

Marital Closeness: Psychological Differences among Ibibios and Yorubas of Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper investigated marital closeness between two Nigerian socio-lingual groups: the Ibibios and the Yorubas, using a number of psychosocial factors as independent variables. Two comparative studies with 129 and 91 participants respectively, were carried out using the survey design. Correlation analysis indicated that attachment style and attitude towards marriage, as psychosocial variables, showed no relationship with marital closeness in the two cultural settings. However, there was a significant relationship between marriage work with friends and marriage work with spouse and marital closeness in the Yoruba and Ibibio cultural groups respectively. A test of prediction in the direction of marriage work was then performed using the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) in the two cultural settings. Results indicate that though marriage work was important within the two groups, marital closeness was more significantly enhanced by marriage work with friends in the Yoruba group than with marriage work with spouse. On the other hand, marriage work with spouse significantly promoted marital closeness among the Ibibios more than marriage work with friends. Further analysis using hierarchical regression confirmed these results, with an additional explanation that marital closeness was independent of the length of marriage and age of marital partners. It was recommended that couples' routine promotion of balance in honest exchanges between their friends and spouses will serve as a reservoir of wellness in their union.

Keywords: marital closeness, attitude towards marriage, marriage work, attachment style, psychosocial differences

Introduction

Relational closeness is typically considered an indispensable feature of romantic relationships (Goodboy & Booth-Butterfield, 2009). Among several forms of relational issues, closeness seems to be the most problematic. The idea of marital closeness, though legendary, has in the past two decades been elucidated by the self-expansion model of motivation and cognition in close relationships (Aron & Fraley, 1999; Aron, Lewandowski, Mashek & Aron, 2013). Accordingly, closeness refers to having cognitive interdependence with a relational partner, promoting a connection between self and other inclusion (Aron, Aron, Tudor & Nelson, 1991; Aron, Mashek & Aron, 2004). It postulates that expanding one's self or self-efficacy is a fundamental human motive, and that one of the ways in which this is accomplished is through caring and close relationships (Clark, 2011; Clark & Mills, 2012; Clark, Dubash & Mills, 1998; Impett, Gordon, Kogan, Oveis, Gable & Keltner, 2010). Marital closeness describes levels of intimacy between a spouse and his or her partner. In the social psychology of marriage, closeness is conveniently explained from three utility perspectives, including (a) having one's spouse as confidant, (b) perceiving one's spouse to be a source of emotional support, and (c) the reciprocity between spouses' report of marital closeness (Tower & Kasl, 1996; Tower, Kasi & Darefsky, 2002).

Closeness in the marital context can be likened to what Grote and Frieze (1994) defined as "friendship-based love", which derives in part from perceptions of the spouse as a friend and represents a continuum-based conceptualization encompassing the extent to which perceptions and feelings of one spouse are positive and reciprocated by the other. In a study of marital closeness among elderly couples in Connecticut using secondary data from the Yale Health and Aging project, Tower and Kasl (1996) suggested that marital dyads in which spouses are mutually close may conveniently be placed on a continuum. On one end of it are mutually close spouses and at the other end are mutually distanced ones, with those in residual asymmetric category remaining in the middle. It has also been revealed that marital closeness is a complex 'amalgam' of love and commitment that can be distilled into relational constellations such as trust, honesty, friendship, and respect (for love) and loyalty, responsibility and solidarity with the other in good and bad times (for commitment). A growing body of research has shown that giving care (as exemplified in love) to others can paradoxically be rewarding for the person giving the gesture (Canevello & Crocker, 2010; Crocker & Canevello, 2008; Crocker, Oliver & Nuer, 2009; Le, Impett, Kogan, Webster & Cheng, 2012).

Feelings of closeness in marriage are derived in part from perceptions of the spouse as a friend (Grote & Frieze, 1994). In a close relationship such as marriage, the concept of closeness through self-expansion implies the degree to which an individual's self-perception overlaps his or her perception of a close other, (Aron, Mashek & Aron, 2004). This self-expansion involves the conscious inclusion of one's resources, perspectives and identities in that of the partner in order to achieve greater self-efficacy (Aron, Aron & Norman, 2001). The self expansion model assumes that individuals, especially strangers, alternately form relationships to facilitate growth and progress, such as events that provoked shared laughter and humorous experience (Fraley & Aron, 2004). In many ways, the relationship we have with other people serve as cornerstones in the construction of our self-concept (Aron, 2003). The very essence of marriage requires that husbands and wives remain close to each other, since it was the reciprocal perception of closeness that brought them together in the first place. Closeness is therefore centrally important in marriage because it helps to protect couples against separation or divorce. Nevertheless, despite the centrality of closeness as an

important ingredient in intimate relating, the dialectical experience of wanting less closeness (i.e. Something like psychological sovereignty) in an ongoing romantic relationship has been noticeably clear and has sufficiently presented as an attitude problem for marital stability. According to Mashek, Le, Israel and Aron (2011) for instance, it is not uncommon to see marital partners “opting” for individuality in what is supposed to be a partnership as demonstrated in Baxter and Montgomery’s (1996) “openness-closeness” and “autonomy-connectedness” strands of dialectical tensions. When relational partners are tossed by the push and pull of dialectical contradictions when attending to relational concerns or when they are influenced by several of the debilitating relational variables, closeness remains a negotiable outcome of such relationship.

The importance of closeness, which is akin to cognitive diplomacy in marriage, is amplified by an important research program that advances the self-expansion model of motivation and cognition in personal relationships (Aron, Aron & Smollan, 1992). This model posits that people seek to increase their potential efficacy which they seek to do through relationship, in which they include others in the self. The model also assumes that individuals ultimately form relationships to facilitate growth and progress (Aron, Norman, Aron, McKenna & Heyman, 2000).

The one-item graphical, non-verbal measure of closeness in interpersonal relationship, the inclusion of other in the self (IOS) scale, (Aron, et al, 2000) consists of seven Venn diagrams of increasingly overlapping circles labeled “self” and “other” which people readily use to construct their relationship with an “intimately” significant other. Studying closeness in relationships based on the perspective of the IOS draws theoretical explanations from the premise that the self can be socially extended to other persons (Schubert & Otten, 2002). Although studies in perception have shown that “people appear to be better social psychologists than they are self psychologists” (Balcetics & Dunning, 2013), the inclusion of other in the self is a cognitive process that integrates the self with social components of closeness with others. This supports Aronetal’s (1992) suggestion that inclusion of other in the self is the basis of relationship closeness, in the sense that one becomes close to his or her relationship partner as the partner becomes part of the self.

Attitude Towards Marriage and Relational Closeness

Marital attitudes can be defined as “the individual meaning and expectations an individual holds toward both marriage in general and their own future marital relationship (Willoughby, 2010). Attitude towards marriage can be viewed from related behaviors that include the basic marriage cognitions (personal conceptions of marital life), fear of social norms and inherent intentions to marry (Kahn, 2007). Marital closeness can be influenced by marital attitudes through the route of happiness (Ugur, 2016). According to Ugur (2016), the relationship between respect toward the partner and subjective happiness is partially mediated by marital attitudes. For example, people who have more positive divorce attitudes, experience greater conflict and less closeness in relationships (Riggio & Fite, 2006). However, more positive marital attitudes increase the probability of marriage and its longevity (Willoughby, 2014). Generally, children who grow up in households where their parents are married and have respect for their marriage, view marriage more positively than those who grow up with conflict-ridden, divorced, separated or non-married, cohabitating parents (Kahn, 2007). Whatever impressions such children form about marital life will define their own attitude towards marriage when they become adults. It is also well-known that of all milestones in life, marriage ranks among the most momentous events and its repercussions, whether positive or negative, can have enormous, far-reaching consequences in future life (Weston &

Qu 2007). Attitudes towards marriage are variously influenced by many factors in society, including fear or increasing incidence of divorce and the increasing freedom for people to choose what type of relationship they want. There are other challenging changes in marital behaviours including cohabitation, non-marital but voluntary childlessness, and increasing approval of egalitarian gender roles (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004). These attitude dimensions can also be appraised using the self-expansion model, a work originally developed to explain a person's motivation to enter and maintain relationships.

A long tradition of research suggests that people tend to engage in social comparison in search of favorable self-esteem. This also happens in close relationships. Partner upward comparisons (comparisons to perceived superior partners) can threaten people's self-evaluations (Major, Testa & Bylsma, 1991) and lead to more negative mood (Tesser, Millar & Moore, 1998; Wheeler & Miyake, 1992). Nevertheless, when individuals are highly close to comparison others, they may empathically include those others as part of their own identity (Aron et al., 2004; Aron, Mashek, McLaughlin-Volpe, Wright, Lewandowski & Aron, 2005). When marital partners share the perspectives and resources of their romantic partners, they empathize with their spouse and are therefore able to enjoy (through reflected glory) the partner's delights and successes (Pinkus, Lockwood, Schimmack & Fournier, 2008). This relational outcome may also emerge from the interaction of partners' attachment style and "equality" of their marriage work with their spouse and friends. Nevertheless, there are partners who engage in negative reciprocity due to unfavorable (downward) comparisons with their partners. Such marriages with competitive synergies sooner or later "corrode" and crumble.

Attachment Style in Marital Closeness

The next variable of concern in this study is attachment style. Of the major contemporary relationship perspectives in social psychology, attachment theory stands out for the importance it gives to the desire for less closeness in a relationship (Mashek, Le, Israel & Aron, 2011). Attachment theory suggests that the way people respond to relationship distress is partly a product of the attachment that they developed over a lifetime of interactions with attachment figures. It also posits that a pattern of dysfunctional relationships with attachment figures during childhood can lead to psychological distress and disorder in adulthood (Scott & Cordova, 2002). A number of studies have established some association between adult attachment styles and relationship maintenance or satisfaction (Feeney, Noller & Callan, 1994; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994). As reasoned by many attachment theorists, the way people think and act in their intimate relationships is guided by cognitive models about themselves and significant others (Brennan & Shaver, 1995). Also, among several characteristics of attachment such as a safe haven, secure base, separation distress and proximity maintenance, each seems to be overly relevant to relationship maintenance activities. Attachment is a special element of the emotional relationship that involves exchange of comfort, care and pleasure. Attachment theory has therefore been showing some level of impact on numerous research programs (Cassidy, Jones & Shaver, 2013).

Based on consistent research findings, it becomes evident that people's attachment styles largely influence chosen relationship patterns. Since attachment styles are relatively coherent and stable patterns of emotion and behavior exhibited in close relationships, it is reasonable to expect that people with diverse attachment styles would maintain their relationships in line with differentiated patterns of emotion and behavior (Dainton, Shelley & Langan, 2003). Studies have long supported attachment styles as important tools in relationship maintenance strategies. For example, the secure attachment style compared to the avoidant attachment style has been found to use most of the relationship maintenance behaviors which include

positivity, assurance, advice, conflict management, social network, openness and sharing tasks (Pistole et al., 2010; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). More specifically, in these studies, secure individuals reported more frequent use of conflict management and positivity strategies than did the fearful. Shaver and Fraley (1998) have provided a two-dimensional model of individual differences in adult attachment to explain the octagonal discrepancies in human attachment neuroticism as shown in the figure below.

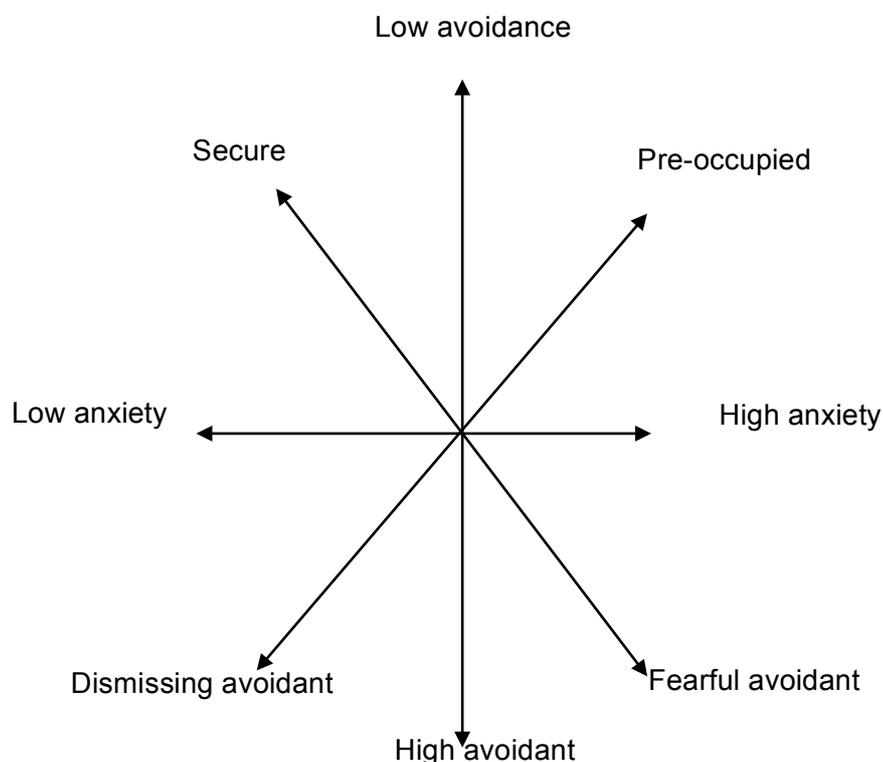


Figure 1: The two dimensional model of individual differences in adult attachment
Source: Self Report Measure of Adult Attachment (Shaver & Fraley, 1998)

Irrespective of these previous classifications, attachment has been most recently discussed as two dimensions of attachment anxiety and avoidance. A related study (Nielson, 2005) also found that secure attachment style was related to a number of love styles that support marital closeness.

Marriage Work: The Trending Pastime of Spousal or Friend-Based Disclosures

Related to attachment is the place of friendship in close relationships. Social networking as a relationship maintenance strategy requires husbands and wives to use the strength of social support and friendships to foster closeness in their union. The concept of marriage work is centered on the idea whereby spouses engage in significant levels of disclosure either with their friends (marriage work with friends) or with their spouses (marriage work with spouse). There is, however, some ambivalence concerning the role of friendships in a marital relationship. A number of frequently asked questions include whether spouses' same or opposite sex friendships fundamentally help to nurture or destroy marital relationships? In pursuit of an answer to this question, a lot of work has been done in the area of mate retention and opposite sex friendships in marital relationships and such researches point to the fact that

opposite sex friendships are likely to lead to infidelity and other traumatic afflictions that conspire to stunt a growing marriage (Fricker, 2006; Buss & Shakelford, 1997; Biec, 2008; Baumeister & Vohs, 2004; Atkins, Eldridge, Baucom & Christensen, 2005; Maner, Rouby & Gonzaga, 2008; Smith, 2007; Vohs & Lasaleta, 2008). A new trend of research has now emerged to evaluate the place of same sex friendships in a marital relationship in relation to the quality of such marriages.

Extensive research with 67 young adult females in relationship work has indicated that females engage in more frequent relationship work with friends, and that relationship work with partners increases over time (Jensen & Rauer, 2016). Relatedly, a study of 106 romantically involved young adults to determine the frequency of disclosure of romantic problems to both partners and best friends did not show any difference in frequency disclosure among males and females (Jensen & Rauer, 2014). In another study of 64 married couples, Jensen and Rauer (2015) found that both husbands and wives engaged in more marriage work with spouses than with friends, with husbands' marriage work with spouse decreasing over time.

Some directions of research have suggested that it is normative for women to garner enormous emotional support from the discussion of marital concerns with their friends and use such to enrich their health (Piferi & Lawler, 2006) as well as relationships (Harrison, 1998; Helms, Crouter & McHale, 2003). These positions differentially define the quality of marital closeness perceived by partners. Also, Proulx, Helms and Payne (2004) who explored the social context of marriage by examining the links between wives' domain-specific marriage work with friends and with spouses in relation to the perception of marital quality, found that women (wives) were equally likely to discuss marital concerns with their spouses and friends except in issues relating to finance and in-laws. This indicates that there is a trend that men and women routinely interacted with their spouse and friends in relation to marital issues but women do this more frequently with friends. The first set of studies in this direction (Harrison, 1998; Helms, et al., 2003,) examined the marriage work on a global level and found that wives engage in more marriage work with friends than with a spouse. Similarly, Proulx, Helms Milardo and Payne (2009) found that support from close friends is positively associated with wives' reports of marital satisfaction and at high level of spousal inference, support from close friends is positively associated with mother and child relationship quality.

Curiously, marriage work with friends has only been found to be beneficial in relationships where wives are already satisfied with their marriages. Marriage work with friends may therefore only help successful marriages (than unsuccessful ones) to grow more progressively (Julien, Tremblay, Belanger, Dube, Begin & Bouthiller, 2000). A complementary condition for women to benefit from marriage work with their friends is that they (wives) may simultaneously be engaging their husbands in similar discussions—a good support for the findings by Proulx and her colleagues.

The Present Study

The present study undertakes to explore closeness by examining couples' attitude towards marriage, their attachment styles and the direction of marriage work (whether people prefer to engage more in communication, on basic marital issues, with their friends or their spouses) on marital closeness. The reasoning was based on the conjecture that the verification of people's attitude towards marriage and their early attachment styles could either intersect or

merge to give direction to how they relate through the discussion of marital issues (inclusion of friend or spouse in the self), as this may, in turn, define the level of closeness or detachment from each other. The study was conceived because of the expected differences in the perception of closeness in the two settings: the Yoruba whose society is, according to Familusi (2012), endemically polygamous; and the Ibibios with their flamboyant and *joie-de-vivre* culture.

Culture and Worldview of the Yorubas

The Yorubas are known as one of the largest African ethnic groups south of the Sahara desert. They are not a single group, but rather a collection of diverse people bound together by a common tonal language, history and culture. The people are generally known to be polygamous (having more than one wife) and each wife and her children are considered a sub-family. Generally, wives compete to gain additional favors for their own children. Polygamous marriages are exceptions of Nigeria's northern (Muslim) states and through the vehicle of Islam, polygamous marriages are commonplace among the Yorubas. Study 1, therefore, took place in the densely populated Agbowo (Yoruba) Community in Ibadan. Ugwegbu (2011) describes the setting as one of the slum areas of the city of Ibadan, where the population of the inhabitants is about 65% Yoruba and 35% other ethnic groups in Nigeria, including Edo, Efik, Igbo, Ijaw, Ishan, Itsekiri and Tiv.

The setting is an emerging settlement (that hosts the University of Ibadan) whose occupants engage in various forms of small scale entrepreneurial activities to benefit from the "free market" provided by the university community (staff and students) perceived to provide one of the best pools of customers in the town. Based on this perception and the ensuing competition, a lot of illegal structures spring up to portray the settlement as a slum, thus attracting idle youths, beggars and all kinds of "hustling" activities. It is common to see men and women glued to their business outfits from dawn to dusk, raising the fear that the nexus of family relationships may, in the process, be sacrificed, even as children return to these shops in their school uniforms until their parents were ready to go home very late in the evening.

Who are the Ibibios?

The Ibibios are Kwa speaking people occupying the palm belt of Southeast Nigeria and are regarded as the most ancient of all ethnic groups in Nigeria (Noah, 1988). They are a cohesive people who, in the midst of diverse social influences (e.g. Religion), still respect civil marriage laws. They are mostly Christians and this, to a great extent, also restrains them from marrying more than one wife even when there are pockets of polygamous attachments in the community. The group's *mbopo* practice is mostly a cultural "insignia" to promote chastity and satisfaction in marriage. The people who are divided into sub-clans such as Annang, Uruan, Oron, and Eket greatly cherish the sustenance of marriage hence the escalation of *mbopo* regarded as an important relationship maintenance practice. The *mbopo* conception is a cultural rehearsal that constantly reminds women and young women in particular, of their vital role in marriage in terms of cultivating harmonious existence between themselves and their husbands. According to Ibironke (2014), the ancient tradition of *mbopo* is the training given to young women in preparation for successful marriage and motherhood while they are in seclusion. Though the period of confinement varies across cultural divides, the more popular version of *mbopo* requires the period of confinement to between 1–3 months. During this period, the young women are confined to a secluded home specifically designed for that purpose. Usually, they are not allowed to come in contact with other people

and are routinely attended to by elderly assistants, some of whom may be their relatives. At inception, the practice of *mbopo* was laced with genital mutilation which was widely believed to be a physiological “antidote” against infidelity. Apart from this psychosexual reason, other explanations to sustain the practice were sociological, such as identification with the cultural heritage. This later became controversial when religious, empathic and moral advocacies were widespread and more attention was then paid to the improvement of participants’ domestic and interpersonal skills, including trading, cooking, home decoration, hair plating and crafts. The elderly women also ensured that the participants (celebrants) are not involved in strenuous work, but were made to eat large portions of local delicacies such as *ekpang nkuwo* (a traditional porridge made coco/water yams), *yam fufu* and assorted soups such as *Ukwoho Afang* and *Edikang Ikong*. The physical appearance of the maidens was also a very important component of the *mbopo*. The women were then massaged frequently with Shea butter and other locally prepared ointments and compelled to drink various pints of water daily to improve their beauty in terms of smoothness of the body (splendour) and healthy waist line (waist-hip ratio), an important measure of beauty among women. Since this (*mbopo*) is also supported and facilitated by the men-folk, the cognitive element of the exercise slowly condenses into behavioral replications of the values by men in the long run.

Based on historically propagated antecedents and too many spaces value-dependent styles of couple interaction, the *Mbopo* is seen to be able of making a clear difference in the quality of closeness among the *Ibibios* compared to the *Yorubas*. This is because the *mbopo* rite of passage intends to keep married women psychologically, physically and intellectually moderated responsive to multifarious marital duties including chastity. This is aided by the tenets of Christianity, which supports the doctrine of monogamy in contrast to the *Yorubas* whose men are allowed by Islam to take more than one wife. Study 2 was similar to study 1, conducted around the-similar communities hosting the University of Uyo in Akwa Ibom State, while study 1 focused on the *Yorubas* with a distinct cultural background as described previously.

In the light of these, the present study sets to investigate the relationships and influence of these variables on marital closeness, especially the impact of spouses’ chosen directions of marriage work on the quality of their marital closeness. The following hypotheses are therefore proposed: (i) spouses in the *Ibibio* cultural setting will engage in more marriage work with each other than with friends due to the cultural *mbopo* practice, which serves to equip young women with internal psychosocial tools to nurture and protect strong spousal relationships; (ii) spouses in *Yoruba* cultural setting will engage in more marriage work with friends than with each other due to availability of other wives that make them to be considerably distant from their husband and cling more to friends.

Method

Study 1. Design

A survey design was used with marriage work (high or low for spouses and friends respectively), attitude towards marriage (positive or negative), and attachment style (secure or insecure) as the independent variables. The dependent variable in the study is marital closeness measured as spouses’ inclusion of others in the self.

Participants

One hundred and twenty-nine (129) respondents took part in the study, out of 168 persons surveyed. Thirty-three copies of questionnaires were not returned while 6 were excluded due to completion errors. One hundred and nineteen (119) of these were still married, 8 separated and 2 divorced. Participants were not couples, but married persons surveyed conveniently using people-in-the-neighborhood interviews. They were selected through the convenient sampling technique (also called availability or haphazard sampling). Interviewers (researchers and their assistants) moved from house (or business premises) to house to request participants to complete research measures. The sample comprised of 56 males and 73 females with a mean age of 40.11. The oldest participant was 67 years while the youngest was 22 years. The mean age of marriage was 28.02 years (minimum age = 20, maximum age = 40). The participants were between 1 – 47 years in marriage (mean = 12.15) and had between 1 – 8 children (mean = 3.08). The sample represented 78.3% Yoruba's, 15.5% Igbos, 0.8% Hausas and 5.4% others. Participants' level of education ranged from First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) (3.9%) to Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) (1.6%) and occupational distribution included trading (45.8%), public service (29.4%) and several forms of artisan activities (24.8%).

Instruments

The main instrument used for the study was a questionnaire which had five sections ABCDE presented in English and explained in convenient languages to participants during the interview.

Section A surveyed participants' demographic characteristics.

Section B: This presented the attitude to marriage scale comprised of items drawn according to the theory of behavior that included marriage attitudes, social norms and marriage intentions. It is a 23-item scale developed by Khan (2007). Ten of the items (2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15 and 16) were reverse scored. The 23-item scale represents a final composite item from Khan's reliability analysis of 29 attitudes and social norms sub-scale where 16 items emerged and the original 11 social norms sub scale where 7 items were found reliable. The author reported Cronbach's alpha of .64. For the present study, Cronbach's alpha was .82.

Section C: This is an 18-item Revised Adult Attachment scale (Collins, 1996). Collins and Read (1990) earlier found that the scale items formed around three factors which they named: (1) discomfort with closeness, (2) discomfort with depending on others and (3) anxious concern about being abandoned or unloved. The internal consistency of the three factors was improved by Collins (1996) in the revised version of the Adult Attachment scale which yielded alpha coefficients ranging from .78 to .85.

Section D: The measure in this section was Helms, Crouter and McHale's (2003) scales of marriage work which contained items adapted from Huston, McHale and Crouter (1986) measure of marital satisfaction. Items were presented in two forms (D1 & D2) to tap participants' marriage work with their spouse and friends. For the present study, Cronbach's alpha for D1 (spouse) was .78 and alpha coefficient for D2 (friend) was .95. Sample items are: "How often you bring up how well the two of you (you and your spouse) talk over important and unimportant issues?" "How often do you bring up the way discussion in your family gets made and the level of influence you have in those decisions?"

Section E: This section of the questionnaire contained series of 7 Venn-like diagrams of varying degrees of overlap measuring marital closeness from the angle of inclusion of other in the self. The scale was constructed by Aron, Aron and Smolan (1992). Respondents were instructed to "please circle the picture below that best describes the participants'

relationship with their romantic partners”. A respondent’s choice is seen as a representation of the degree of closeness he or she perceives in his or her relationship with his or her partner. The authors had demonstrated that despite the difficulty of conducting an inter-item consistency for a one-item measure, the IOS has alternative form with Cronbach’s alpha of .95 for romantic relationships and test-retest validity of .85 for romantic relationships.

Procedure

The study was a survey conducted in the precincts of the Agbowo and neighboring communities hosting the University of Ibadan. Copies of questionnaires were delivered to the participants by the researcher and assistants; these were completed and returned within a time frame of one week. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses at the point of obtaining consent. The survey involved administration of questionnaires and interviews. Out of the 168 copies of questionnaires administered, 129 were found adequate for analysis. While 6 were discarded for errors of completion, 33 others were not returned. The researcher approached potential participants in their different locations (households and business outlets). They were informed about the study and the need for their cooperation in order to make the exercise successful. The researcher presented the questionnaire to the interviewee and explained the mode of completion, rendering assistance where necessary. Participants’ queries were clarified for proper understanding of questionnaire items.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 20. Relationships (ie, intercorrelations) among variables were examined using the Pearson Product Correlation while prediction of marital closeness was verified using the analysis of variance and multiple regression. The hierarchical regression model was also used to verify the strength of each variable in the prediction of marital closeness.

Results

From the Table 1, a number of relationships were confirmed, including very strong correlation of age with number of years in marriage and marriage work with spouse. Also, level of education was associated with number of years of marriage and socioeconomic status. Only two variables (age when married and marriage work with friends) correlated with the dependent variable, marital closeness. The hypothesized relationship between marriage work with friends and marital closeness in the Yoruba sub-culture was confirmed ($r = -.23, p < .05$).

Other bivariate relationships show that age when married correlates with participants’ actual age as well as a number of years of marriage. Number of years of marriage also correlates with attitude towards marriage just as socioeconomic status strongly, but strangely correlates negatively with level of education, a likely reflection of prevailing unemployment and underemployment due to the concentration of educated persons within the setting and the resultant poverty and low standard of living. Also, level of education correlated positively with the number of years of marriage, while marriage work with spouse correlates positively with an attitude towards marriage.

	N	\bar{X}	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Age	129	40.11	10.60	1	.188*	.900**	-.053	.133	.505**	-.221*	.066	-.034	-.055	.119
2 Age when married	129	28.02	4.71			-.251**	-.108	-.162	-.107	-.161	.060	-.243**	-.121	-.178*
3 No of years in marriage	129	12.15	10.50				-.030	.218*	.576**	-.140	.091	.084	.010	.162
4 Socio Economic Status	129	1.91	0.52						-.026	-.063	.038	-.118	-.078	-.012
5 Level of education	129	6.31	2.08											
6 No. of children	129	3.08	1.64											
7 Marriage work with spouse	129	65.33	15.79											
8 Marriage with the friends	129	25.19	19.88											
9 Attitude towards marriage	129	73.27	16.71											
10 Attachment style	129	51.81	13.93											
11 Marital closeness	129	6.44	1.89											

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations and Intercorrelations of Independent Variables and Marital Closeness

In terms of prediction, since attitude towards marriage and attachment styles did not correlate with marital closeness, the main interest of investigation was shifted to marriage work. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to further verify the influence of marriage work with friends and spouse on marital closeness.

The result is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary Table of 2x2x2 ANOVA Showing Influence of Gender and Levels Marriage Work (with friends and spouse) on Marital Closeness among the Yorubas

Source	SS	Df	Ms	F	Sig.
Total	5533.00	129			
Gender (A)	2.46	1	2.46	1.82	>.05
Marriage work with spouse (B)	2.86	1	2.86	2.11	>.05
Marriage work with friends (C)	7.38	1	7.38	5.44	<.05
A x B	.69	1	.69	.52	>.05
B x C	.02	1	.02	.02	>.05
A x C	.54	1	.54	.40	>.05
A x B x C	.41	1	.41	.30	>.05
Error	164.09	121	1.36		

From the results, there was no significant influence of gender $F(1,121) = 1.82$; $P > .05$ and marriage work with spouse $F(1,121) = 2.11$; $p > .05$ on marital closeness. However, there was a significant effect of marriage work with friends on marital closeness $F(1,121) = 5.44$; $p < .05$.

Study 2:

Design: As in study 1, a survey design was used.

Participants: Ninety-one participants of Ibibio extraction took part in the second study. The Ibibios have a cultural practice called *mbopo* which helps to sensitize inhabitants holistically on the essential tenets of marriage. Specifically, young women are prepared for womanhood through seclusion and character training to fulfill an important cultural expectation of chastity. The ritual embodies many expressions, including beauty, opulence and moral training where a woman is wholly prepared for successful family life (Imeh, 2009). Forty-seven (51.7%) of the participants were males while 44 (48.4%) were females. Also, 82 (90.1%) were still in intact marriages, 5 (5.5%) had separated, 3 (3.3%) were divorced while one participant did not indicate relational status. The data also indicated that 88 (96.7%) were Christians, 2 (2.2%) and 1 (1.1%) were traditional worshipers and Muslims respectively. In terms of education, 32 (36.3%) had bachelor's degrees, 12 (13.2%) were higher diploma graduates, 14 (15.4%) national certificate in education, 4 (4.4%) master of business administration, 2 (2.2%) master of science and 8 (8.8%) were doctoral degree holders. The rest of the participants had lower qualifications such as elementary school certificate = 2, secondary school certificate = 7, and ordinary diploma = 9. One participant had no formal education. Occupational indicators showed 29 participants (31.9%) were engaged in various business ventures, 34 (37.4%) in the civil service, 10 (11.0%) teachers, 3 (3.3%) students, 3 (3.3%) pastors and the rest in various engagements ranging from seamen to bankers.

Instruments: The same package of measures used in study 1 was also used in the second study.

Procedure: Same as study 1 except that the second study followed after 3 weeks.

Data Analysis

The same statistics (correlations and ANOVA) were used in the data analysis. However, an additional investigation was done in the second study using the multiple and hierarchical multiple regression to examine the strength of variables after controlling for marriage duration and age of couples, factors suspected to account differently for the participants' level of marriage closeness.

Results

The Table 3 shows the bivariate correlations among the variables of the study. The results indicate a significant correlation of age and age when married and number of years of marriage. Also, socioeconomic status correlated with the participants' level of education. As hypothesized, there was a significant correlation between marriage work with spouse and marital closeness among couples in the Ibibio sub-culture ($r=.29$, $p<.01$).

S/N	Variables	N	\bar{X}	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Age	91	40.15	10.36	-	.506*	.867**	.007	.092	-.105	.019	-.015	-.098	.143
2	Age when married	91	28.20	4.94		-	.126	-.171	.064	-.009	.026	.047	-.163	.218*
3	Number of Years in marriage	91	11.67	8.36			-	.021	.001	-.035	.025	-.047	-.056	.006
4	Socioeconomic status	91	2.08	.45				-	.352**	-.008	-.030	.054	-.027	.106
5	Level of Education	91	6.08	2.05					-	.072	-.003	.232*	-.261*	.197
6	Marriage work with spouse	91	54.16	9.87						-	.278**	.124	.087	.292**
7	Marriage work with friends	91	36.41	14.77							-	-.351**	.241*	.031
8	Attitude towards marriage	91	79.73	12.28								-	-.194	.115
9	Attachment style	91	51.00	9.10									-	-.088
10	Marital Cohesion	91	6.01	1.37										-

** correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed)

* correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed)

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Bi-variate Correlation of Independent Variables on Marital Closeness

The predictive component of the hypothesis presented in Table 4. The result shows that gender and marriage work with friends did not influence marital closeness [$F(1, 83) = 3.073$; $p > .05$] and [$F(1, 83) = 0.023$; $p > .05$]. In this cultural group, marriage work with spouse showed significant influence on marital closeness [$F(1, 83) = 7.234$; $p > .05$]. This was further verified using the simple multiple regression.

Source	SS	Df	Ms	F	P
Total	3457.00	91			
Gender (A)	5.187	1	5.187	3.073	>.05
Marriage work with spouse (B)	12.210	1	12.210	7.234	<.05
Marriage work with friends (C)	.039	1	.039	.023	>.05
A x B	.112	1	.112	.066	>.05
B x C	.659	1	.659	.391	>.05
A x C	3.759	1	3.759	2.227	>.05
A x B x C	6.232	1	6.232	3.692	>.05
Error	140.089	83	1.688		

R squared = .177, Adjusted R squared = .101

Table 4. Summary Table of 2x2x2 ANOVA Showing Influence of Gender and Levels of Marriage Work (with Friends and Spouse) on Marital Closeness Among the Ibibios

From the Table 5, age, number of years in marriage, marriage work with spouse (MWS), marriage work with friends (MWF), attitude towards marriage and attachment style significantly jointly predicted couples' marital closeness ($R=.45$, $R^2 = .20$, $F = (6, 20) = 3.51$, $p<.001$). The joint prediction accounted for 20% of the variance in marital closeness. As seen in the results, three of the variables, age ($p=.64$; $t=3.22$; $p<.001$), number of years in marriage ($p=-.54$; $t=-2.73$, $p<.001$) and marriage work with spouse ($p = .36$; $t = 3.33$) $p < .001$) predicted marital closeness, with number of years in marriage affecting marital closeness negatively.

Model	B	T	P	R	R²	F	P
Age	.64	3.22	.002	.45	.20	3.51	.004
No of years in Marriage (Marriage duration)	-.54	-2.73	.008				
Marriage work with spouse	.36	3.33	.001				
Marriage work with friends	-.04	-.35	ns				
Attitude towards Marriage	.03	.25	ns				
Attachment style	-.07	-.71	ns				

Table 5. Summary Table of Simple Multiple Regression of Age, Number of Years in Marriage, MWS, MWF, Attitude towards Marriage and Attachment Style

Also, from this result it was observed that three variables – number of years of marriage, marriage work with friends and attachment style – influenced marital closeness negatively. With this result, there was the need to further understand how these variables were related in order to understand their negative strength (output) on marital closeness. Does more or less years in marriage, too much or too less interaction through social networking, or peoples' secure or insecure attachments lead to more or less closeness? To answer every aspect of this question, a hierarchical multiple regression was conducted to examine the strength of marriage work with spouse, marriage work with friends, attachment style and attitude towards marriage in predicting marital closeness, after controlling for age and marriage duration which represent demographic characteristics of couples.

Variables	R	R ²	R ² Change	F	P	β	t	p
Step 1	0.28	0.08		3.64	<.05			
Age						0.55	2.70	<.05
Marriage Duration						-0.47	-2.31	<.05
Step 2	0.45	0.20	0.124	3.51	<.05			
Age						0.64	3.22	<.01
Marriage Duration						-0.54	-2.73	<.01
Marriage work with spouses						0.36	3.33	<.01
Marriage work with friend						-0.04	-0.35	>.05
Attitude towards Marriage						0.03	0.25	>.05
Attachment Style						-0.07	-0.71	>.05

Table 6. Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Independent Variables on Marital Closeness

In the first step of hierarchical multiple regression, two predictors (age and marriage duration, making up a model) were entered. The model was statistically significant [$F(2,88) = 3.64$; $p < .05$] and explains about 8% of variance in marital closeness. After entering the marriage work with spouse, marriage work with friends, attachment style and attitude towards marriage in step 2, the total variance explained by that model increased to 20% [$F(6,84) = 3.51$; $p < .001$]. The introduction of the second set of the study's variables (predictors) explained additional 12.4% variance in marital closeness, after age and marriage duration have been controlled for (R^2 change = 0.124; $F(4,84) = 3.26$; $p > .05$). In the final model, three out of six predictor variables contributed significantly to the prediction of marital closeness, with age having the highest contribution ($\beta = .64$, $t = 3.22$, $p < .001$), followed by marriage duration ($\beta = .54$, $t = 2.73$, $p < .05$) and marriage work with spouse being the least ($\beta = .36$, $t = 3.33$, $p < .01$).

Tolerance and VIF were all within acceptable range of 0.24 to 0.91 and 1.09 to 4.19 respectively, which indicated absence of multicollinearity among the predictor variables.

Discussion

The results of Study 1 showed that age at marriage and marriage work with friends correlated with marital closeness, spouses' attitude towards marriage, attachment style and level of marriage work with their spouse, showing no correlation with marital closeness. Though the results did not support the findings (prediction) of Khan (2007), it confirms the preliminary correlations results which showed that attitude towards marriage, attachment style and marriage work with spouse (with the exceptions of marriage work with friends) were not significantly correlated with marital closeness.

However, marriage work with friends, which was found to be significantly negatively correlated with marital closeness was further investigated. This correlation result may mean that there were greater but unintended opportunities for spouses to be involved in frequent interchange with friends of the same sex in several outdoor activities in their attempts to improve family welfare. However, the negative result may have pointed to some trouble in

their marital relationship. It was then reasoned that if frequent engagement of spouses in discussion about their marriage with their friends may likely impact their marriage negatively, there was essentially the need to examine adverse aspects of self-disclosure in such interactions. A thought was also crafted along the line of gender leading to the prediction that there will be a significant influence of gender and the two levels of marriage work with marital closeness. The result of this hypothesis was partially confirmed, with the indication that neither gender nor marriage work with spouse predicted marital closeness. However, marriage work with friends was found to significantly predict marital closeness. From the results, more spouses, irrespective of gender, engaged in marriage work with their friends and this was seen to be detrimental to marital closeness. The numerous oral exchanges between these spouses may have worked against marital closeness, depending on the content. This outcome made for further probe into the socioeconomic status of the participants. From the descriptive statistics, 65.1% of the respondents reported belonging to the higher socioeconomic class, with 45.8% trading and 29.4% in public service. Seventy-eight-point three percent (78.3%) of the participants belonged to the dominant ethnic group of study. It may have appeared that several of these factors interacted to make the main variables insignificant on marital closeness. Reflecting on the non-significant result of marriage work with spouse in the study, it may be reduced that marriage work with friends on the one hand became an outlet for spouses in the study to find fulfillment from their unfulfilled marital relationships. While this continued, the care fabric of their marital relationship may have become weakened, with the resultant negative attitude towards their marriage, energized by an already existing poor attachment style and resultant poor relational exchanges in terms of quality discussions.

Existing research evidence which has supported this finding has shown that women's friendships are intricately linked with the spousal relationship (e.g. Jensen & Rauer, 2016; Jensen & Rauer, 2014; Helms et al., 2003). While it has been empirically established that whereas, men are likely to describe their friendships as activity based, women are likely than men to self-disclose especially from a wide range of topics including children, intimate relationships with others, work-related concerns and concerns about their marriage among others (Harrison, 1998). However, the present finding did not support Jensen and Rauer (2015) which found that both husbands and wives engage more in marriage work with a spouse than with friends, with husbands' marriage work with spouse decreasing over time. It was somewhat unclear whether this decline would mean an increase in marriage work with friends. The findings also partially support Proulx et al's (2004) domain-specific approach to the study of the link between marital quality and wives' marriage work with spouse and friend. Analyses revealed that women were equally likely to discuss marital concerns with their spouses and friends in all except two domains of marriage work: Family finances and relations with in-laws. Specifically selected areas: communication, support for work role, child rearing philosophies, support for parental role, social life and leisure, division of household tasks, child rearing concerns and marital decision making were indicated by respondents as areas they freely discuss about, whether with their spouses or friends, with more reservation given to the more "volatile" areas of family finance and issues with in-laws.

On the other hand, unclear attitude towards their marriages, attachment styles and distant relationships with their spouses may have led them to desire less of spousal closeness and attach more with their friends to share their marital joys and predicaments. This is in line with Mashek and Sherman (2004) who reported that college students who want less closeness in their current relationships report lower levels of relationship satisfaction. This appears as a level of learned helplessness among couples and calls for a suitable intervention program that

may be useful in redefining their marriage such that spouses will expand more towards their spouses than towards their friends. Since social support of friendship remains an additional and an essential component of progress for every marriage, spouses should take their marital relationship as the primary focus of their existence. In previous studies, although marriage work with friends were much associated with women than men (e.g. Helms et al., 2003), the present study found no gender classification for marriage work. Moreover, although Helms et al's (2003) study found that women's marriage work with their friends were beneficial to their marriage, the present study shows that both men's and women's marriage work with their friends were detrimental to their marriages. This may be due to the cultural difference between the western (individualistic) culture of their study and African (collectivist) environment which this study explored.

In Study 2, it was found that age when married and marriage work with spouse correlated with marital closeness. While the result indicated something significant about marital age and marital closeness in terms of the African environment, it pointed to something different about spousal and social support and marital closeness in the two (African) cultures investigated. There was also an observation that participants' age correlated with age when married and number of years of marriage, while level of education correlated strongly with socioeconomic status. Other results turned in the opposite direction, with spouses in the Ibibio socio-cultural setting reporting significantly higher levels of marriage work with each other than with friends. The result, as observed has supported the prediction which relied on the efficacy of the *mbopo* socio-cultural practice towards the promotion of relationship maintenance. These results may suggest that spousal friendships in the Ibibio socio-cultural setting could be enhanced by the numerous cultural expectations associated with the process of wife selection which involves multifaceted and diverse exercises interlaced with friendly rituals. Marriage work with friends, though still in practice among the Ibibios, may have been influenced by the quality of interaction existing (or expected to exist) between spouses. As shown in the result, there is no gender specialization on this component of interaction which indicates that both husbands and wives may, at one time or the other, initiate discussions capable of enriching their relationship. One of the most important findings in this study is the contribution of age and the number of years of marriage to the quality of marriage work with spouse. Although other variables (attitude to marriage, attachment style and marriage work with friends) did not show significant influence in predicting marital closeness, they however jointly contributed in different ways (positively or negatively) to the quality of marital closeness among spouses. Thus, couples' marital closeness as advanced through spouse-spouse interactions was mostly a function of their age strengthened by the number of years (experience) they have lived together.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The present study examined a number of factors considered important in ensuring marital closeness among couples in comparative settings. It has been found in the study that among factors such as attachment style, attitude towards marriage, age, marriage duration and marriage work (with friends and each other), marriage work remains the most salient determinant of spousal closeness. Although somewhat independent of age and marriage duration, marital closeness appeared to be enhanced more by marriage work with friends in the Yoruba setting. This may be explained by more outdoor activities like trading and other business engagements. On the other hand, marriage work with spouse appears to enhance marital closeness more among the Ibibios, probably due to the perceived cohesive spousal atmosphere created by the *mbopo* dynasty and the ensuing indoor engagements by every

couple. In other words, spouses in the Yoruba socio-cultural setting may have spent more time apart than they do together, thus using their network of external friendships to support their union than they do between each other. In the same way, the Ibibios appear to have exploited the socially-expected spouse-spouse togetherness to enhance closeness, since most of women's activities are located within rather than outside their homes. It is, therefore, recommended that spouses and families strive to balance family, friendships at both ends, since each aspect of support has its own salience and brilliant ecologies. Healthy unions therefore serve as marital models to new couples who will build on it to ensure the overall marital health of the society.

In relation to the Yorubas, it may be suggested that relational partners work towards optimizing the quality of their relationship by paying primary attention to the needs of their marriage even when there are diverse issues in the relationship. Repair strategies such as tolerance building and empathic joining rather than isolation or several other retaliatory behavior should be used to keep relationships alive.

Limitations of the Study

The study may have been limited by a number of factors, including the use of self-reports as well as the sample size of participants. It is well-known that self-reports have the tendency of tilting towards ensuring social desirability which may dwell on self-presentation rather than giving a true account of the situation. On the other hand, the small sample size in the two studies may not allow for outright generalization of the findings. The findings should therefore be interpreted with caution. Moreover, though cultural differences may have emerged, the time interval (about three weeks) between the two studies may still influence the responses of participants in some unclear ways.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future researchers should endeavor to address the issues of small sample as well as attempt some experiments in place of cross-sectional studies. Also, the two studies could be carried out simultaneously to allay fears about time-related limitations. In addition, the non-significant results of attitude towards marriage and attachment styles did not give a clear definition of the participants' bearing on their marriage. This may suggest that unfriendly and distant exchanges between spouses tend to increase a spouse's social networking with friends, thus reducing routine spousal interpersonal exchanges. On the other hand, it may indicate that an already existing closeness between spouses is likely to attract detrimental friendships to the union. The third possibility is that there may really be no causal relationship between marriage work with friends and marital closeness, and the observed correlation may point to the presence of a third variable such as meddlesomeness by third parties or belated regret in the choice of a spouse. To ensure the direction of causation, there may be need to go beyond these methodologies. Future research may, therefore, ensure more robust measures of these variables in order to clearly understand the direction of the findings. Moreover, it will also help to compare participants with positive attitude towards marriage and favorable attachment styles with others in the opposite groups.

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