Feminist Literature and Marital Status

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Abstract
This article is part of a series and it reports on the marital status aspect of an earlier research on the usefulness of feminist literature for defending women’s rights, targeting equality between the sexes, against male chauvinism. The intervention novel was applied to Year II undergraduate students of Literature. Following guidelines from established sources the research was designed as a test-retest quasi experiment and on account of the small sample sizes the data were analysed using the t-test. The category of single people showed significant change of attitude in favour of the feminist argument of the novel but the category of married people did not. Apparently, the thoughts of the married respondents were in agreement with the feminist advocacy in the novel prior to their reading it and seemed to have affirmed the feminist argument rather than change to it. That is, the selection of a piece of literature for change of attitude targets should consider whether the persons concerned are not already in agreement with the selected piece of literature.

Introduction
As discovered in Senesie, Samuel M. B. (2015) the genre termed feminist literature shows to be commendable as an instrument for the defence of women in mail chauvinistic society. The target in its use is to adjust attitudes in order to ultimately accomplish equality of the two sexes. However, the idea of Stritof, Sheri raises some doubts about applying this instrument to married and single people or to any people at all: “Once an attitude is ingrained in your mind, it is usually there forever”. This assertion notwithstanding, the acclaimed ability of feminist literature to adjust the attitudes of people may be tested against marital status by a comparison of the responses of married and single people to the genre. This is the aspect of the Senesie (2015) research reported in this article. The Sierra Leone background was used.

1.1 Background
The marriage institution takes various forms in Sierra Leone and is also in a period of transition in which recently enacted pro-feminist laws are confronting traditional norms. First, African traditional marriage traditions among the seventeen odd ethnic or tribal groups of the nation have fundamental similarities but also identifying differences. In general, all the ethnic groups require the prospective husband’s payment of the bride price of the girl or woman he desires to marry. Until the recent enactment of laws on marriage (as in Africa for Women’s Rights), in case the woman was coming from a previous marriage, the new husband had to pay the dowry on behalf of the woman and usually through her family, to the previous husband, and the woman would forfeit the property she jointly owned with her earlier spouse.

The article “African Wedding Traditions in Sierra Leone” describes examples in specific tribal terms. Among the Mendes, a man or the family of a boy may identify a girl and propose marriage of the girl to her parents. In this procedure the man or boy then keeps waiting for the girl to grow up; most times he serves her parents with his labour as well as makes many material offers to them for her sake until she is mature enough to be initiated into the Sande secret society, which marks her qualification to become a married woman. He will then pay her bride price and marry her. The Temne tribe practises similarly but can initiate a girl into the Bondo secret society while she is still very young; she grows up to maturity before a man can propose marriage to her through her parents. The Kuranko’s, on the other hand, would identify a man for their daughter when she is mature and offer her in marriage to
him. During the period the couple remain married, there can be several instances of annoyance inflicted on both the parties. Polygamy of the husband and infidelity on the part of the wife, have shown to be common causes of stress, domestic violence, separation and divorce. Perhaps on the bases of the “pleasures and pains” experienced by married persons, one would expect married and unmarried persons to defer in their responses to pro-female defensive arguments of feminist literature.

However, African traditional marriage is not the only type in Sierra Leone. A different pattern most common in urban areas is for young people to select their own partners and present these to their respective families for information and for approval. In urban areas it is quite common for a man to live together with a woman, in a kind of transition marriage, for a long time without marrying her or even proposing marriage to her, whether they have children or not – usually to the disadvantage of the women.

However, in case such cohabitation results in marriage, Western wedding traditions or a combination of these with African traditional rituals is usually practised.

Following are indications of recently enacted statutory laws protecting women’s rights and confronting male chauvinistic traditions:

The adoption of Registration of Customary Marriages and Divorce Act in 2007, which sets the legal age for marriage at 18, requires the consent of both parties to marriage and the registration of all marriages, empowers both spouses to acquire property and provides that gifts, payments, or dowries are non-refundable.

In addition, any man and wife who keep together in their love relationship for up to five years shall attain to the status of marriage, whether they perform a wedding ceremony or not, whether they register their marriage or not. In the same way as registered marriages enforce joint ownership of property by the couple, marriages attained by living together share property. Also, any children born out of wedlock have the same claim to their parents’ property as those born within wedlock.

Unmarried persons, on the other hand, are in the majority and are concentrated in the youthful years but including a significant, observable number of persons in higher age brackets. Among these older ones can be found many, who desire a marital partner but have not got one. Others still – many in the class of highly educated women - have faced disappointment after disappointment and got into resentment.

2.0 Review of related literatures

There is a scarcity of literature which relates marital status to feminist literature, although sources consulted provide applicable information: (i) attitude differences relating to forms of relationship practiced in the background cultures of the study (ii) indication that there are issues about which people differ in their attitudes on account of their marital status (iii) proclaimed benefits of marriage life which may influence the attitudes of unmarried people in favour of marriage.

2.1 Types of relationships in sources, practised also in the background country

Two separate writers, Gubernskaya, Zoya and Shirey, Wayne point out the categories of relationships that may constitute components of marital status: persons in cohabitation, married persons, single persons, the widowed (as well as widowers), the divorced or separated. All of the categories are clearly evident in the background country of the study and in other countries. The co-habitation category is apparently the most common in countries like Sierra Leone (as expressed by Teale, Lotta 2007) to this extent the traditional marriages or cohabitation now take the status of officially registered marriages. The attached foremost condition to authenticate the relationship in a marriage is that the couple must have lived together for at least five years.

2.2 Marital status causes difference in attitudes towards certain issues
A number of findings, which show that marital status leads to differences in attitudes regarding certain issues, seem to suggest that feminist literature may be included among those issues. That is, in case different marital status groups show different attitude towards money and cohabitation, they may also differ with respect to the message in feminist literature. Elizabeth H. Gormani studied attitudes of working men and women to the pay they received. Three marital status groups were involved – married, never-married, and divorced. Gormani reports that “the effects of marital status on pay valence and financial satisfaction do not differ by gender”. However, the results revealed that of the three groups married men and women valued their pay the most, followed by divorced individuals while single people valued their pay the least. Also, Gubernskaya, Zoya reveals that out of twenty-eight countries studied for their approval of cohabitation, cohabiting individuals showed to be more positive than actually married people.

2.3 Proclaimed benefits and annoyances of marriage that may influence attitudes
A number of sources identify certain benefits and annoyances of marriage that may influence people’s responses to feminist literature, which endeavours to change the attitudes of people in favour of equality between man and women. Whether respondents would resist the messages of feminist literature because of the negative experiences in marriage or whether they will be positive towards feminist literature because of the benefits observed or experienced could be revealed through the research. Waite, Linda J. and Maggie Gallagher list out very fundamental benefits that can be derived from marriage as against cohabitation: better finance status; longer life; better mental health and greater safety. As for each of the claims, they provide convincing arguments, sometimes using research results. For example, she shows that married men are half as likely to commit suicide as single men and one third as likely as divorced men. . . . Married people report lower levels of depression and stress and 40% say they are very happy with their lives compared to about 25% in single people.

On the other hand, married people and single people alike do suffer at the hands of their partners because of their practice of infidelity. Weaver, Jane explains that while people in relationships desire soul custody of their partner’s love, married persons cheat on their mates, more than single people or people in cohabitation. In support, Paul Goodman (2015) provides explanations: that fidelity is not natural to man and that marriage imposes bureaucratic restrictions against the nature of the individual; where people mistakenly get into relationships with the wrong partner, divorce cost can be very expensive; in many marriages quarrels hardly go away and the partners have to live their lives enduring the pains of the quarrels.

3.0 Procedure and results
The research procedure and findings are presented in the following sections.

3.1 Objectives and hypotheses
The objectives were set to find out whether
A. exposing married and unmarried (single) people to feminist literature would lead to change of attitudes on their parts so that they show to have attitudes projected in the feminist literature and to which attitudes they were hitherto opposed.
B. any change in attitudes realised on account of the exposure would differentiate between the two categories: married people and single people.

The following null hypothesis were tested
\( H_01 \). Exposing married and unmarried people to feminist literature will not lead to change of attitudes on the part of any of the two categories in favour of the attitudes projected in the feminist literature.

\( H_02 \) In case change of attitudes results from exposing married and unmarried people to feminist literature, the change will not differentiate between these two categories of marital status.
3.2 Study population and sample
The study population was all undergraduate students of Literature in the two public universities in Sierra Leone at the time. The study sample comprised Year II undergraduate students of Literature at the two public Universities in Sierra Leone at the time of the research: University of Sierra Leone (located in Freetown) and Njala University (located in Bo, 150 Km from Freetown) as well as at Njala in the Moyamba District (about 110 Km from Freetown).
Corrected form pilot studies conducted with students of the Northern Polytechnic (situated in the Northern Provincial Capital of Makeni) and the Eastern Polytechnic (situated in the Eastern Capital of Kenema), only two categories of marital status were used in the research – the married and the unmarried (single). This was because,
(i) the other possible categories – widowed persons, divorced persons tended to show zero representation in the population studied, (undergraduate students of literature, with Years I and II as the sample). The population of undergraduate students was guided from Baron, Robert (2002:630) who recommends persons who can use “systematic processing” to receive the persuasive message of the text.
(ii) the category known as cohabiting couples was taken as married since the background nation had passed a law to register all such relationships as married. On account of this, for example there were no questions designed to ascertain that respondents had marriage certificates. On the other hand, there were no windows, divorced or separated persons in the sample.

3.3 Study design
The research design is as described in 3.3 of Senesie, Samuel M. B. (February, 2015): a test-retest quasi experiment with two treated experimental groups and an untreated control groups.

3.4 Analysis
Following the guide of J. C. F. de Winter (2013) the t-test was used; it is the appropriate statistical tool for very small sample sizes.

3.4 Results
The graph and table in this section present the descriptive statistics and the inferential statistics respectively, for Objectives A and B and for Null Hypotheses H₀₁ and H₀₂.

3.4.1 Results from objective A and Hypothesis H₀₁
Objective A was set to discover whether exposing married people and single people to feminist literature would lead to change of attitudes on the part of any (or both) of the two categories, so that they adopt attitudes projected in the feminist literature and to which attitudes they were hitherto opposed.
From the graph, there was apparent change in of attitudes on the part of the single as well as the married categories in favour of the feminist arguments in the intervention novel.

In the case of the married category, the differences in the lengths of bars 2 (posttest) and 3 (delayed posttest) above bare 1 (pretest), show an apparent improvement in the attitudes of that category.

In the case of the single category, the differences in the lengths of bars 5 (posttest) and 6 (delayed posttest) above bar 4 (pretest), show an apparent improvement in the attitudes of that category.

However, for both the married and the single categories, only the inferential statistics of the t-test results in the table (and not the descriptive statistics of the graph) can show whether the differences are significant or not.
The t-test results shown in the table: The average level of attitude of the single category at posttest (after the exposure) is 127.50, and this is significantly higher (at p < .05) than the level of their attitude at pretest (before that exposure) - 122.09, with the p-value of 0.001. Similarly, the delayed posttest measure of attitude (124.40) is significantly higher that the pre-test measure of 119.96 and the p-value is 0.010.

Accordingly,

(i) exposing married people and single people to feminist literature may lead to change of attitudes on their parts, in this case on the part of the single people category.

(ii) Null Hypothesis A was rejected since at least one of the two categories demonstrated change of attitude in favour of the feminist literature.

3.4.2 Results from objective B and Hypothesis H02
Objectives B was set to find out whether any change of attitudes realised would differentiate between the two categories of marital status (married and single). From the table of t-test results and from the result to Objective A presented in 3.4.1,

(i) The change of attitude which resulted from the exposure of the marital status groups to feminist literature showed to differentiate the single people category, which showed significant change of attitude, from the married people category which showed no significant change of attitude.

(ii) Null Hypothesis H02 was rejected since the two categories, single and married were differentiated because the one showed significant change of attitude but the other did not.

(iii) The change of attitude realised seems to be stable: while there is significant change between the pretest and the posttest as well as between the pretest and the delayed posttest, there is no significant change between the posttest and the delayed posttest, of the single category.
Table: paired t-test comparison of pretest, posttest and delayed posttest scores of marital status groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital status group</th>
<th>Test</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S. D.</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Null Hypothesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>120.46</td>
<td>9.386</td>
<td>.2.142</td>
<td>.053</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>128.62</td>
<td>17.900</td>
<td>-.2.245</td>
<td>.075</td>
<td>H01 &amp; H02, retained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>119.00</td>
<td>8.509</td>
<td>-.2.245</td>
<td>.075</td>
<td>H01 &amp; H02, retained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delayed post test</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>137.63</td>
<td>23.045</td>
<td>-.173</td>
<td>.498</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>134.50</td>
<td>20.608</td>
<td>-.173</td>
<td>.498</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delayed posttest</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>137.67</td>
<td>23.054</td>
<td>-.173</td>
<td>.498</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>122.09</td>
<td>11.191</td>
<td>-.3.623</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>H01 &amp; H02, rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>127.50</td>
<td>13.674</td>
<td>-.3.623</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>H01 &amp; H02, rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>119.96</td>
<td>10.972</td>
<td>-.2.672</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>H01 &amp; H02, rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delayed post test</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>124.40</td>
<td>13.802</td>
<td>-.2.672</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>H01 &amp; H02, rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>124.85</td>
<td>13.669</td>
<td>.286</td>
<td>.776</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delayed posttest</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>124.40</td>
<td>13.802</td>
<td>.286</td>
<td>.776</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(i) *= P < .05  (ii) ns = not significant

From the above results it is evident that single people are more likely to change their attitude in favour of the argument in a feminist literature text. This implies that in a progressive way single people can be persuaded to build empathy for married people in respect of the problems that confront the latter. Thus feminist literature can also be useful for preparing the minds of single people for marriage life. The level of sensitivity and experiences generalizable in each of these groups, in relation to the subject of marriage, could be fundamental to the variation in their attitude. In this research, for example, the intervention text (So Long a Letter by Mariama Ba) argues out against problems women face in marriage in the African society, which problems could be already afflicting the married respondents. Therefore, they were likely to have been in agreement with the writer’s argument before getting exposed to the novel. They were therefore less unlikely to have a change of attitude after exposure to the novel since they already held the attitude projected in the novel.

3.5 Conclusions

1. In general, where the attitude of a group of people is in agreement with attitude argued for in a piece of Literature, their changing to this projected attitude need not be expected. Rather, the application of the literature to the group may only lead them to confirm their own existing attitude. For example, if a group of married people is exposed to a text that argues against the troubles with which married people are generally afflicted, the attitudes of the group members would be highly likely to be in agreement with the argument in the text prior to their reading it. Therefore, they need not be expected to change their attitudes in favour of the attitude which this literary text solicits.

2. In similar note, it is more relevant to use literature to change a person’s attitude if the person has attitudes in opposition to what the literature text argues for.
REFERENCES


Gormani, Elizabeth H. “Marriage and Money: the Effects of Marital Status on Attitudes toward Pay and Finances” (retrieved October 26, 2010) from http://wox.sagepub.com/content/27/1/64.short


