having all the desire to establish rewarding and successful love relationships, if partners lack the necessary skills they may end up with nothing. It is unfortunate that mother nature doesn't provide people with directives on how to manage their relationships successfully. The implication is that individuals have to learn a variety

of skills to deal effectively with challenges of love relationships. These observations tie perfectly with the assertion that love only is not enough for the relationship to succeed.

Relationship maintenance involves something beyond the mere repetition of those variables that initiated attraction in the first place but requires considerable amount of skill (*Wilkinson & Campbell, 1997*). Nelson-Jones (1986) also believe that loving involves skills. Love relationships are not just about asking what your partner can do for you, an emphasis on being loved; but also asking what you can do for your partner, an emphasis on expressing care and love. To do this individual needs some skills and those skills are said to be not innate but can be learned (*Durana, 1996*).

There is empirical evidence that lends support to the notion that the skills of loving (i.e. communication, conflict resolution skills etc.), and to some extent a mature perspective on love relationships can be taught to young adults (*Silliman, 1987*). Partners can be assisted to develop capacities that will enhance their interactions. Psycho-educational programs such as the PAIRS (Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills) (*Durana, 1996*) proved to be effective in enhancing partners' self-knowledge, developing communication and conflict management skills, uncovering hidden expectations and thus alleviating potential problems.

An approach that sees loving as a skill can possibly sensitize people about putting more effort in perfecting their skills in order to maintain pleasurable love relationships, rather than relying on romantic myths like those discussed previously. Young people need to be aware that rewarding love relationships require basic interpersonal skills such as communication, assertiveness etc., and these skills can be learned.

2.5 SUMMARY



This chapter presented a discussion on love relationship by reviewing relevant literature. A theoretical orientation to this study and its rationale was presented. Other aspects looked at included romantic myths that are commonly associated with love relationships, how these myths affect the relationships and factors that can explain relationships failure. The focus also fell on the importance of love relationships as well

as factors considered to be the building blocks of terrific love relationships.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe young adults' conceptions of love relationships and their general view relating to premarital relationship preparation programs.

Methods and procedures used to accomplish this purpose are described in this chapter. The general approach to the study involved a qualitative paradigm.

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

A phenomenological approach was adopted to conduct this study. The relevant data were collected and analysed following the principles of an emergent design. An emergent design implies that a research design unfolds from the interaction with the study (*Robson, 1993*). Maykut and Morehouse (1994) argue that through an emergent design, the researcher can identify important leads in the early phases of data collection which can be pursued further by follow-up questions. The approach therefore, allows the broadening or narrowing of the focus of inquiry if and when the situation demands.

3.1.1 Assumptions and rationale for a qualitative design

Maykut and Morehouse (1994) define qualitative research paradigm as an investigative process that generally examines people's words and actions as its primary data source. The intent is to understand a phenomenon or situation as it is constructed by the participants. With its mainly phenomenological orientation, qualitative research focus on understanding the meaning events have for persons being investigated.

According to Cresswell (1994) the qualitative researcher is the primary instrument of data collection. As a result the researcher is better able to enter into the participant' world and, through ongoing interaction, get insights into participants' perspectives and meanings.

Qualitative research is also distinguishable by the fact that theory and/or hypotheses are often not established a priori, and what is important is not predetermined by the researcher rather the outcome of the study evolves from the systematic building of homogenous categories of meaning inductively derived from the data. Qualitative research is mainly used in exploratory study.

Having outlined the basic assumptions underpinning qualitative research, it becomes important to state the rationale for the choice of a qualitative paradigm. Firstly there is minimal literature and prior research on the subject of young adults' construction of love relationships to allow the generation and testing of a theory and hypotheses. Therefore, this study being exploratory in focus, could be tackled sufficiently by a qualitative design.

Secondly, a qualitative approach offered the best option to gain insights into participants experiences. Furthermore, a qualitative approach generates a richer understanding of a phenomenon or situation under study more than a quantitative method could.

3.2 THE SETTING

This study was conducted at Vista University campus, Mamelodi. The campus is situated at Hinderland street in Mamelodi Gardens, east of the Pretoria city. The interviews were conducted at offices in the department of psychology and the Student Development Centre.

3.3 RESEARCH PROCEDURES

3.3.1 Sampling

The participants in this study were recruited through the Head of the Department of Psychology at Vista University (Mamelodi). A meeting was arranged with potential participants, where the researcher described the purpose of the study as exploring the experiences of young people in love relationships.

An invitation to participate in the study was extended to volunteers who fulfilled the

specified criteria:

- (i) aged between 18 and 26 years
- (ii) currently involved in a heterosexual love relationship
- (iii) had a dating experience of at least a year.

Therefore participants were not randomly sampled, rather purposely sampled. A purposive sampling procedure is described as an approach whereby only participants who possess the required characteristics are included and thus enabling the researcher to satisfy his/her specific needs in a project (*Robson, 1993*).

3.3.2 Participants

Participants in this study were students in the department of psychology at Vista University, Mamelodi campus and were all registered for a Psychology 300 level course. The sample included a total of eight participants, all of whom were females. Although an invitation to participate was extended to both male and female students, only female students showed interest and responded satisfactorily. Male students who were approached indicated that they felt uncomfortable discussing their love relationships.

The participants were all involved in an intimate love relationship but none was married. The age of participants ranged from twenty to twenty six years.

Except for one participant who had only two love relationships during her dating experience, all other participants reported an average of four relationships. The dating experience of participants ranged from five to nine years.

3.3.3 The measuring instrument

An interview schedule was designed by the researcher to answer the research questions. In order to ensure its accuracy as far as possible, the content of the schedule was finalised after the initial list of questions was tested on a number of people who were not to be part of the final sample. During the pilot test respondents'

comments on how they experienced the questions, in terms of whether or not questions were threatening, difficult to understand, were used to finalise the list of questions.

The interview schedule comprised two major sections:

Section 1: This was a cover letter whereby the researcher introduced himself, his affiliation, the purpose of the study as well as procedures to be involved in the study.

Section 2: This section of the interview schedule comprised of four parts which overall contained twenty six questions.

Part A: This was made up of demographic questions: present age, number of relationships individual participant engaged in and participant's years of dating experience.

Part B: It contained general questions on love relationships and was aimed generally at eliciting responses on: attitudes towards dating, the value attached to love relationships and general perception of and reactions towards conflict situations in a love relationship.

Part C: Focussed on participants' expectations in love relationships as they relate to:

- (i) self
- (ii) partner and the relationship itself.

Finally: Part D was meant to capture participants' knowledge and general views' relating to premarital relationship counselling as well as issues or problems around which participants would like counselling.

The complete interview schedule appears in Appendix 1.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

3.4.1 Data collection

The structured, individual face-to-face interviews were conducted with each participant. The respondents were interviewed on different days and times. This was due to the fact that respondents were preparing for their mid-year examinations and thus interviews could only be conducted when each respondent had time.

The researcher initially planned to tape-record the interviews but the plan was abandoned because of noise from construction work nearby. Therefore the researcher took notes, recording verbatim all ideas expressed by respondents and as a result each interview lasted an average of fifty minutes.

3.4.2 Data analysis

Data generated by a qualitative design is voluminous, however it still has to be manipulated and presented in a meaningful way in the final report. To accomplish, this several methods are used. For example, Marshal and Rossman (1989) suggest the method based on the principles of data "reduction" and interpretation. This approach entails reducing a voluminous amount of data into certain patterns of themes and then creating a coherent picture of the phenomenon under study. Following similar principles data in this study were analysed and presented descriptively.

In order to develop a thorough and comprehensive analysis and presentation of the data, the researcher went through each transcript several times before engaging in the "discovery". Maykut and Morehouse (1994) describe "discovery" as the process of identifying potentially important ideas and themes in the data. Summaries of the salient features in each protocol were made and checked for recurrent and interesting ideas in all transcripts. Both the manifest and latent meaning of the participants' responses were taken as units of analysis. Finally similar ideas and concepts were grouped together and presented in terms of interview questions.

3.5 METHOD OF VERIFICATION

Data generated by qualitative research is sometimes questioned on its validity and

reliability (*Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1984*). Several suggestions are offered to address the question of the accuracy of information derived from qualitative research. One of the solutions to this problem is the use of what is known as "member checks". Member checks is defined as the process of asking research participants to tell whether or not the researcher has accurately described their experiences or perceptions.

The advantage of seeking participants' feedback is that it helps the researcher to recognise and/or emphasise something that was initially missed. The approach further serves as feedback to the informants about the outcome of the study, something that is surely appreciated by research participants.

In this study participants were contacted for the second time, some face-to-face, others telephonically to give them feedback on the outcome of the study and to get their comments on whether or not their ideas were accurately captured by the researcher. Generally participants agreed to the researcher's summaries and many expanded on their initial responses, thus enriching the insights derived from the initial interviews. It was in fact during the second or "feedback" interviews that participants became more open and expressed great interest to participate in any program that is intended to help them make a success of their relationships.

Interviews	Current Age	Age at first date	Dating experience in years	Total number of relationships	Average duration of relationships
A	20 yrs	15 yrs	5 yrs	5	1 and half yrs
B	21 yrs	15 yrs	7 yrs	5	5 months
C	25 yrs	17 yrs	8 yrs	7	1 and half yrs
D	20 yrs	17 yrs	4 yrs	3	1 and half yrs
E	23 yrs	18 yrs	5 yrs	4	1 and half yrs
F	23 yrs	18 yrs	5 yrs	4	1 and half yrs
G	24 yrs	15 yrs	9 yrs	4	2 and half yrs
H	26 yrs	17 yrs	9 yrs	2	5 years
N = 8	$\bar{0} = 22,7$ yrs	$\bar{0} = 16,5$ yrs	$\bar{0} = 6,5$ yrs	$\bar{0} = 4,375$	$\bar{0} = 2$ yrs

4.1.2 Respondents' level of knowledge about love relationships

Part A of the interview schedule further sought to elicit responses relating to participants' level of education on dating and love relationships and how such education was imparted or gained.

Casual discussions with peers or friends was mentioned by most as the common way through which respondents learned about love relationships and were initiated into dating. The second most common way through which respondents learnt about dating was guidance from the church and school. In addition to the said sources of information on dating, 80% of the respondents practised what can literally, be termed "experimenting" - learning through experience or as one goes along.

Parental involvement, where primarily the mother was actively involved, and reading magazines were mentioned by the least number of respondents as the ways through which respondents became knowledgeable about dating and love relationships.

Generally respondents expressed discontentment regarding the quality and "quantity" of the education they received before they started dating. The overall feeling expressed by respondents was that the information they received failed to lay a good foundation for their subsequent dating experience. Although peers/friends were reported to be major transmitters of information on dating, it was interesting to note

that respondents also felt that such information could not be relied upon or trusted as some respondents said: "... because they [peers] are as inexperienced as we are". Where the school and the church were involved in dating education, dating was said to be portrayed as a taboo: "We are told not to go out with boys but not told why".

4.1.3 The value attached to love relationships

Although acknowledging the great risk of emotional hurt brought about by love relationships these days, the interviews also sought to understand whether or not young people still viewed love relationships as worth the risk and the importance they think these relationships have for one's life.

Despite the prevailing problem of love relationship failures among young and older people these days, all the respondents in this study remained optimistic and expressed a positive attitude toward love relationships. Respondents felt love relationships are necessary and their optimism was reflected in statements such as: "... it does not mean that if you were previously hurt, you will always get hurt" and "anyway it is boring to be alone".

Regarding the value they attach to love relationships, respondents gave interesting, varied and somewhat controversial responses. For example many respondents indicated that involvement in a love relationship gives the individual a sense of importance - a feeling that one is special; a sense of belonging and an experience of intimacy that ordinary friends cannot offer, as well as satisfaction of the need for sex. Some respondents believed that love relationships relieve stress and give the individual a sense of security.

Another question in the interview schedule elicited responses regarding what respondents viewed as characteristics of a healthy love relationship. Participants' responses were then categorised into "realistic" and "unrealistic" in terms of how far or close were those responses attached to reality. These categories should however, not be misrepresented as meaning that one set of characteristics is wrong and the other is right. A summary of participants' responses is presented in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Characteristics of a healthy love relationship as seen by respondents

"Realistic"	"Unrealistic"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ! Good communication ! Mutual trust/Respect ! Mutual sensitivity/supportive/ understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ! No arguments between partners ! No criticism from partner ! Very close contacts - partner must call every day

The reasons for which people engage in love relationships seem not only to influence their behaviours in such relationships but also the success or failure of the relationship.

For example, an individual who enters into the relationship for monetary benefits is likely to terminate the relationship if the expected benefits are not forthcoming. In this study the majority of respondents (75%) cited love, sharing and companionship as the "right" reasons for which people should engage in love relationships. Few respondents (25%) agreed that young people could still be "right" to engage in love relationship to avoid loneliness and stress; for security and to make one's life better.

4.1.4 Perceptions of conflict and how it is generally dealt with

On how young people perceive conflict in love relationships, in terms of its role and how it is resolved, all respondents acknowledged that conflict was a common experience in all of their previous love relationships. The respondents' protocols revealed that they respond with ambivalent feelings (fear and sadness) to conflict situations in their love relationships. Although some respondents (38%) viewed conflict as an opportunity to learn, they continued to express fears for their relationships as captured in statements such as "I thought my partner no longer loved me and my relationship was bad" or "I was afraid our relationship was heading for a breakdown".

Another interesting observation was how participants in this study battled to deal with conflict situations in their love relationships. When asked about how they generally dealt with conflict in their relationships, most respondents reported that "... we just got

back to good talking terms", seemingly indicating that things just settled themselves. On further enquiry into their strategies of dealing with conflict, it was revealed that avoidance was the most preferred strategy. Statements such as "I end up admitting things for which I was not wrong" and "I often keep quiet for the sake of peace" were supportive of the avoidance strategy.

4.1.5 Expectations in love relationships

Expectations in love relationships are equally important for the success or failure of the relationship. For example fulfilled expectations are more likely to contribute positively to the success of the relationship, whereas unmet expectations could erode the relationship.

Respondents were asked to tell what their expectations were, as they relate to:

- (i) self
- (ii) partner and the relationship.



Varied views were expressed and a summary of those expectations is shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Expectations in love relationships as they relate to self, partner and the relationship.

Self	Partner	Relationship
! Be honest, faithful	! Honesty, respect	! Happiness
! Be a wife to him	! Openness	! Must culminate in marriage
! Give in to every request he makes	! Allow me freedom to express my	! 75% of my expectations must be met - if not I leave
! Phone him every day to show I care	views	
! Make my partner happy		

4.1.6 Opinions about premarital relationship preparation programs

The final part of the interview schedule attempted to elicit respondents' views regarding programs aimed at educating young people about dating and ultimately preparation for marital relationships. The questions examined the respondents' level of knowledge and opinions about such programs as premarital counselling, and issues and/or problems they would like these programs to address. What follows are the responses of participants to the preceding questions.

Fifty percent of the sample reported that they knew nothing about such relationship preparation programs as premarital counselling. For those who had some knowledge about these programs, it was found that their knowledge was superficial or limited - could not explain in detail what such programs entail. The latter group of respondents indicated that they only heard about premarital relationship counselling from their churches.

The nature, purpose and goals of programs such as premarital relationship counselling were described to each participant; after which respondents were asked to give their opinions as to the usefulness or uselessness of such programs. It was interesting to note that all respondents expressed a positive attitude toward psycho- educational endeavours such as premarital counselling, which are aimed at imparting valuable

knowledge and skills to young people in their efforts to make a success of their love relationships. All participants seemed convinced that such programs could benefit them ... help one make informed decisions before marriage.

The respondents further expressed great interest to attend such programs if and when they become available and accessible to them. Despite agreeing on the potential benefits of relationship preparation programs, some few participants (38%) raised important questions regarding these programs. The questions raised related to the costs involved and fear of having to discover after self-exploration, that one is not compatible with one's partner.

On who could best help to impart the necessary knowledge and skills to young people about building terrific love relationships, respondents preferred parents ahead of professionals (i.e. psychologists, social workers etc.); the church and school. The common reason cited for preferring parents as educators about matters of dating, was that "... it must start at home ... we spent more time with them ... [and] can relate to them easier than outsiders".

Professionals, among others psychologists and social workers came second as favourites for the task of preparing young people for the demands of love relationships and married life. The professionals' training in human behaviour was seen as their major asset. Both the church and school enjoyed relatively little support from respondents as possible "education centres" on matters of dating. However, one respondent suggested that all these institutions could play a meaningful role collectively.

Finally, the issues and/or problems which seemed to be of great concern to respondents insofar as love relationships are concerned and for which they would like counselling, were management of conflict and communication of one's feelings, followed by sex and finances. A complete list of issues/problems around which respondents in this study would like counselling, appear in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Issues/problems young people would like counselling on (in their order of popularity)

Issue/problem	%
! Conflict management/problem-solving skills	(n-7) 86%
! Communication skills	(n-6) 75%
! Sex - making my sex life better	(n-4) 50%
! Finances - how to manage our finances	(n-2) 25%
! Others - general education on love relationship - What to expect in married life - Identifying my partners level of commitment to our relationship	(n-1) 13%

4.2 SUMMARY

The preceding discussion outlined the major findings of the study. It described the socio-demographic profile of the sample, the dating patterns of respondents as well as their values and expectations in love relationships. The final part of this chapter centred around the views of respondents as they relate to their attitudes towards psycho-educational programs aimed at educating and empowering young people to make a success of their love relationships.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This chapter reviews the findings of the study as reported in the preceding chapter. The results are evaluated and interpreted as they relate to the objectives of the study and as compared to other related, previous studies.

5.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study managed to achieve the major goals as set out in chapter one. It managed to

- (i) examine young adults' experiences in love relationships in terms of their dating patterns, level of preparedness, values and expectations as well as how they deal with problems in their love relationships;
- (ii) explored young adults' views regarding premarital relationship preparation programs.

5.2 SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

The demographic information gathered in this study revealed that many young people begin dating at an early age, without prior education and continued guidance especially from parents, and thus experience problems in sustaining lasting pleasurable love relationships. Duck (1983); Segal (1996) and Silliman (1987) also found that lack of knowledge about the realities of love relationships often explain relationship difficulties in both the young and old people.

As this study has found, many young people tend to underestimate the amount of effort required to maintain a healthy love relationship. This difficulty is clearly illustrated by young people's movement from one relationship into the next, supposedly in search of a perfect partner. The difficulty of young people in this study to maintain one or few long-lasting relationships, was in agreement with the notion that without education on the skills of loving, these young people enter into love relationships

poorly informed and unprepared for the work that lies ahead (*Cutter 1994*).

It was also found that peers play an integral part in shaping the life-structure of the young people. In agreement with the view by Louw (1991) and Silliman (1987), respondents' conceptions about dating relationships were shaped mainly by peers. However, knowledge imparted by peers was viewed as unreliable and inadequate.

In terms of values and expectations in dating relationships, young people in this study, attached varied values to such relationships and expressed vastly different expectations in their relationships. Some of these expectations were found to be similar to those identified by various authors as unrealistic (*Baron & Byrne, 1987; Cutter, 1994; Hauck, 1981*). For example some respondents felt that for the relationship to grow stronger one's partner should call every day to express his/her love. The practicality of such a belief is questionable and this reflects negatively on the maturity of those subscribing to such thoughts. Due to the varied difference in expectations and values of respondents in this study it was difficult to deduce a common denominator to all their values and expectations.

Further, respondents' optimism in and positive attitude toward love relationships despite the reported high rate of relationship failures, confirmed what many authors believed, that love relationships will remain the most fulfilling experience for many people (*Forgas, 1985; Stern & Bistow, 1996; Wilkinson & Campbell, 1997*). Generally respondents agreed that the quality of the relationship with one's partner is of psychological and emotional significance.

Another interesting finding was about how respondents in this study perceived and dealt with conflict situations in their love relationship.

The study confirmed the findings by Cutter (1994) and Rush (1984) who found that young people tend to believe that conflict in love relationships is bad and thus needs to be avoided at all costs. On the other hand, Hewett (1984) and Wilkinson and Campbell (1997) maintain that mature people face up to any problem that arise in their relationships and never avoid dealing with such problems.

Similar to other studies on young people's conflict resolution strategies (*Feldman &*

Golden, 1998; Forgas, 1985; Jasinski & Williams, 1998; Rush, 1984) this study found avoidance strategies to be typical ways for most young people to deal with conflict in their love relationships. For example, Akeeping quiet for the sake of peace emerged to be characteristic of young people's reactions to potential conflict-arousing situations in their love relationships.

According to Nelson-Jones (1986) problem-solving is a skill but it is not inborn. The characteristic use of avoidance strategies by most young people could be explained as a manifestation of their lack of confidence in their abilities to deal with conflict and owing to lack of necessary skills. Rush (1984) further maintain that young people need to recognise that no relationship is exempt from conflict and thus thinking that conflict can be avoided is unrealistic. In fact, great relationships are built on forgiveness and reconciliation.

Finally, on the question of respondents' views about psycho-educational programs that seeks to educate and empower young people in the skills of loving, respondents generally expressed a positive view toward such programs. Various authors have documented the potential benefits of these programs in the area of love relationships. After conducting evaluative studies, Bloomfield and Vattesse (1989); De Witt (1992); Durana (1996) and Goldman (1987) found that relationship preparation programs with a psycho-educational orientation enhances the couple's self-knowledge, communication and conflict resolution skills and increase the couple's chances of success later in married life.

However, in contrast to other authors who believe that these psycho-educational programs could best serve young people if they are school-based, (Hauck, 1981) the present study revealed that respondents' preferences were: Alt should start at home. Empowering parents in terms of facilitating communication between them and their teenage children, to act as helpful educators could handle this call for home-based programs.

Generally, despite its exploratory orientation, the major findings in this study confirmed what other related literature has documented on young people's experiences in love relationships. The results were also comparable to studies done on other types of

intimate relationships like marriage.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study has generated insightful information about young people's general conceptions and experiences in love or dating relationships. This information could be helpful, particularly to those working closely with young people especially in the area of love relationships. What follows are conclusions drawn from this study and recommendations for further study.

6.1 CONCLUSIONS

Judging from the findings of this study about young people's dating patterns which showed that generally a single dating relationship had an average life-span of less than two years, there is just no denying that young people are experiencing difficulties in the management of their love relationships and thus need to be taught to do so. The positive views toward psycho-educational programs as expressed by respondents could be used as a starting point toward making such programs accessible to the youth.

In addition, owing to these kinds of dating patterns (that is relationship-hopping), it became evident why many young people are said to be at high risk of attracting diseases such as HIV/AIDS. The apparent difficulties in maintaining lasting and pleasurable love relationships among the youth, could be attributed to, among others, possessing less credible and useful information on dating as imparted by inexperienced peers; lack of knowledge or necessary skills such as communication and conflict resolution skills, as well as having unrealistic expectations about their love relationships.

With probably many other young people experiencing difficulties in their dating relationships, it seems logical to suggest that without guidance and education by adults, these young people are more likely to experience countless problems even in their marital relationships. There is more likelihood that problems that they experience

today could carry over to married life in future. Intimate violence, which has become a talking point these days; seem to be a manifestation of these difficulties.

Even though this study fell short, owing to its limited scope, to establish why some young people develop certain expectations in their love relationships, the finding that many of those expectations were not based on reality, also emphasised the observation by many that young people have no or little ideas about what love relationships are intrinsically all about and need adult guidance to appraise such relationships realistically.

6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

This study and other related ones, managed to depict a state of chaos insofar as young peoples' love relationships are concerned. Their difficulties and failures in dating relationships could have far-reaching consequences for the management of their marital relationships in future. It is in view of these scenarios that the following recommendations are made.

It is recommended that further studies be conducted to improve on the limitations of this study as identified elsewhere in this paper. The following points could be addressed: examine how and why certain individuals develop particular expectations about love relationships:



- ! A detailed instrument could be developed to give an extensive assessment of young people's specific needs or preferences with regard to psycho-educational programs, like structural issues, (group vs individual couples, males only vs females only groups), qualities participants would prefer in the program facilitator, etc.
- ! An inclusion of both sexes in future studies could help to compare for similarities and/or difference on the experiences of young people in love relationships.

For the general community, especially parents, the apparent lack of guidance for the youth on matters of dating poses a serious challenge which need to be taken on as a matter of importance. Preparing young people at an early age for dating relationships is likely to help

importance. Preparing young people at an early age for dating relationships is likely to help them make a success of even their marital relationship in future. Facilitation of parent-child communication could help save young people from the hurt of establishing love relationships on unrealistic basis.

In conclusion, and in support of the preventive approach to mental health, there is no better time than during early adulthood to deal with problems of married life. Other previous studies confirmed that the skills of loving can be taught and thus are recommended for young people too.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

EXPLORING YOUNG ADULTS' CONSTRUCTION OF LOVE RELATIONSHIPS

CONSTRUCTED BY: T O S Modipa

Department of Psychology, University of North West

INTRODUCTION

My name is Oscar Modipa. I am registered for the programme: Masters of Social Science (Clinical Psychology) at the University of North West.

I am conducting this research project as part of the requirements for my programme of study under the supervision of Mrs Vicky Segami and Dr Kelvin Mwaba.

The purpose of this study is to learn more about young people's experiences of love relationships and their views regarding premarital counselling. I will be interviewing several other people and I am asking you to also participate.

There is a need for a great deal information that could be used toward the development of programs for preparing young people for married life. It is through this interview that I hope to learn more important things about the value that young people attach to love relationships and their opinions about premarital counselling.

I would like to share my findings with you and should you like to get a copy of the final report please let me know. You are assured that your identity will not be revealed as you will be assigned a false name and the information you shall have given will be handled with strict confidentiality. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers.

Please note that it is important that I capture your ideas as accurate as possible, therefore I will be taking notes and using a tape recorder during the interview. Tell me if it is all right to tape-record the interview? Are there any questions you would like to ask me before we get started?

Pseudonym of interviewee : _____ **Sex:** _____
Name of interviewer : _____
Date of interview : _____
Time : _____
Setting : _____

PART A: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

- ! Are you married or unmarried?
- ! How old are you?
- ! How old were you when you started dating?
- ! For how long have you been dating?
- ! How many love relationships have you had so far?
 - !! If more than one, what was the average duration of your past love relationships?
- ! Did you receive any form of education on love relationships before you started dating?
 - !! If yes, from who or where?
 - !! Would you say the education you received was enough or not?

PART B: GENERAL QUESTIONS ON LOVE RELATIONSHIPS

- ! With so many people hurting from broken love relationships, do you think love relationships are still worth engaging in?
- ! What role do you think love relationships play in one's life?
- ! What is your idea of a healthy love relationship?
- ! People engage in love relationships for a variety of reasons; which do you perceive to be the right reasons?
- ! Conflict is said to be inevitable in any relationship. What is your perception of conflict in love relationships?
 - !! What role do you think conflict plays in love relationships?

PART C: EXPECTATIONS

! When you get involved in a love relationship, what expectations do you generally have of:

- (i) **Yourself:** (i.e. what responsibilities or roles do you think you should play to make a success of your love relationship?)
- (ii) **Your partner:** (i.e. what do you generally look forward to from your partner?)
- (iii) **The relationship itself:** (... what do you hope to achieve with your love relationships?)
!! how do you ensure that your expectations are met in the relationship?

PART D: GENERAL QUESTIONS ON PREMARITAL COUNSELLING

! What do you know about premarital counselling?

!! (The interviewer describes what premarital counselling entails, to those students who indicated that they don't know what premarital counselling is all about.)

! Based on what I have just described for you, give me your opinion about premarital counselling programs.

! If premarital counselling services were to be made available and accessible to you, would you be prepared to use them?

!! Give reason(s) for your answer.

! Do you think young people need to be prepared for love relationships and married life?

! Amongst parents; the school; the church and professionals like psychologist; social workers etc; who do you think can best prepare young people for married life?

!! What makes you think so?

! What are the issues/problems you would like to see addressed in premarital counselling, in their order of importance?

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING

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