

How I met my husband:¹
Bridal narratives at bridal showers in Gaborone
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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore how marital relations are established in Gaborone. This is done through analysing narratives at bridal showers. One of the most entertaining moments during any

¹The phrase "How I Met My Husband" is adopted from the title of one of the short stories written by Alice Munro (1974). *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* Canada: [McGraw-Hill](#).

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bridal shower is when the bride-to-be⁵ is expected to narrate how she met her partner. The researchers carried out a qualitative study where in-depth interviews and participatory observations were the key data collecting instruments. A total of 13 bridal showers⁶ in Gaborone were attended and bridal shower narratives compiled. The following are important findings of the study: narratives can be used to understand the meaning that the brides create about the formation of their relationship; there is evidence of a shift from traditional Setswana perspectives of relation formation to modern ways of courtship – a paradox between modernity and the apparent conformity to the traditional perceptions that a man must always initiate the formation of a relationship. Bridal shower narratives in Gaborone further demonstrate the importance of love before marriage and personal choice in partner/spouse selection. The paper further concludes, consistent with the findings of Oubuch, Veroff & Holmberg (1993), that each narrative presents a story making process, style and content of storytelling. The study recommends that future studies collect groom-to-be stag party narratives for comparison.

⁵Thereafter referred to as the ‘bride’

⁶ The data is extracted from a study titled ‘*Botho/Ubuntu and Community Building in the Urban Space: An Exploration of Naomi, Laban, Baby and Bridal Showers in Gaborone.*’ The study was generously sponsored by John Templeton Foundation and was done by women in the Theology and Religious Studies, Social Work and Centre for Continuing Education departments of the University of Botswana.

Keywords: *Botho/Ubuntu, bridal showers, husband narrative, relation formation, marital relations, storytelling, marriage, love, Gaborone, Botswana*

Introduction

Cities are the height of human achievement. Cities are fraught with ambivalence. We adore city life, it stimulates, entertains and excites. Cities are open and tolerant, but perversely elitist and exclusionary (Leary-Owhin, 2016: 1).

City life has been an attraction for many young adults. Cities provide an opportunity for creativity as one journeys to find one's space within the busy city life. Women, especially the young and educated, have through bridal showers created female spaces for themselves. Within such spaces, they are able to empower each other and challenge some gender stereotypes. Hence, they enable themselves to cross social boundaries such as, for example, one that held that an unmarried woman cannot offer guidance to a bride (Setume et al., 2017). Bridal showers have further created spaces in which women can share personal information such as how one met one's partner, for example. The sharing of such personal information is through narratives.

Overtime changes have taken place in relation to how men and women meet to form relationships. According to Hirsch and Wadlow (2006), research 'around the world has suggested that the process of globalisation, transnational migration and

modernisation have contributed to changing understanding of marriage and the role of love and intimacy in it.' Hirsch (2003) further comments that there has been a significant shift from marriage of 'respect' to companionate marriage of effect where marital relationships have become largely emotive than just social obligations. As Botswana fast becomes part of the global village, changes regarding intimacy and personal choice have developed. Through bridal shower narratives, society can discuss the extent to which individuals have moved from the traditional kin-focused ways of establishing romantic relationships to an individual's autonomous choice. This plays out well in bridal showers in the urban space of Gaborone. Whereas in the past with marriages of 'respect' parents were responsible for the selection of spouses for their sons and daughters, in the contemporary Botswana women make their own choices of who to marry.

The purpose of this paper is to explore what opportunities are available to city dwellers to meet potential suitors/husbands through the analysis of narratives made by brides at their bridal showers. At any bridal shower one important question that a bride needs to answer is, 'how did you meet your partner?' The bride will be expected to narrate how she met her partner. In a way the bride is trading the 'juicy' story for bridal advice and gifts! After this introduction the paper will explore what bridal showers are and what purpose they serve, then trace a development in the establishment of relationships overtime. Then the paper outlines a theoretical background that situates the understanding of how

couples establish a relationship within the concept of personal narratives. After that, field data is presented and analysed

Bridal showers

Bridal showers are ritual activities that prepare a woman for marriage. A bridal shower is ‘a ritual that dates back to the 16th century Western Europe as a gendered ritual organised by women for women’ (Clark, 2000: 7; Jenkins, 2000; Montemurro, 2005, Setume et al., 2017). The origins of bridal showers are traced to a legend in Holland. According to this legend, ‘a woman wanted to marry a poor man whom her father feared would not be able to support her, and thus her father refused to provide dowry. Sympathetic to the love between the two, the would-be-bride’s friends gathered together gifts so that she was able to wed’ (Montemurro, 2005: 13). This practice has since been adopted by women across the world in order to celebrate one another (Solway, 2016). Bridal showers offer women an opportunity to express how much they care about each other, because women are socialised to care (Gilligan, 1998).

Though bridal showers are neither exclusively urban centred nor for the elite, they are largely done by middle class, educated and single women in urban spaces (Setume et al., 2017). While in America the purpose of bridal showers is to shower the bride with gifts (Montemurro, 2002, 2005), in Botswana the main purpose is to give advice to the bride (Setume et. Al., 2017). Solway has observed that bridal showers in Botswana ‘have appeared as a new form

of ritual combining both the consumerist driven allure of modern Botswana with aspects of didactic function of older instructional rituals and social connectedness' (2016: 315). Solway notes that for Botswana women, bridal showers are not just about presenting the bride with gifts, but the bride is also presented with instructions such as, for example, how she needs to behave in relation to her in-laws. Women present at the shower would discuss, ask questions, and share views, experiences and opinions with the bride to prepare her for married life. Solway further observes that Bridal showers in Botswana offer women of all ages, including friends and kin to share instructions for the bride and indeed for themselves; she explains that 'bridal showers offer a new way in which non-kin are incorporated into the marriage process, thus illustrating a "social" expansion that contradicts the tendency of contraction' (Solway, 2016: 315). Bridal showers are a very feminine social group and usually portray a carefree environment where very sensitive content can be trivialised and jokes made from it, for example, at one bridal shower, the bride was a widow. She narrated how she met her man, and at the point that she explained that her first husband had died, one attendant at the shower interjected and said '*lefu la gwe la mphidisa*'⁷ (through his death I am enabled to live on). This expression is drawn from a hymn referring to the death of Jesus but has come to

⁷ Intentionally misconstruing a line taken from a Christian song about how through the death of Jesus Christ humanity was saved.

express how the death of a spouse can also empower the widow/er, say for example, through life insurance cover or inheritance. In order to situate the current ways of how women in the urban space of Gaborone meet their spouses it is of paramount importance that a brief history of relationship formation in the context of Botswana is offered.

Developments in the formation of intimate relationships

Culture in all its facets is dynamic. Equally, how women establish or meet the man that they are to marry has also changed overtime. In this section we will describe three periods in how relationships are formed. The first period will cover the Traditional Setswana ways of establishing a relationship; secondly, a discussion of formal education and urbanisation will follow and thirdly, the formation of relationship in the era of modern technology will be discussed.

Setswana culture and relationship formation

Historical accounts about the formation of marital relationship centered on the kin (Kuper, 1940; Matthews, 1940; Schapera, 1939). In patriarchal societies where marriage was seen as a vocation for all, parents could not leave such an enormous task of forming marital unions to the inexperienced youth. Marriages were arranged. In those days becoming a wife or husband was such a mandatory role such that it was impossible for one not to marry (Kuper, 1940; Matthews, 1940; Schapera, 1939). Failure to marry

attracted derogatory terms such as *lefetwa*,⁸ (one who has been ‘passed by’). This was the case because marriage was arranged by parents and there was stigma attached to failure to marry and childbirth before marriage, especially for women. This was done with little or no consent from those getting married. Schapera poignantly captures that when he asserts that the issue was never who to marry but when (1939). With arranged marriages, romantic love was absent, implying that marriage came before love. However, overtime formal education and urbanisation had an impact on how sexual relationships were established.

Formal education, urbanisation and the formation of relationship

With the arrival of formal education and migration to urban places new social dynamics were shaped. These developments gave the younger generation more autonomy versus the older generation. Gulbrandsen (1986) carried out a study in Botswana among the Bangwaketse in Kanye. He observed that parents have lost their grip on the younger generation and can no longer impose their wish as whether or not to marry, when to marry or who to marry. This was because due to formal education and urbanisation the youth became independent in both

⁸ A derogatory word used to refer to women that are perceived by the society to have passed a period/age at which they should ideally been married, therefore they have been ‘passed by marriage’

thought and action when it came to matters of love. He notes that:

[...] while a young man's ambitions were customarily directed towards acquiring rank in the hierarchically organised politico-jural forum of the *kgotla*,⁹ where marriage was a basic condition for participation and where ownership of cattle was significant, the young men of today achieve esteem mainly through immediate and conspicuous consumption [...] in other words, there has been a dramatic transformations in idioms of rank, resulting in marriage not only becoming irrelevant but even 'just causing trouble' in the young man's achievements. Marriage means a young man might be hampered by a wife who 'makes noise' when he comes home, and who may bring a case against him of poor maintenance (Gulbrandsen, 1986: 15).

In contemporary Botswana as elsewhere (Sassler & Miller, 2015) young adults are increasingly 'assuming what was historically the purview of parents and community: the right to manage their own relationship' (Sassler & Miller, 2015: 142). Sassler and Miller further explain that courtship has increasingly moved away from the home and into more anonymous, often public spaces' where

⁹ A *kgotla* refers to a local administrative system in Setswana villages

‘parents and relatives continue to play important roles in romantic decisions-making, though they are no longer the main gate keepers. New technologies such as the internet provide young adults with modern ways to meet prospective partners,’ (Sassler & Miller, 2015: 142).

The bridal narratives poignantly point to the practice of self-selection of partners without much interference from their parents: a sole responsibility of the individuals who are to get married/get in a courtship hence has become a personal journey to explore. Analysing the bridal shower narratives allows for the exploration of how romantic relationships are formed in the modern cities.

Formal education and urbanisation created different social spaces within which a whole range of opportunities became available for the youth to meet. Schools, places of work and places of entertainment in cities are not gender sensitive as compared to a traditional Setswana set up. Therefore, these physical social spaces became vehicles for relationship formation. This was the case until the age of technology emerged.

Relationship formation and technology

It has been observed that social media has become an important vehicle in the formation of romantic relationships (Rainie & Wellman, 2013; Chambers, 2013; Kaya, 2009; Mesch & Talmud, 2007). Social media applications such as WhatsApp, SMS, facebook, etc, have rendered the need for a physical

space to meet irrelevant and therefore has greatly increased opportunities to meet online.

Costa (2016) poignantly explains changes in ways of establishing intimate relationships. Costa does so by focusing on the role played by media in the expression of love when he describes how media has expanded:

‘...opportunities to satisfy pre-existing desires for pre-marital romantic love, which were traditionally limited to rare encounters in the few available and suitable offline space. New forms of romance first appeared with the arrival of the internet in the region: many people in their 30s and 40s note that internet chatting and MSN were used to meet, communicate and flirt with people of the opposite sex [...] diffusion of social media and the smart phone have made online pre-marital romance love and friendship among young people more frequent and thus more integrated into their daily lives’ (2016: 103).

Therefore, through analysing bridal narratives at bridal showers, this study explores the extent to which social media has become part of union formation and development. But what are narratives?

Narratives: stories about the self

The use of narratives in exploring marital and romantic relationships has been adopted in many qualitative research studies (Banks-Wallace, 1999; Maguire, 1998). The narrative approach to understanding relationships started in the late 1980s and ‘early 1990s with the postmodern and social

constructivist approaches offered by Gergen (Cf; Skerrett, 2010: 504). A narrative or story is a report of connected events, real or imaginary, presented in a sequence of written or spoken words, or both. The word derives from the Latin verb *narrare* (to tell), which is derived from the adjective *gnarus*, "knowing" or "skilled."

A personal narrative is a 'form of auto-biographical storytelling that gives shape to life experiences' (Gaydos, 2005: 255). Gaydos explains that people make sense of the world and themselves in it by creating self-stories which have the qualities of narratives (2005: 254). Such stories have a beginning, the middle and the end. Narratives offer an understanding of how brides create meanings from self-defining memories (Gaydos, 2005). At bridal showers the bride will create a beginning where they was no interest in the relationship, to development of interest and love towards the groom and the end is reached when she accepts the advances and the marriage proposal. Most of the narratives will end with such taglines as '...and here we are' or '...and the rest is history.' Kotre (1996) cautions that the use of narratives should be done with the understanding that memory does not exactly conform to the facts of the actual events; the essential role of memory is the creation of meaning about the life of the self. It is therefore important to understand that the main purpose of analysing bridal shower narratives is to comprehend how brides make meaning of the formation of their romantic relationships, how they portray how they met their

partners/husband instead of a very accurate factual presentation of what happened.

The use of personal narratives to explore romantic relationships is bountiful (Berger & Kellner, 1964; Oubuch, Veroff & Holmberg, 1993). Narratives therefore allow couples to construct their own realities. The research adopting narrative approach presents a researcher as ‘collecting and interpreting stories that people tell about themselves. Stories represent ways in which people organise views of themselves, of others and of the world in which they live’ (Oubuch, Veroff and Holmberg, 1993: 813, Bruner, 1990). It is further observed that narratives need to be understood as stories of self-representation. Therefore, narratives present the positive parts, an interplay of power dynamics and sensitivity to the spouse/partner and, above all, are biased self-representations (Oubuch, Veroff & Holmberg, 1993). Everyone makes stories out of their experiences. Therefore, each story that a bride shared during bridal showers in Gaborone, represents the choice of ‘which things to share in the story and how to say it’ (Schneider, 2002: 77). Skerrett (2010) carried out a qualitative study with long term middle class heterosexual couples where the main objective was to explore the extent to which co-narratives relate to the development of the relationship over time. The study found out that the synthesis of each partner’s life story into a couple’s story promoted individual and relational development (Skerrett, 2010: 504). Wamboldt (1999) carried out a study using a sample of pre-marital couples and adopted the narrative approach ‘to explore coherence,

interaction, and relations beliefs between the couples. The study concluded that the outcome of the couples' effort to construct an intimate consensual reality is the primary determinant of the psychosocial outcome for not only the individual, but also the relationship they form (1999: 37-51).

Another study used a sample of 264 married couples, in which Oubuch, Veroff and Holmberg (1993) examined how these couples narrated the development of their relationship in the first year of their married life. The study found out that stories told by couples in the first year of their marriage helped to interpret the meanings that couples derive from becoming a couple. The study ably demonstrated the significance of the use of narratives. Most of the narratives used in literature were co-joint, that is, the husband and wife were asked to respond to the same research item with the aim of finding, for instance, consistency between couples; however, this study explores narrative consistency across brides.

Sassler and Miller (2015) carried out a study on the ecology of relationships. The purpose of the study was to explore the physical spaces where couples in the contemporary society meet and the impact of these places on the quality of the relationships. The formation and development of a romantic relationship is largely 'shaped by the type of network in which the initial' meeting took place (Sassler & Miller, 2015: 143). In their study Sassler and Miller found out that some ways of meeting romantic partners such as being introduced by friends or

family members through shared interest or at work or school may result in more homogenous relationships. They further concluded that such networks encourage partners to commit more to the relationship and develop more trusting bonds (Sassler & Miller, 2015; cf. Coleman, 1988) as couples might feel greater social support from the same networks.

The study found out that couples that met at less socially approved places like bars did not have strong family ties as compared to those couples that met at more accepted places like church or place of work.

Methodology

Data was collected through a qualitative study in Gaborone, the capital city of Botswana. The target group were brides who were recipients of bridal showers. Purposive sampling was used to identify key participants. Participants were identified through a list from the District Commissioners' office in Broadhurst office, through churches and snowballing. This was largely a qualitative study that was complimented by quantitative data. The qualitative approach is ideal for the study since the study is interested in the experiences of the brides in their environment (Creswell, 2009; Chilisa and Preece, 2005; Wodak, 2001; Bogdan & Biklen, 2016). The principal data collecting techniques were in-depth interviews¹⁰ with the brides. For this paper

¹⁰ At the time of writing the paper, a follow up was made with brides KM and TE since their narratives were not fully captured during the initial shower events

we focus on the narratives made by the bride and, in particular, how she answered the question, ‘How did you meet your husband?’ The bridal story was collected through voice recorders then transcribed verbatim, after which a thematic analysis was used to navigate data. Data is presented through narrative passages and verbatim quotes of the respondents. The next section presents the narratives and the findings of the study.

Narratives at bridal showers: How I met my husband

Love comes in many different forms and can present itself in the least expected environment. The narratives at bridal showers give a glimpse at how finding love can be a very exciting experience for the modern lady who has gradually shifted away from the traditional social context. She has shifted from how individuals traditionally became wives through the active involvement of their kin to a personal choice that is based on romantic love and companionship. Brides at bridal showers often have a quick response to the question ‘where/how did you meet your man?’ Oubuch, Veroff and Holmberg (1993) reached a similar observation that ‘couples have a quick and easy response to inquiries of how they met, recounting how it all began and often tell a story of considerable interest (1993: 815).

Love can be found in the least expected areas as reflected in the narrative below.

Bride TE

I was on a bus from Francistown to Maun. The bus stopped and we (passengers) went to the bathrooms. As I was going to the *ladies' bathrooms*, a gentleman tried to talk to me. I ignored him. As I came out of the *ladies* he was waiting by the entrance. He then says to me 'I think I have seen you in Gabs.' Well, I have never been to Gabs. Then he changes his story line to 'or it must have been in Francistown'. I looked at him and headed to the bus. He asked me for my cell number. I refused to give it to him. He followed me. As we approached the bus, he says to me 'If you don't give me your cell number, I am going to get inside of the bus with you and scream inside of the bus'. That scared me. I opted to give him my BBM (Black Berry Messenger) pin instead. He then explained to me that if I don't want to talk to him again, I can delete it and he won't be able to trace me. He sent the BBM. I did not respond to it the whole day before I accepted it. I accepted it the next day. We started chatting and everything fell into place.

This narrative is an epitome of how social media has become an important part of formations of relationships.

Bride MP

As young couples move from rural to urban places, they create social networks that are based on friendship and church membership and less on blood

ties (Setume et al., 2017). It is then not surprising that Mma MP is introduced to her potential lover through a friend as presented in her self-story below.

I met him through my friend. I was working at Barclays bank. One day a *sms* came through from him asking what time I was knocking off. I replied, 'Ka 5'. (Then the bride pauses and says, 'I am done.' The audience laughs and protests that the bride should continue). The next day he sends another message 'ke mo parking.' Then we came this way.... she describes the route they took as the audience screams with excitement of the detail). He then asked where I was going. I told him I am going to BBS mall. When we reached the mall, he went to a shop and bought some soft drinks. He dropped me off at home. He sent a few *smses* the next morning followed by more and more *smses*. That is how the relationship began. He explained to me that he was looking for a wife and did not want courtship. He suggested that I visit his home village to see what kind of people he comes from (murmurs among the audience)

The above two samples demonstrate generally how the bridal personal narratives were generally conducted. Below, we proceed to make meaning of these narratives. A thematic approach is used to make meaning of the narratives shared by brides at bridal showers in the urban space of Gaborone. The themes were adopted from an American study

(Oubuch, Veroff and Holmberg, 1993: 817). These themes are the story-making process, the style of storytelling and the content.

The story making process across all bridal narratives

Story telling 'in its broadest sense is anything that is told or recounted, normally in the form of a causally linked set of events or happenings, whether true or fictitious. Stories are a medium for sharing and a vehicle for assessing and interpreting events, experiences, and concepts to an audience. Through stories we explain how things are, why they are, and our role and purpose within them. They are the building blocks of knowledge and can be viewed as the foundation of memory and learning. Stories link past, present, and future and telling stories is an intrinsic and essential part of the human experience. Stories can be told in a wide variety of ways, which can be broadly categorised as oral, written, and visual, and are so all-pervasive in our everyday lives that we are not always aware of their role as a tool of communication in all societies (Healing through Remembering, 2005: 12).

As already stated above, all bridal shower recipients had to answer the question and therefore tell a story: How did you meet your spouse/husband? The bridal speech can be demanded by anyone in the audience. For instance, during RS' bridal shower, when it was time to give advice to the bride, one of the speakers instead of giving advice to the bride stood up and said: '*nna ke batla go itse gore o kopane kae le monna wa gago*' (I want to know how you met your

man). There was clapping and ululations in approval. Then the bride started her story:

Bride RS

We met in 2004 when I was still a student at Gantsi brigade where I was doing a course in Accounting. We started the relationship then. In 2006 I left Gantsi to come to do my internship in Gaborone. *'E be di phone di time go sena ope yoo o buwang le o mongwe.'* Then we lost each other's contacts. After some years God intervened and he also got transferred to Gaborone. I saw him in a cruiser, and he also saw me and stopped the car. That's how we got re-united *'ebe re kopana mo Gaborone e be re tsweledisa ha re neng re eme teng, re itshokela dikgwetlho tsa botshelo ...ra utlwana. Ke fela last year a kopa gore 'mma jaanong ke batla go go nyala''* (we met in Gaborone and continued from where we left. We were patient as we met challenges in life, and we committed to each other. It was last year that we decided that we want to get married to each other.

The same lady makes a follow-up: *A one a le romantic fa a proposa* (was he romantic when he made the proposal?)

The bride then explained:

He invited me for dinner and suggested that we leave the children behind. We went to a restaurant at Airport Junction. We drank some Coffee and he said to me: lady I mean it, I want to marry you.

The style of storytelling

Different styles of storytelling were reflected at bridal showers. Mature brides were comfortable in answering the questions and therefore gave a detailed description of the events, while young brides were less comfortable and gave very scanty details and the audience would usually be sensitive to the nature of the bride and hesitant to probe. However, as demonstrated by *Bride RS's* narrative above, for more comfortable brides the probing was very evident. The more interesting narratives were given by brides who were able to dramatise their storytelling. A comparison is given below from two narratives, namely, *Bride KM* and *Bride MPE*

Bride MPE

We met at a night prayer meeting in 2008. We became friends and the relationship started in 2014.

Bride KM

We were colleagues (at work) and church mates. We worked closely together especially at church, him as an elder; me as a youth leader. One day I was the preacher of the day as I usually did. This time it was a

little different as I was giving testimony about my previous life. The message must have touched him because he said as I was preaching something told him ‘That is your wife.’ ‘The following Sunday, he calls me and informs me that he wants to see me. Apparently, he summoned all fibre of his being to make the call. He came to my house, and he told me that he had been looking and studying me so he feels I would make him a good wife. I said, ‘no ways, never, no interest in you at all, like zero interest and my body is not going to be touched by any man especially him.’ He went back and devised other ways, apparently admiring my composure and moral standards. Later he tries another manoeuvre to coax me to share a house with him¹¹ as I was the only person who he could possibly share a house with. Still, I said no. He gave up. We continued to meet at work and at church. Later I started developing an interest in him, but he seemed to have moved on (murmuring and laughter from the attendants). I tried to flirt (more laughter and clapping). Apparently, he didn’t pick that, and regret set in, and I understood it was spilled milk. I got transferred to a different school. We barely communicated. Then one day, he says he woke up depressed and lonely and wondered who could pick his

¹¹ Sharing of houses by staff is a common practice as there is acute shortage of staff houses

mood and bang, he thought of me! Me! Me! (Jeering clapping and laughter). He sends a message 'I'm troubled and I think you are the answer to my troubles.' I then suggested he comes to town so that maybe I can help him (more laughter interjection and clapping). The day the schools closed he immediately ran to see me. We talked, he saying he still wants to marry, and I said I will think about it. But I had already made a decision. I waited for a week still not being clear. Then finally I said, 'let's give it a try'. We did and he said I want to marry you as soon as yesterday. I said there is no ring on my finger, be my guest. Then here we are!!

The social network that the couple had of working together and going to the same church provided a conducive environment for them to meet and establish a marital relationship.

Dramatizing in story telling is important because it captures the attention of the listener (Oubuch, Veroff & Holmberg, 1993). The listeners are engaged, entertained and interested in the story. Hence the laughter, interjection and ululations. In the case of more reserved brides, the most interesting part of 'how I met my partner' is left 'dry and disengaging.' However, what possible lessons came from all these narratives?

Cultural content of storytelling at bridal showers

Normative Setswana prescriptions played a very important underlying influence in the content of

bridal narratives. Setswana culture is a patriarchal one. Therefore, the fact that in issues of love, it is the male partner that is expected to make the first move towards the formation of a romantic relationship is evident in the narratives. Males are therefore 'perceived as the appropriate initiator of a relationship and proposal of marriage, more so than women' (Oubuch, Veroff & Holmberg, 1993: 817). The findings are therefore consistent with our cultural expectations that only men can initiate the formation of both a courtship and marriage. In all cases men initiated both the formation of the relationship and the proposal to marry. It seems women in the relationship were always responding to the man in question. For instance, in the case of Bride KM above, she initially rejected her partner's first intent to engage in a relationship with her. After she had developed some attraction towards him, she is not able to explain to him that she has developed interest and she would want them to give it a try. She flirts. From a cultural perspective, good women do not flirt. Thus, the fact that the bride describes her actions as flirting might suggest change of attitudes of women towards men. He doesn't read the signals. She gives up. She gets a transfer to another school, and it is only after the man sends Bride KM a message that: 'I'm troubled and I think you are the answer to my troubles' that Bride KM accepts, and the relationship is formed. Oubuch, Veroff and Holmberg (1993) in a study in America reach the same conclusion and further explain that 'these cultural prescriptions are associated with greater psychological wellbeing'

Summary and conclusions

In all the cited narratives, romantic love and companionship are important elements in the formations of the relationships: women are getting married to men that they love. The narratives have a beginning as revealed in the process of storytelling; the middle is when the couple are dating and finally, the ending is when they get married. All the narratives are consistent with the cultural expectations that a man should initiate relationships, all women in their narratives disclose that the man started the relationship. Bride KM's narratives depict how she almost gave up when the man could not read the signals. The desire for love and companionship among young couples is a worldwide trend (Twamsely, 2013). Twamsely carried out a study among the Guarani Indians in UK and India. The purpose of the study was to examine 'how ideologies of love are shaping marriage practices among middle class couples of 20-30 years' (2013: 267). In this study, Twamsely found that in all cases cited, love came before marriage as all participants expressed a strong desire to marry someone they loved, making love the primary part of spouse selection (2013: 273). While couples in her story preferred endogamy (marry within the Indian community) couples at bridal showers married across both the geographical and ethnic divide. Consistent with the narratives given by brides at bridal showers in Gaborone, love is the basis of getting into a relationship. Bridal shower narratives reflect how far women in the contemporary Botswana have moved away from the traditional parent centred physical space interaction

to modern ways of finding romantic love in a very liberal and technology enhanced environment. The study suggests that future bridal shower narratives research should also involve the groom narratives as well for comparisons relating to gender.

Therefore, in this study we propose that bridal shower narratives can be used as follows: to understand the meaning that brides create about their relationship formation; to explore the shift from traditional Setswana perspectives of relation formation to modern ways of courtship, and to solve the paradox between modernity and the apparent conformity to the traditional perceptions that a man must always initiate the formation of a relationship.

The contemporary relationship formation displays the extent to which the use of technology allows more social space for interaction in the development of romantic relationships. The absence of parental influence in the formation of such relationships reflects the extent to which the younger generation is gradually becoming independent of their parents or the older generation in matters of their love and the extent to which love, and intimacy are of paramount importance: that is marriage of 'respect vs. companionate marriage.'

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