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**THE IMPACT OF TELEVISION ON THE CONCEPT
OF MARRIAGE AMONG THE YOUTH**

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A Full Scale Project Submitted in Partial Fulfilment
of the Requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Social
Communication

NAIROBI 2006

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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

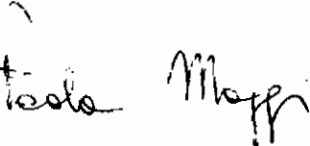
I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Diploma in Social Communication. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

Signed: 

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This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to the many open-minded people who have talked to me, sharing their opinions, advice and experiences.

I would like to thank my moderator Sr. Paola Moggi for her commitment in supervising and for guiding me through the entire project. I would also like to thank all the teaching staff in Tangaza who have been instrumental in my academic growth. My gratitude also goes to my parents who inspired me to venture in the field of communication. I also want to extend my thanks to Ann, Jane, Timothy and Christopher who were there for me.

Finally, my greatest thanks go to the Almighty God for giving me good health and strength in the process of producing this work.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The media is the latest agent of socialization. As such, its pervasiveness has raised a lot of concern. The media has been variously used as a power tool by the elite in society from time immemorial. Whilst Gutenberg's invention brought the masses into the previously exclusive world of enlightenment, it did not reverse the balance of power. Whereas knowledge was officially a preserve of a few people and guarded jealously before the advent of mass media, now it is generated by a few people and sometimes with the purpose of misinformation¹. It has had both negative and positive effects on society.

1. Statement of the Problem

The inhabitants of the city of Nairobi are caught up between two different cultures. The two are modern culture and the traditional culture. This is especially so for the youth who are born and brought up here. This unstable cultural background is leading to a situation whereby some aspects of cultures that had a lot of prominence in the past are losing importance. This is true especially as far as the beliefs and traditions surrounding marriage are concerned.

¹Cf. P. J. ROSSI – P.A. SOUKUP, ed., *Mass Media and the Moral Imagination: Communication Culture and Theology*, London: Sheed and Ward 1994, 162.

In a society greatly influenced by mass media, teenage attitudes towards marriage are becoming as infantile and unrealistic as they are portrayed in the media, that is, at a superficial level, grossly emphasizing on the honeymoon and personal gratification, with divorce being offered as the solution to all troubles. This is leading to a situation, whereby young people grow up having a skewed view of marriage, leading to break-ups as soon as they venture into it. As a result, an increasing number of people are sceptical about marriage while others are unwilling to get married. This is a new phenomenon in the African context where marriage was an important rite of passage.

2. Description of the Study Locale

The area under study is Karengata, an estate in Nairobi, with emphasis on young people in tertiary level of education. The research was mainly conducted in Karengata, the meeting point of Langata and Karen estates. This area has three institutions of higher learning, and quite a number of religious communities. For this reason, the majority of young people living in the area are students, either living in rental houses or in hostels. The area is dotted with settlements of the upper-class citizens in Nairobi with most of the inhabitants in the area owning the houses in which they reside. In the same neighbourhood, there are student hostels and houses, occupied on a rental basis by students studying in the nearby campuses. The houses are big and characteristically fenced off, both from each other and prying eyes. The students' residences on the other hand are small and much closer together. The area has a mixture of both multi-religious and multi-ethnic groups, this being a characteristic of urban areas.

3. Study Objectives

- ❖ To identify the position of marriage in contemporary society.
- ❖ To identify the contribution of media if any, in the position identified.
- ❖ To find ways in which the media can be used to make marriage more meaningful.
- ❖ To fill gaps in knowledge concerning the topic

4. Hypotheses

The research aims to verify validity of the following statements:

- ❖ Young people are consumers of television programs.
- ❖ The programs portray marriage trivially.
- ❖ Young people are influenced by such portrayal and end up having a myopic vision of marriage.

5. Scope and Delimitation of the Study

The topic of marriage is wide and varies from one community to another. In discussing it from the African traditional perspective, I avoid too much cultural specificity, for the topic of marriage in traditional African society is as wide as there are different communities. Thus, I have limited my discussion to only those aspects that are more or less similar in most Kenyan cultures.

Another limitation to my research was the rather restricted number of respondents selected on a purposive basis mainly because of the time limit. The final

limitation is that the application is not presented in its implementation but in its initial stage of plan and script. This is largely due to the nature of the application.

6. Organization of the Work

The research is divided into three chapters. The first chapter discusses the traditional understanding of marriage in the African context, the present state of marriage and the role that the media plays in this situation. This chapter begins by examining the role of marriage in any society. It also discusses its significance, features, process and marital responsibilities in the African context. Chapter One further discusses the changes that have so far occurred in this area and the role the media has played in bringing about this change.

The second chapter is devoted to the field research and examines the place of marriage in contemporary society from the young people's point of view. It investigates the consumption pattern of media by the young people and how their use of media might affect their outlook to life as explained by prominent media theories. In this chapter, I will also discuss the ethical implications of such a situation and try to offer a solution. The findings related to the use of the media will then be adopted to elaborate the communication strategy proposed by this thesis.

The third chapter is an elaborate explanation of a communication strategy that I will propose to counteract the negative consequences observed. The blue-print for the project will be attached in the appendix.

7. Definition of Terms

Culture

Culture can be described as a people's complete way of life both materially and non-materially. Every society has its own specific culture, which differentiates it from the rest. Within any given culture, there is what is referred to as tension and convention. The tension is provoked by the liberal part of culture -- it openly embraces change, while the conventional component is conservative -- not only shuns the change, but also feels threatened by it.²

Globalisation

This is the phenomenon whereby social and economic relations are disembodied from their local context and re-embedded across space and time.³ In other words, globalisation is the opening up of borders in such a way that every corner of the world is interlinked. What happens in one part of the world affects the other parts, no matter how far apart they appear to be.

Modernisation

Derived from the word "modernity", it is closely associated with westernisation. It encompasses the supremacy of rationality, industrialisation, capitalism and technology.⁴

² Cf. S. WANAKACHA, "Culture Communication and Society", Class Notes -- Tangaza College, the Catholic University of Eastern Africa 2004.

³ Cf. I. MARSH, *Making Sense Of Society: An Introduction To Sociology*, Singapore: Longman Publishers 1997, 377.

⁴ Cf. K. GYEKYE, *Tradition and Modernity: A Reflection on the African Experience*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1997, 265.

Patriarchy

This is a system based on the law of the father both in terms of lineage, where children take on the father's name rather than on their mother's, and through male oriented political institutions.⁵

Marriage

Marriage is a union between two people of which one is male and the other female, with the intent of becoming family. According to A. Shorter,⁶ marriage is an intimate union between man and woman, of which mating is an essential and sacred expression, establishing enforceable rights between them, marking a change of status for them and their parents, giving the children of the union a higher status than extramarital ones, generating relationships of consanguinity and affinity, implying that other forms of mating or intimacy are deviant or preparatory to marriage.

Kinship

This is the relationship between persons related by real, recognized or fictive consanguinity⁷.

Mass Media

Technologies used to mediate communication to large heterogeneous audiences or even to individuals⁸.

⁵ Cf. M. O'SHANGHNESSY, *Media and Society: An Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999, 199.

⁶ Cf. A. SHORTER, *African Culture, an Overview: Socio-Cultural Anthropology*, Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa 1998, 83.

⁷ Cf. L. MAGESA, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions Of Abundant Life*, Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa 1998, 104.

⁸ Cf. L. MCQUAIL, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, London: Sage Publications 2000, 24.

Television

It is a medium of mass communication that engages both the audio and visual senses. It is an industry, a set of audio-visual text and a socio-cultural experience, run by professionals. The output generated by it needs to be interpreted and it links daily life to other larger symbolic orders of social and political life⁹.

⁹ Cf. P. DAHLGREN, *Television and the Public Sphere: Citizenship, Democracy and Media*, London: Sage Publications 1996, 25.

Chapter I

The Metamorphosis of Marriage and the Role of the Media

1. Introduction

This chapter is a rendition of the traditional status of marriage in the African society. It sets the background against which the contemporary state of marriage is to be compared and contrasted with the modern setup. It shows the importance of marriage in any society. At the same time, this chapter highlights the changes the institution of marriage is undergoing at present as well as the role the media are playing in effecting these changes. In discussing the role played by the media, it has to be kept in mind that the media effects occur in conjunction with other factors within society.

2. The Importance of Marriage in the Society

W.C. Bier has that people get married not just because it is natural but also because it is a source of life's satisfaction and the foundation of meaningful personal relationships for the psychological stability of an individual. This theory comes from Freud and states that personality is formed by interactions with meaningful others.¹⁰

Over the centuries marriage has evolved from a tribal, social, political and spiritual event to the modern individual romance with little or no concern for parental or ancestral approval. We find the essentials of marriage in all cultures,

¹⁰ Cf. W.C. BIER, *Marriage. A Psychological and Moral Approach*, New York: Fordham University Press 1965, 43.

namely, a life long union of husband and wife for the sake of mutual support and progeny to continue the ancestral line and promote the welfare of the tribe or clan.¹¹

A society comprises various institutions working together. In all human societies, since time immemorial, very strict regulations have been spelled out and observed to govern the marriage institution. Marriage is the foundation upon which the primary unit of every society is built. Strict sexual mores were often necessary for the continual existence of the band.¹² The more clearly defined and closely followed is the marriage system, the more orderly and ethical a society is said to be.

3. Marriages in African Traditional Societies

In the African traditional set-up, the marriage was a long and elaborate process. Speaking of marriage, Mbiti notes that it is the point where all the members of a community meet, the departed, the living and those yet to be born to repeat, renew and revitalize the whole drama of history.¹³ Mohler terms African marriage as a tribal contract in which the patriarch and his elders supervised and approved the union.¹⁴ In keeping with Mbiti's philosophical formula "I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am", marriage was a communal affair with little or no emphasis on romance.¹⁵ The wife's fertility was of prime importance. Children not only continued the all important ancestral line, but also offered filial continuity to the ancients, bringing a certain supernatural aura to the marriage. Childbirth was not only the crowning point of marriage but also the assurance of the continuance of

¹¹ Cf. J.A. MOHLER, *Love, Marriage and Family*, New York: Alba House 1982, 3.

¹² Cf. J.A. MOHLER, *Love, Marriage and Family*, New York: Alba House 1982, 3.

¹³ Cf. J. MBITI, *African Religion and Philosophy*, Nairobi: Heinemann Press 1969, 133.

¹⁴ Cf. J.A. MOHLER, *Love Marriage And Family*, New York: Alba House 1982, 3.

¹⁵ Cf. J. MBITI, *African Religion and Philosophy*, Nairobi: Heinemann Press 1969, 102.

one's kinship group. In other words, marriage was not an end to itself but a means to an end.¹⁶

3.1 Significance of Marriage in the Traditional Society

Marriage in African culture was above all for the good of the tribe. There were no bachelors or spinsters for life unless in very special cases. Marriage was the primary means to honour the ancestors, and as such, misuse of male-female relations was a major breach of ethics. Marriage was the next and natural step after initiation. It was also through marriage that status was acquired. It was the means through which a person was accepted among the adult elite. Unmarried persons, whether male or female, were regarded as incomplete and commanded little or no respect from the rest of society¹⁷.

3.2 Features and Changes in the Traditional Marriage

African traditional marriages were and still are either patrilineal or matrilineal according to the community. We have patrilineal system where genealogy lines can only be traced from the father's side of the family, while matrilineal system is traced from the mother. Nevertheless, there are a few underlying features that are common in most of them across the board.

3.2.1 Polygamy

In the past, a man was allowed to simultaneously have more than one wife at a time. The practice was not only approved but also highly esteemed in the African traditional society. It was a symbol of prestige and anyone with many wives was

¹⁶ Cf. L. MAGESA, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, Nairobi Pauline Publications Africa 1998, 115-118.

¹⁷ Cf. A PHILLIPS, ed., *Survey Of African Marriage And Family Life*, London: Oxford University Press 1953, 1.

highly respected. This practice was however strictly regulated and, although having many wives was something an average African man aspired to have, studies have shown that most marriages were monogamous.¹⁸

Presently, with the onset of Christianity and economic pressure among other factors, the practice is on the decline with rather few exceptions. Instead, the practice has mutated to serial polygamy, a situation whereby men now have one legal wife and girlfriends or secret mistresses elsewhere.

3.2.2 *Marriage Gifts*

In most African marriages, the making of a payment of goods or services by the bridegroom to the bride's kin was an essential part of the establishment of legality.¹⁹ Until the marriage gifts/bride price was paid, the marriage was neither complete nor legally recognized. The wealth acquired from the marriage of a daughter was often used for further marriages of the sons and, in this way; the family did not regard it as a source of profit:

In the African traditional society, bride-price was meant to be compensation to the woman's family for the loss of one of its members. It was both a token of appreciation and a reminder to her family that although she was gone, she was not dead²⁰. At the time of marriage, the woman would leave her family of birth and become part of her husband's family. It was not a one-way exercise but involved the exchange of gifts between the two families.

¹⁸ Cf. R. BROWN - A.R. FORDE, ed., *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, Manchester 1987, xiv.

¹⁹ Cf. R. BROWN - A.R. FORDE, ed., *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, Manchester 1987, 146.

²⁰ Cf. J. MBITI, *African Religion and Philosophy*, Nairobi: Heinemann Press 1969, 135.

Bride price was also meant to be a kind of "marriage insurance" that stabilized a marriage. Upon receiving a bride wealth, the girl's father would keep the majority and redistribute the rest to other relatives according to laid down conventions. In this way, all parties who had received a share would be interested in the maintenance of the marriage since they would have to repay back the bride wealth in case of a divorce.

Presently, bride-price is assuming a new status. It is now grossly misrepresented and increasingly commercialised. Cases of parents treating their daughters like investments to be traded to the highest bidder are a common place. Since it is also payable in cash, a young man does not require the consent from his parents or relatives if he can afford it.²¹

3.2.3 *The Collective Aspect*

Marriage was never an affair between the husband and wife. It was regarded as a union of two kinship groups. This kinship bond was so strong that it remained effective even beyond the lifetime of the original individual spouses.²² In the same breath, the reverse would also hold. Marriage and community bonds were so close that a rift between the communities involved could actually nullify a marriage.²³ Without the community's support and continuous encouragements from both sides, a marriage was doomed to fail

The communitarian aspect is well demonstrated by the existence of levirate marriages. Once married, the woman irrevocably became part and parcel of her

²¹ Cf. A. PHILLIPS, ed., *Survey of African Marriage and Family Life*, London: Oxford University Press 1953, 1.

²² Cf. Theological Advisory Group, *A Biblical Approach to Marriage and Family in Africa*, Kijabe: Kijabe Printing Press 1996, 74.

²³ Cf. J. MBITI, *African Religion and Philosophy*, Nairobi: Heinemann Press 1969, 115.

husband's family. Upon his death, either a brother or a near relative of her husband would cohabit with her in place of her husband. This practice was meant to ensure that widows were neither neglected nor in a position to jeopardize the community's morality.

Presently, however, with the onset of Sexually Transmittable Diseases (STDs), especially Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), the practice is highly discouraged. It is, however, still practiced in some rural parts of Nyanza Province. Now widows are left largely to fend for themselves and in the worst cases, they are expelled from their marital homes.

The communitarian sense of marriage is now a pale image of what it used to be. After the wedding celebration the couple is usually left alone. Without the mutual support from friends and relatives, marriages nowadays sometimes fail due to very trivial reasons.

3.2.4 Procreation as the Principal Goal

The most notable characteristic of African marriage was the importance accorded to procreation. Mbiti argues that this was indeed so paramount that, in some traditional societies, a marriage was not considered as such until children were born. Without the due arrival of children a marriage remained incomplete and solutions were sought.

Sororate marriage was one way of solving the problem of childlessness. A barren woman was a disgrace both to the marriage and her ancestral clan. This was one of the valid foundations for divorce. To redeem her family from shame, the

wife could get her sister to be a co-wife. The latter would then have children for the man's clan on her behalf and thus save the marriage.²⁴

Ghost marriages and woman to woman marriages were also another way of dealing with childlessness. If a man died before marriage his genealogical line would be lost. To prevent this, the clan would conduct a ghost marriage; conduct a marriage ceremony where a young woman is declared the wife of the deceased. The woman was allowed to conceive by other men but legally, the children would be considered as the dead husband's children.

Woman to woman marriage took place when a married man died without children (or without enough of them) and there was no man to inherit the wife, the widow was allowed to 'marry' another woman — 'iweto' among the Akamba. The new and often younger woman could have children by other men but these children would be considered the widow's children. She would provide for them and in this way the dead man's family lineage would be continued.

These two types of marriages are now no longer in existence especially in the urban setup, or else they are very rare. The pressure to have children, though still strong, has lessened. Now a childless couple have several options open to them. Depending on their financial capacity, they can have children using the available technology or through adoption.

Apparently nowadays people get married for various other reasons, some of them noble (love, companionship) and some of them dubious (prestige and money). Religion has always been a strong influencing factor in shaping views on marriage; the dominant religion in Kenya today allegedly is Christianity.

²⁴ Cf. J. MBITI, *African Religion and Philosophy*, Nairobi: Heinemann Press 1969, 135.

3.3 *Christian Understanding of Marriage*

In Christianity, marriage is a permanent, stable, sexually exclusive, unity-seeking and unity-generating commitment of love between a man and a woman for mutual fulfilment, happiness and meaning, and open to the generation of offspring.²⁵ From the Christian perspective, emphasis is placed on permanence and sexual fidelity. Marriage is also viewed as possessing both natural and supernatural aspects, as a quote from the Bible states “so then what God has united let no man put asunder”.²⁶ Spouses who love each other are honoured whether or not they have children. In African societies, where Christianity is widespread, it is often assumed that family life and the institution of marriage are evolving towards the Christian model. However, this is not often the case. What is consistently and repeatedly portrayed in the media seems to set a different pace in the evolution of marriage in urban and modern lifestyle.

4. **The Process of Traditional Marriage and the Role of the Media in Promoting Change**

In the African societies, marriage was not an event but rather a process. Mohler describes African nuptials as a drawn-out process that began with the betrothal arrangements between families, whereby entrance of the bride not only required payment of bride wealth, but also the performance of proper ceremonies.²⁷ Stages in marriage differed from community to community but their intentions were the same. The process was a dynamic whole, whose purpose among other things was to create an alliance and a gradual growing together of partners.²⁸

²⁵ “Dossier: “Marriage in Africa”, *New People*, 101 (March-April) 2006, 16.

²⁶ Mark 20:2-12.

²⁷ Cf. J.A. MOHLER, *Love Marriage and Family*, New York: Alba House 1982, 146.

²⁸ Cf. J. MBITI, *African Religion and Philosophy*, Nairobi: Heinemann Press 1969, 119.

Also Christian marriage entailed a process of mutual knowledge between the spouses before the vows were pronounced on the wedding day, but in the modern setting, marriage is barely a process. The process has often been reduced to a mere run-up to the wedding ceremony. In the modern setting, the traditional steps in preparation for marriage have been either played down or ignored altogether. What matters more seems to be such trivialities as how the overall wedding ceremony itself is rated.

4.1 Initiation

The past

Marriage was preceded by initiation ceremonies. It was only after this stage that one was considered of marriageable age. During these ceremonies the young initiates were given relevant instructions on acceptable adult behaviour, especially on sexual and marital issues. This education was in form of riddles, stories and songs. The initiation schools were indispensable preliminary preparations to marriage, in some occasions harsh endurance tests were administered.²⁹ These were meant to impress the importance of perseverance in adult responsibilities and good conduct.

The present

In urban settings initiation is seldom accomplished and the Christian initiation of Confirmation is lived in a very superficial way. Without "initiation", young people now have no reliable means of learning values: they are left to fashion their own values and meanings by pulling together from various sources. Whether

²⁹ Cf. A. PHILLIPS, ed., *Survey Of African Marriage And Family Life*, London: Oxford University Press 1953, 1.

this is good or bad depends on the sources they access.³⁰ People internalise what they are exposed to. Just like nutritionists believe that we are what we eat, the paternalism principle also states that we are what we read (view)³¹. Constant exposures to programs that depict marriage as irrelevant and doomed to fail make the young people view it that way.

In the media, marriage is often depicted as a spur-of-the-moment activity with the only requirement being that the two people involved like what they see physically. Dating is now the most important step before marriage. Unfortunately, in this set-up, no one else is present to guide the two amateurs on what really counts.

4.2 Choosing a Spouse

The past

Depending on the community this was done in different ways. One of the most outstanding aspects of this tradition was the level of the parents' involvement in the choosing process. Even on occasions whereby the initiative was left to the couple, the parents had a lot of influence in it. Without their approval, the marriage could not proceed. Choosing a marriage partner and proposing marriage was the man's prerogative. It was unheard of for women to take direct initiative in such matters.

Even though physical aspects were considered, the qualities preferred in a marriage partner were principally moral. This is well illustrated by the Kgatla proverb - "A pretty girl either steals or wets her bed".³² This proverb was meant to

³⁰ Cf. T.H. ERIKSEN, *Tyranny of the Moment: Fast and Slow Time in the Information Age*, London: Pluto Press 2001, 134

³¹ Cf. L.A. DAY, *Ethics in Media Communications: Cases and Controversies*, Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company 1991, 238.

³² Cf. J. MBITI, *African Religion and Philosophy*, Nairobi: Heinemann Press 1969, 115.

alert the young men not to be deceived by beauty but to seek to know the character of the girl they chose.

The present

Now young people learn the qualities to look for in a marriage partner from the media. In television dramas and soap-operas, the ideal wife is slim, always well groomed and always has everything in control around the home. The husband is tall, strong and charming; he has a white collar job and has plenty of time to spare for his family. There are hardly any real hardships in the marriage except for the inevitable cheating.

5. Factors that Foster Change in the Marriage Institution

The winds of change in Africa have been fuelled by various factors, among them modernization and globalisation. Joinet points out that modernity has two faces, a beautiful one and an ugly one. The ugly face of modernity comprises of culture of death, whereby a wanton pursuit of personal gratification is prioritised. The beautiful face is the opening up of not only the people's scope of knowledge but also their systems of thought. What people can or cannot do is no longer as strictly prescribed now as it was in the past. The freedom to choose is not only for the broad things like career and religion, but also for marriage partners.³³ Cultural change is promoted by different factors; it can be due to urbanization, formal education and media among others.

In the media, the aspects of globalisation and modernity are converged and dished out to people in large quantities, especially in the urban centres. The media have also facilitated some positive changes. In spite of the sexist portrayal of

women, on other occasions, they are also portrayed as being capable of determining the course of their lives. Among other roles, they are portrayed as capable of other activities outside the traditional domain of the home. Thanks to these portraits women have acquired more confidence in taking part in serious debate and making choices for themselves; by extension they now have more liberty in the choice of marriage partners.

Another positive feature is the disappearance of the practice of child betrothal which led to what can now be termed as child marriages. In the past, it was normal to marry off girls at a very tender age. The stress on the education of girls is slowly replacing the long standing, though misplaced, notion that educating a girl is like watering a shade tree in someone else's compound.

Intermarriage between different tribes, highly discouraged in the past, has become a common feature in the urban society today.³⁴ By portraying such marriages as normal, people in the urban centres do not feel bound to marry their kinsmen only.

However, despite these positive changes, the Christian view of marriage seems still too superficial among the youth to substantially shape their behaviour: where deep convictions have not yet matured, the media plays a major role in shaping people's life, especially if they are still young.

³³ Cf. B. JOINET, *The Challenge of Modernity in Africa*, Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa 2000, 15.

³⁴ Cf. S. WANAKACHA, "Culture Communication and Society", Class Notes, Tangaza College – the Catholic University of Eastern Africa 2004.

6 The Role of Media in Socialization

The media now occupies a pervasive presence in our lives. Exactly how its content affects our behaviour is yet to be ascertained. However, the general consensus is that media affects behaviour. Sometimes the media reflects reality but other times it helps to promote change. Controversial entertainment materials dealing with social issues are seldom neutral in the lessons they teach.³⁵ In line with the cultivation theory, programs like soap operas, which, as the norm, portray simplistic approaches to marriage, encourage the youth to view indigenous elaborate processes as cumbersome and outdated.

The media plays a socializing role across the board. By affecting people's cultures, their values and beliefs are altered and consequently their behaviour.

6.1 *The Media Influence on Culture*

Through the media, cultures are both propagated all over the globe and refined on a faster scale than in the past. Globalisation entails abolishing barriers and operating on the stage of the whole world as if it were one single space. In the spirit of open competition, both goods and services can be produced and sold anywhere in the world for the maximum profit. This includes television programs which help globalise and synchronise cultures.

The cultural synchronization theory³⁶ speaks of a situation where different cultures come into contact and end up adopting cultural models from one another. At a cursory level, this is what seems to be happening in the developing countries. However, closer inspection reveals otherwise. The adoption of cultural models is

³⁵ Cf. L.A. DAY, *Ethics in Media Communications: Cases And Controversies*, Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company 1991, 211.

³⁶ D. MCQUAIL, *McQuail's Mass communication Theory*, 4th ed., London: Sage Publications 2000, 238.

largely one-way, as local cultures cede to Western models. In this case, the more radical theory of cultural hegemony is more applicable.

According to the cultural hegemony theory, modern cultures are imposed on the indigenous cultures which have little means of resistance. The modern cultures are usually based on consumerist economies, which are out to expand their markets. This, they do by changing indigenous non-consumerist cultures into commoditised cultures. The indigenous cultures are given a new set of values which predominantly insinuates that anything can be bought³⁷.

6.2 Effects on Values and Beliefs

Culture encompasses everything including morals, values, beliefs and attitudes. By affecting the culture, all other aspects of peoples' life are left vulnerable. Through the media people get ideas that shape their values. Althusser classifies media as an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA).³⁸ Through the media, people adopt ideas and beliefs unconsciously and add them to their repertoire of ideologies. This is well demonstrated by Hitler's hate campaign against the Jews that resulted in mass murder and the Rwandan genocide here in Africa.

6.3 Effects on Behaviour

In the area of fashion and lifestyle, usually young people simply re-enact what they see. The cultivation theory seeks to explain their reaction on a deeper level, where what people see affects them unconsciously over time. This theory states that how we occupy our time influences how we think. Novak offers, "If you practice the craft of writing sedulously, you begin to think and perceive

³⁷ D. MCQUAIL, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, 4th ed., London: Sage Publications 2000, 94.

differently. If you run for twenty minutes a day, your psyche is subtly transformed (...) and if you watch six hours of television on the average every day?"³⁹

The principle of unintended consequence holds that the audience interpret whatever they watch, irrespective of the producers' intentions. For example the program 'Two and a Half Men' was a situation comedy on KTN that can be interpreted in diametrically opposed ways. The program humorously depicted the lives of two men living with one of the men's son. One of the interpretations is that a father can manage to raise children as just as well as a mother. It can also be interpreted as a validation of single parenthood. Other interpretations are that it is easier and fun to have shallow relations with the opposite sex and also that gay relations are viable among others.

The television medium, engages more senses than either radio or print. This is probably why it is so far the most influential media among the youth.

6.4 Effects on Marriage

Television is a medium of the here and now. What happens this moment is not necessarily connected with what happens the next minute. Television is a medium devoid of reflection and cohesive thought and favours "fast thinkers". In Eriksen's "fast world" marriage is naturally slow and fits badly with the current era. He argues that in the West, marriage begins when love is at boiling point and then gradually fizzles out⁴⁰. At least, this is the general portraits of most Hollywood movies that we get on television.

³⁸ D. MCQUAIL, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, 4th ed., London: Sage Publications 2000, 77.

³⁹ J. SHANAHAN – M. MORGAN, *Television and Its Viewers: Cultivation Theory and Research*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999, 2.

⁴⁰ Cf. T. H. ERIKSEN, *Tyranny Of The Moment: Fast And Slow Time In The Information Age*, London: Pluto Press 2001, 134

The frequent depiction of the Hollywood model of marriage ending up in divorce makes it seem not just inevitable but natural. It is a pity that people do not get access to more variety in what they are exposed to, in form of other models of reality. Other models, in this case the African models in their various formats, go unnoticed in other places because funds for local productions are almost nonexistent.

Models from other places like the East have to contend with big differences in both religious and language grounds. Christian portrayals of marriage in the media are very rare, but when presented they can get international resonance. The movie entitled "A beautiful mind" is an example of a successful movie with moral values.

6.5 Concept of Responsibility

The prospect of everlasting youthfulness is glorified whilst aging and maturity are portrayed as outlandish. The emphasis of staying young has expanded the intermediate stage of youth in both directions and stripped maturity of its former glory. Unlike in the traditional culture where people aged gracefully and were cherished by society, the quest now is how to stay forever young. The tyrannical culture demands unmediated instant gratification and keeps promising ever new and more exciting moments.⁴¹ If marriage is portrayed as exciting only when it is new and people are pushed to seek novelty and excitement, then lasting marriages are definitely not on the agenda.

Against the background of gross imbalance in cultural propagation, the North/South divide is reinforced. The beaming satellites being almost exclusively owned by the North virtually reduces the South to being a recipient. In this way and

through cheap imports, African culture is rapidly being overtaken by the alien cultures that are repeatedly depicted on television. Irrespective of whether the exporters of these programs intend to promote their culture, the viewers usually end up adopting the cultural models portrayed. This is evident in the day to day living; especially of the youth.

There is no doubt that the marriage institution, a vital aspect of culture, is under siege. How much of this can be attributed to the influx of foreign cultural models promoted via the media is the subject of my investigation which I present in the next chapter.

7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have emphasised on how the marriage institution in the African context has considerably changed in a brief period of time since the formation of urban centres and the emergence of the entertainment media. I have discussed some disappearing and some new practises, and the role of television as an entertainment and educational media in this scenario.

What follows is a deeper research of the phenomenon with intent of coming up with a communication strategy according to the identified problem.

⁴¹Cf. T. H. ERIKSEN, *Tyranny Of The Moment: Fast And Slow Time In The Information Age*, London: Pluto Press 2001, 133

Chapter II

Field Research

1. Introduction

This chapter is divided into two sections. It presents the field research conducted in Nairobi, especially in Karengata area, to assess the influence exerted by TV on young people's understanding of marriage. Media theories are used to clarify the phenomenon.

In the first section, I present the findings of my survey in this area of investigation. I will also make reference to a previous survey in the same area on the effects of media on the alcohol consumption culture among the youth.

The second section consists of an evaluation of the effects of the media on the young people. From the research findings and elucidation from media theories I make the connection between the situation on the ground and television programming. I also discuss the contribution of the latter to the cultural deterioration of the institution of marriage.

2. Research Methods

I used both quantitative and qualitative research methods to compile my research. The qualitative part comprised of interviews⁴² and participant observation. The quantitative method was in form of a survey. Additional information was retrieved from a survey conducted in the same area on a related subject.⁴³

I use the quantitative findings to show the trends and to verify my first hypothesis, that young people are consumers of media, and specifically of television. I will then deepen the findings through participant observations and in-depth interviews, to report the effects that the media messages have on the youth.

3. Sampling Criteria

The sampling criterion used for both surveys was the purposive method. In the previous survey conducted in 2004 to find out the impact of media on alcohol consumption culture among the youth, the researcher handed questionnaire to young people within the age brackets of 18 and 30. The area of research was wide, with Karengata being only one among the eight estates.

My survey also targeted the youth within the same age in institutions of higher learning within the urban set-up. I specifically chose this group due to two major reasons. One is that I am an urban youth and the other one is that young people in higher institutes of learning are also the trendsetters of tomorrow.

The interviews and participant observation were all within Karengata area. The interviews were conducted in two stages, first, with single parents and then, with young unmarried people. I conducted the participant observation only with young people to establish their viewing habits.

⁴² Refer to appendix 2 for the questions.

⁴³ Refer to appendix 1 for the questionnaire.

4. Data Collection

The questionnaires for the survey were both handed out and collected through intermediaries mainly in the institutions of higher learning.

In the previous survey where I referred to, one hundred questionnaires were handed out, eighty three of them were returned and none of them was invalid. In my present survey I handed out one hundred questionnaires and collected eighty seven of them, all of them valid.

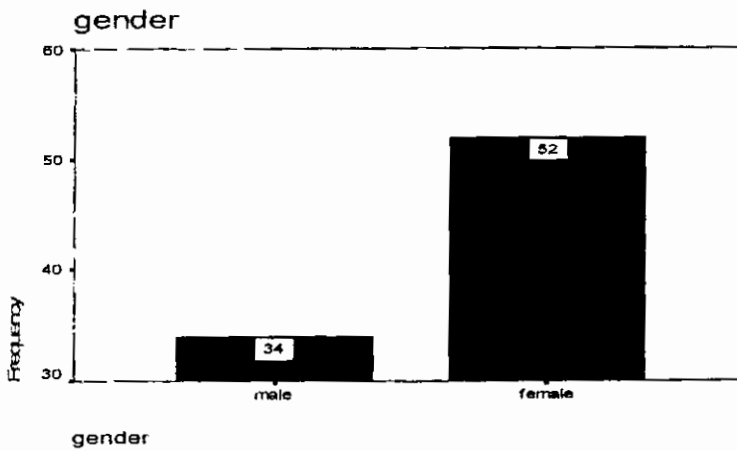
I conducted the interviews and participant observation on the young people that I chose on purposive basis. I interviewed seven young people, four of them female and three of them male. The interview locations were mainly the school, cafeteria and their houses.

I covertly observed five different groups of audiences. Two of the participant observations were with young people in the TV rooms in their hostels. This was mainly in the early evening from five o'clock to nine p.m. Two other ones were with young people living with their families. One was in the evening between six o'clock and ten p.m. and the other on a Sunday afternoon. The last two were with young people living alone both from 7.00 p.m. to 10.00 p.m.

5. Data Analysis

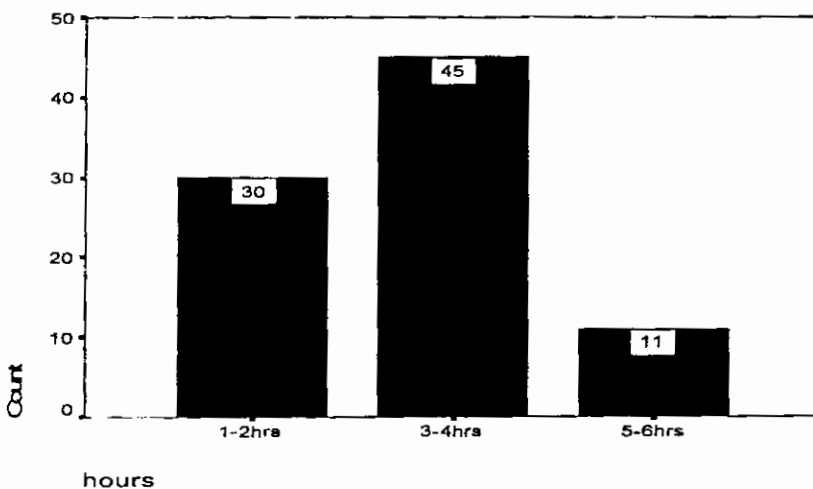
5.1 Demography

The population of the respondents in my survey featured 20% more women than men ranging mainly within the age bracket of 21-28. Almost all of the respondents are Christians (98%) and most of them, up to 80% have tertiary education level.

Graph 1

5.2 Exposure

Up to 98% of the respondents had access to television with more than 80% admitting to watching it for more than three hours a day. The consumption pattern (Table 2) especially verifies my first hypothesis that young people are highly exposed to the television medium. With more than half of them watching for more than three hours a day, that adds up to more than 21 hours in a week (almost a whole day) and more than 84 hours a month!

Graph 2

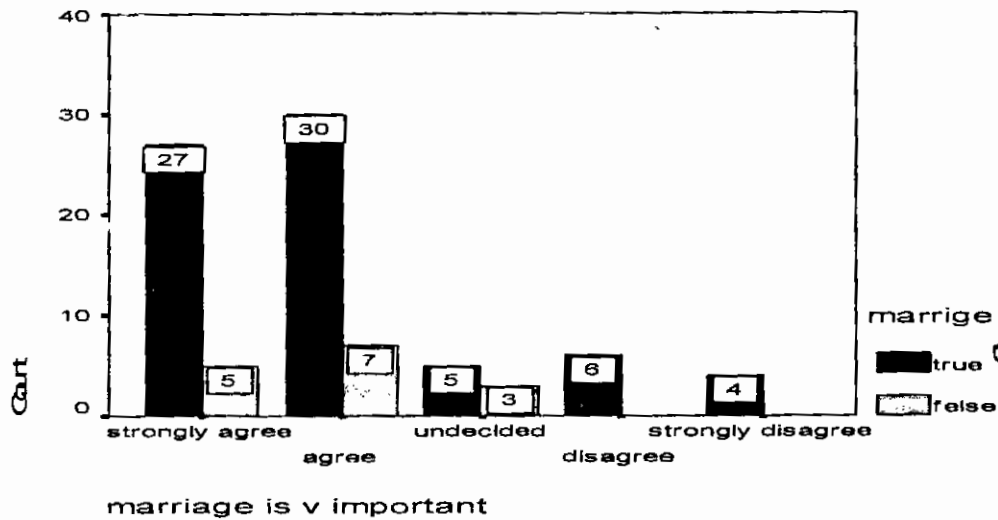
5.3 Media Influence

According to the survey conducted in 2004, the media affects alcohol consumption among the youth; there is a correlation between the advertised alcohol brands and the brands favoured by the youth. More than 70% of them consume brands that are mostly advertised. Tusker and Pilsner were not only the most consumed brands but were also identified as having the best advertisements. At least 51% of the youth identified television as the most influential media in comparison to radio and billboards. These findings support my hypothesis that young people are influenced by television.

The cultivation theory states that over time, we begin to internalise what we are exposed to. People who watch too many television programs end up with a similar perception about the world as the one portrayed on TV screen. The more young people are exposed to the adverts the more motivated they are to have similar lifestyles.

5.4 Importance of Marriage in Society

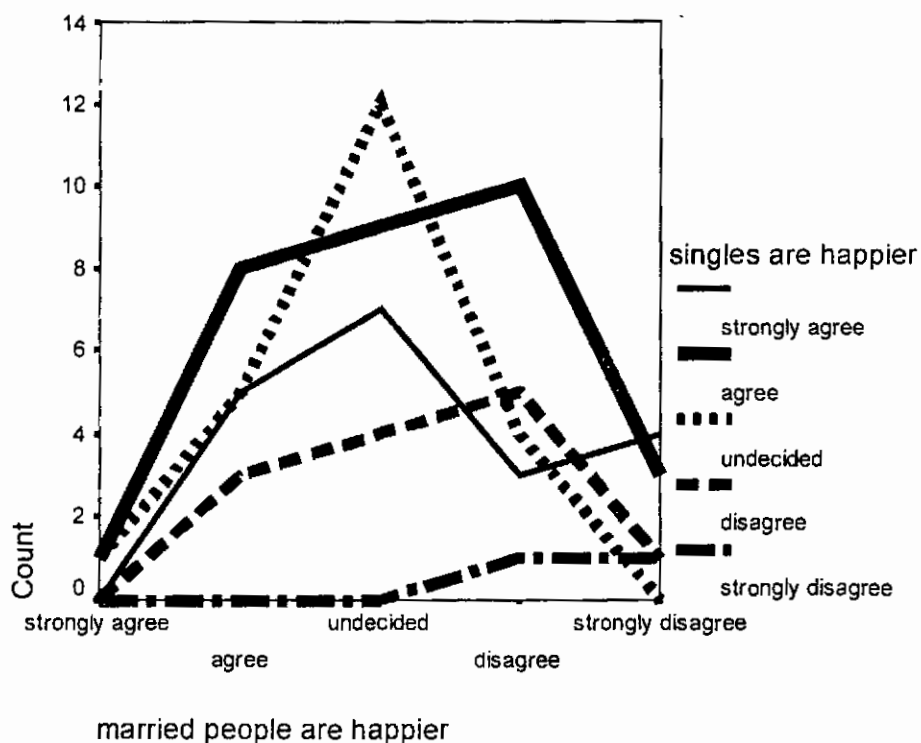
Up to 80% of the respondents agreed that marriage is still very important in society. Still among them, up to 81% felt that marriage is severely compromised and losing out in the modern society. This shows that the changes occurring are fairly recent so that the present generation are caught up between two cultures.

Graph 3

5.5 Portrayal of Marriage

More than 70% agreed that dating should precede marriage but less than 30% thought that married people are happier. This is quite in line with the glamorous portrayal of dating by television programs.

Single people were viewed as being happier by 57% of respondents while only 26% felt the same about married people. A high number of respondents 37% were undecided whether or not married people were happier. This shows that young people are getting mainly negative impressions about marriage. As the major agent of socialisation, television is evidently contributing to this perception. It also confirms my second hypothesis that television portrays marriage trivially.

Graph 4

On whether married people are happier than single people or vice-versa, most young people were undecided. However the graph shows that those who plainly agreed and those who agreed strongly that singles are happier as the next biggest group. In the married people are happier categories, most responses lean more on the negative side.

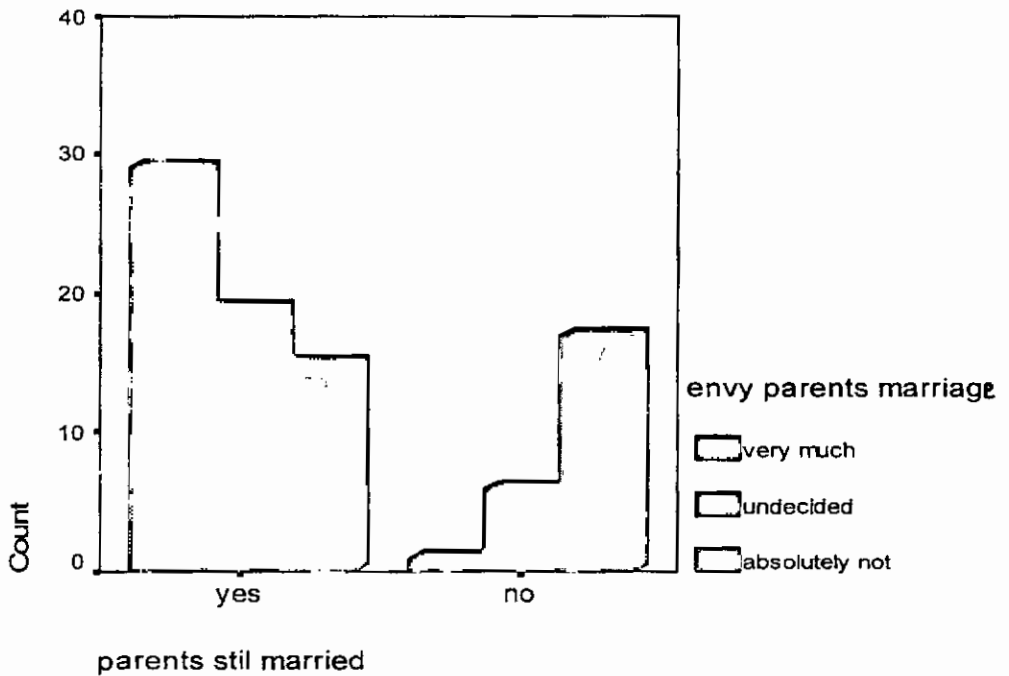
5.6 Marriage Values in Relation to Family Background

Television influence also depends on resonance. In the confirming theory, the media are said to be powerful in confirming what people suspect to be true. Acceptance of television messages is determined by the context within which the message is consumed. The more congruent it is with the lived world of the viewer, the more impact it makes in terms of acceptability.⁴⁴ Young people who have

⁴⁴ Cf. J. SHANAHAN – M. MORGAN, *Television and Its Viewers: Cultivation Theory and Research*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999, 66.

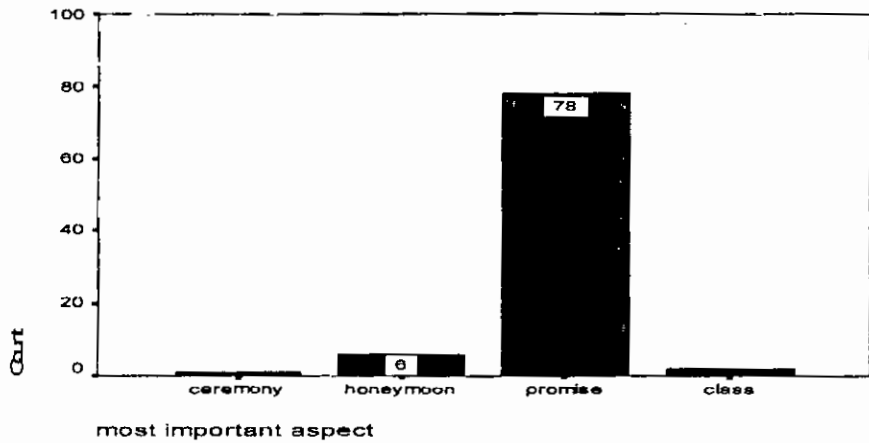
experienced dysfunctional marriages were much more likely to believe the portrayal of living-single as being the ideal lifestyle and marriage being nothing but trouble.

Graph 5



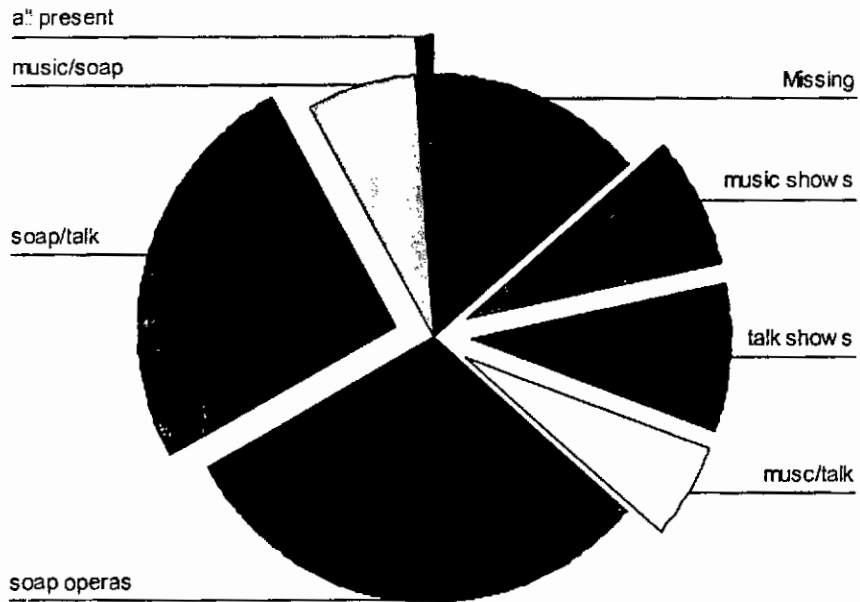
More than 70% of the respondents came from families where both parents are married. Out of the 63 respondents who came from functional families, less than half of them envied their parents' marriage. However the majority of those who came from dysfunctional families clearly had nothing to envy. This is in support of the confirming theory, where the media cements what people suspect to be true.

In spite of television, the promise was greatly favoured as the most important aspect of marriage (Graph 6). Man is above all a social being and cannot overcome the need to be meaningfully connected with others.

Graph 6

5.7 Favourite programs

I noticed three recurring categories of TV programs which I put into different combinations for computation purposes. These were soap operas, music shows and talk shows. Apart from them being separate categories, I combined people who watch both soap operas and music shows, soap operas and talk shows, music shows and talk shows and all three. Soap operas were the single most favourite category at 28% followed by talk shows at 9% then music shows at 8%. In the combined categories, those who watched both soap operas and talk shows were the majority at 24%, followed by those who watched music shows and soap operas at 7% and lastly those who watched both music and talk shows at 5%.

Graph 7

5.8 Equality

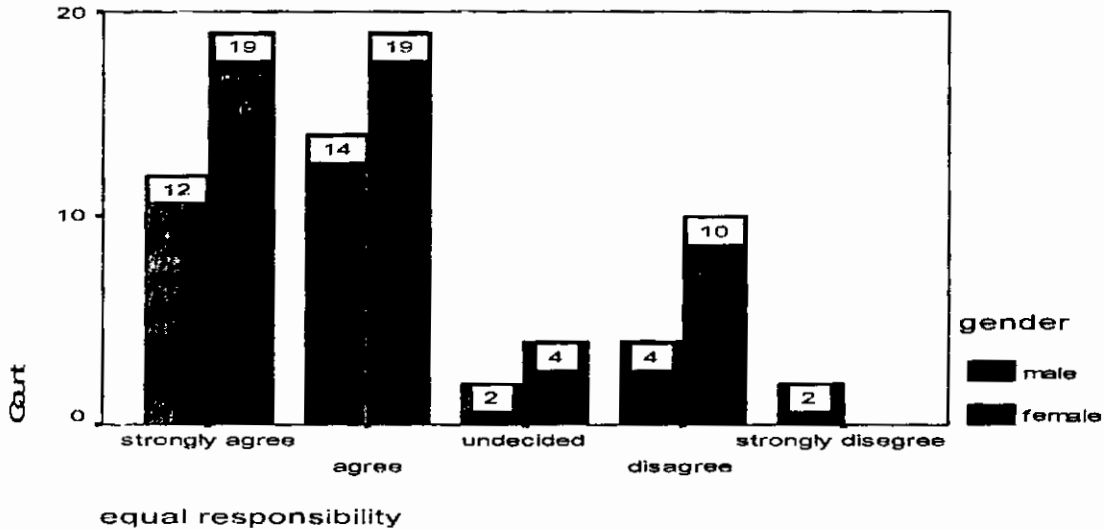
In reflection of content of the TV shows, the question of equal responsibility of the spouses was also widely supported by up to 70% (N.B female respondents were the majority). This is one of the positive results I mentioned earlier.

The results showed that the young peoples' views on marriage are as varied as their background but nevertheless they do have several broad points in common. On the overall, men seemed to be more positive than women about the past and present forms of marriage. Most young ladies echoed Anna's⁴⁵ (an interviewee) sentiments and expressed dissatisfaction with the heavy demands placed on the African women as wives. However, some of them are comfortable with the situation

⁴⁵ Not her real name

while others are still unsure. This shows that culture is really in transition, provoking both positive and negative reactions.

Graph 8



6. The Needs of the Audience

From the findings above, I can firmly assert that the young people are not only heavy consumers of television but are also attracted to certain programs. According to the 'users and gratification theory', people go to the media to satisfy their needs. Blumler and McQuail classify these needs as diversion, personal relationships, personal identity and surveillance.⁴⁶

The news was rated top in the program line up by most respondents (I did not include it because it was not relevant in this discussion). The people have a need to know what is happening in their society, and the media has a surveillance function. They also want to learn how things work in the society, that is, the social processes and where to attach values. People also refer to media in search of distractions from routine and to be entertained. Young people also use the media to

fulfil their social needs. They want to have something in common to talk about and to identify themselves with people in the media.⁴⁷

6.1 Television Programs as Agents of Alienation

Using the media as a source of information only becomes problematic when the need of the user and the purpose of the information available differ. Soap operas are tailored more for the purpose of distraction and entertainment. They offer stories with storylines which, at best, can be said to be firmly planted in the air. They are only handy for those people who watch for distraction purposes. This, unfortunately, is where many young people turn for information about relationships, marriage and other important issues.

The preference by young people for talk and music shows is also in line with McQuail's⁴⁸ four principles according to the uses and gratification theory. Through talk shows they learn about how other people (especially the famous ones) cope with different situations. However, the inadequate congruence between the lifestyle of the average Kenyan youth and the people in the talk shows make them even less meaningful. The young people seek entertainment mainly from the music shows and situation comedies (sitcoms). Nonetheless, a number of them try to emulate what is portrayed by the pop idols they adore.

6.2 Symptoms of Alienation

To argue that there is no emotional or intellectual change from the media exposure is tantamount to arguing that a soldier, at any moment untouched by

⁴⁶ Cf. J. WATSON, *Media Communication: An Introduction to Media Theory and Process*: London, McMillan Publishers 1998, 63.

⁴⁷ Cf. D. MCQUAIL, *Audience Analysis*, London, Sage Publications 1997, 71.

⁴⁸ Cf. D. MCQUAIL, *Audience Analysis*, London, Sage Publications 1997, 72.

bullets in the battlefield, is emotionally and intellectually untouched by the experience.⁴⁹

In this regard, young people are soldiers in the frontline of cultural change. There is a palpable disdain among some young people for their culture. For some, it is so strong that they look down on their mother tongue and converse only in English. Some of them live with the vision of going to the glamorised West as their biggest dream.

With regard to marriage, the young people see the marriage set-ups in their own families based on the heavy patriarchal system as old-fashioned. They also see the frequent break-ups between young couples in their midst and the shallow but glamorous excerpts on television. They are lost in the conflicting concepts and instead of finding means to reconcile the two; they choose the "easier" Hollywood option.

7. Conclusion

From the research findings, the institution of marriage is indeed going through a very rough patch. The media and in this particular case, television has a role to play in this. Using media theories, its influence on young people has been established. The challenge is how to use it to reassert our cultures and the important institutions within them.

From observation and interaction with my peers, I noticed that one of the latest caprices among young people is the urge to know what is happening in the lives of people who are to them larger than life. The popularity of talk shows in my research has validated this observation. The talk shows' characters range from

⁴⁹ Cf. T. H. ERIKSEN, *Tyranny Of The Moment: Fast And Slow Time In The Information Age*, London: Pluto Press 2001, 188.

celebrities in both the local and foreign entertainment sector to other notable figures in the public domain.

Most of the respondents concurred that marriage is losing out in society and in an open ended question suggested that the media should try to undo the damage already inflicted. Media has the capacity to influence and reverse the trend floundering value attached to marriage as an institution in society.

Chapter 3

Television Talks and the “Reality” of Marriage

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have proposed to use a talk show to combat what I refer to as a simplistic approach to marriage. In this chapter, I elaborate on the application of my project. I discuss the format of the show which I name ‘Ups and Downs’ and enunciate the specific considerations that I make in the implementation.

The fact that media operates on the public airwaves means that it has social responsibilities to live up to. As it is now, the media is a private institution operating in the public sphere. The liberalization of airwaves has seen the media being run like any other profit seeking organization irrespective of their social responsibility. The media’s power is a Janus faced, just as Pope John Paul II pointed out; the media are just tools which can be used both positively and negatively⁵⁰.

If it has effectively brought negative influences in society then it has also the same capacity to bring benefits. The media need not be just an agent of cultural erosion in the area of morals in today’s society. It can be used as an agent of cultural dispersion whereby different cultures meet and interchange ideas.

⁵⁰ *Communio et progressio*

2. The Kenyan Context

The Kenyan media (television in particular) has not escaped the domination from the West. Despite a feeble attempt towards increasing local production, the bulk of the television content is still imported. Foreign programs translate to foreign ideas. Whereas over the centuries cultures have been enriched by contact with other cultures, there is a difference between cultural exchange and cultural domination.

A society is held together by shared values and norms. In African traditional society individuals underwent five rites of passage. These were birth, initiation, marriage, elder hood and death. Through the media the importance of these practices is being diminished either deliberately or indeliberately.

The challenge for Kenya and Africa as a whole is to find a means to put their cultural schema in the limelight. It is an expensive endeavour which becomes even more costly as time goes by. As the Swahili adage goes “mkosa mila ni mtumwa” — he who has no culture is a slave, if nothing is done to entrench our values then we will have lost the true meaning of the word civilisation. In life, values provide anchors without which people would drift aimlessly in the sea of life. Losing an entire generation to this aimlessness is more expensive than all the gold in the world.

3. Towards Cultural Integration

The media has been termed as the modern day Trojan horse. Through television, foreign cultures have sneaked into the local contexts and will soon take over.⁵¹ Traditional cultures are modified to become similar to modern cultures, in what is referred to as synchronization of cultures. Through television, young people in particular are exposed to what they consider the more progressive and modern

⁵¹ Cf. B. R. BARBER, *Jihad Vs McWorld Terrorisms Challenge To Democracy*, New York: Random Publishing Group 1995, 70.

culture. There is a heavy imbalance in the flow of information between the Northern and Southern hemisphere.

Equality among the genders is a fairly new concept in the African culture. However, as the numbers show, it seems to be picking up fast and especially among the urban folk. (As mentioned before, this is a positive side of intermingling of cultures).

Media practitioners and scholars in the Developing countries after having identified this trend have reacted in various ways. Some see it as inevitable and are content to ride the prevailing wave and make the proverbial quick buck, while others have tried to counter it by making low budget productions. Unfortunately the scripts are so highly Westernised that, by and large, they remain foreign in the most fundamental aspect — the content.

4. Cultural Re-assertion

The theory of cultural imperialism argues that cultural values can be invalidated through media to some extent supporting the hypodermic needle effect. In other words, it states that foreign values and cultures are injected into the heads and minds of the inhabitants of developing countries through the media.⁵² Stated this way it appears exaggerated and calls for denial, but all it takes is for one to look around at the young people and what they consider “cool”⁵³. If this is true, then I take it that the reverse is also true and that the same media can be used to reverse this trend and validate the positive aspects of our cultures.

⁵² Cf. J. CURRAN – M. GUREVITCH, ed., *Mass Media and Society*, London: Arnold Publications 1996, 190.

⁵³ Fashionable

Fashion, even when embracing the Afro style, is dictated by the Western ideas. The most popular movies and programs in the developing countries are usually from the West, even when they deal with local content. This does not have to be so. With more determination and creativity, we as the local media practitioners can influence both our youth and the youth elsewhere.

In the recent past, Kenya has experienced some cultural re-awakening especially in the music scene. The up-coming artists even when adopting Western styles in producing their music are already making big steps. Giving them more air-time in the media and encouraging them in other ways, like organising festivals, definitely put a much needed shine on the tarnished Kenyan spirit. Having these local celebrities as guests in the talk show is just one way of doing it.

5. Ethical Considerations

5.1 Moral Aspect

The media is one field where ethical relativism is fast becoming the standard. The prevailing attitude is that, if the majority decides something is ethical, it is ethical.⁵⁴ This is the view largely promoted by the media as explained by the spiral of silence theory. The media introduced into the mainstream the concept of gay marriage. In Kenya, it was unheard of but now it is portrayed as if it were just another upcoming lifestyle. People who oppose it feel like their view is the minority and either join the perceived majority or keep their misgivings to themselves.

⁵⁴ CF. L. A. DAY, *Ethics in Media Communications: Cases And Controversies*, Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company 1991, 52.

In this way, an altogether warped lifestyle creeps in and dilutes a society's morals. In this situation, media managers are not completely helpless. If what we get from the media depends on somebody's choice, then there is a chance that the person could have chosen differently, despite ominous financial considerations.

5.2 For Media Managers

Whereas competition and economic factors have an important role to play in media management, some basic ethical standards need to be adhered to in their operations. The most obvious ways of dealing with the problem are radical. We as the media fraternity can shake our heads regretfully and turn a blind eye to the role the media is playing in the erosion of values in the society. We can also go to the other extreme and ban all television imports from the West. The first option is unacceptable while the second one is unrealistic considering that we live in a globalised world where it is no longer possible to control what people access.

In this stalemate a middle ground has to be sought. Aristotle's golden mean states that moral virtue lies at an appropriate point between two extremes, in this case between doing nothing and overreacting. The middle ground in this case would be to air a program that would be both appealing to the young people and impart valuable knowledge about the reality of marriage. While offering diversion and amusement, relaxation as well as respite, mass entertainment can also be functional and beneficial to society.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ CF. L. A. DAY, *Ethics in Media Communications: Cases And Controversies*, Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company 1991, 327.

Kenya barely has the facilities for movie production and is nowhere close to Hollywood standards. For this reason, not many young people are captivated by local productions which compare poorly both in script and technical productions to the cheap imports.

6. Special Considerations for Television

Television that sometimes has been referred to as a "vast wasteland"⁵⁶ is primarily an entertainment medium. As an artistic medium it tells us a great deal about our individual character and the kind of society we really are.⁵⁷ Unfortunately due to factors like corporatisation and concentration of ownership among others, the responsibility to provide beneficial programming is undermined.

In corporations, the management is more concerned with the profit margins. In their money language, content and effects are non-issues. If the imports are cheaper, nothing else seems to matter. Concentration of ownership means that programs will be distributed globally even to places where they have no meaning.

Catering for the diversion seekers and imparting knowledge at the risk of losing audience have been cited as mutually exclusive alternatives. Herein lays the dilemma for the television producers. In this delicate balance, too often are the scales tipped in favour of the balance sheet. However, this should not be automatically so, audiences are attracted by good stories.

⁵⁶ N. MINNOW, Chairman of the Federal Commission in a public address in 1961, in L.A. DAY, *Ethics in Media Communications: Cases And Controversies*, Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company 1991.

⁵⁷ Cf. L.A. DAY, *Ethics in Media Communications: Cases And Controversies*, Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company 1991, 324.

If drama is based on real life and good scripts are judged by their overall believability, then real life experiences are more interesting than any script. Programs do not have to be surreal or simplistic to be interesting. The popularity of the Oprah Winfrey show and increase in reality-television shows provide a proof that people are very interested in real life experiences.

7. Harnessing Media Power

7.1 Focussing

All the effort devoted to media research is a clear indication that the media is powerful. Its power, above all, stems from the ability to focus people's attention on some issues and not others. It may not be able to tell us what to think, but its ability to tell us what to think about is power enough. The media also influences us to see and interpret events according to its frames. It can make us perceive a glass either as half-full or as half-empty, depending on the stance it wants to adopt.

The media have a big part to play in shifting the opinion and beliefs of people towards a mainstream convergence. Different societies had their own unique concept of marriage and the procedures involved. Nowadays, the Hollywood version, as the most exposed model, is rapidly gaining dominance across the board. According to the amplification theory, what the media portrays gains importance in our thought process and vice versa. Frequent portrayal of divorce as a viable and convenient solution in television dramas says something to the viewers⁵⁸.

With this conviction in mind, to use the metaphor of the half empty/full glass, I propose to use the media to show both levels of the glass albeit with special

⁵⁸ Cf. P. J. ROSSI – P.A. SOUKUP, ed., *Mass Media and the Moral Imagination. Communication Culture and Theology*, London: Sheed and Ward 1994, 218.

emphasis on the fullness. I think that there are enough programs that dwell on the half emptiness of the marriage glass.

7.2 Repetition

The media also derives its power from repetition. The more a message is repeated, the more believable it becomes. The more we see something, the more we get used to it. In this way, practices that appear to be strange, when viewed on the television frequently enough, end up appearing normal. In the past the “living single” model was unheard of, but with frequent television depiction it became normal and acceptable.

What young people need is positive cultivation. They need the assurance that it is fashionable, not just to get married, but also to make it work. Just as frequent portrayal familiarized them with negative foreign models, so too can frequent portrayal of positive and realistic models reconnect them to a more positive reality.

7.3 Quality

High quality output is also a strong incentive to win over audiences. The bigger the audience the more effective the media becomes in shaping values. Television shows which have been professionally done attract more people than poor productions. Given the high cost required to make quality productions in form of soap operas and sitcoms, I think a talk show will be a fair compromise, for in this case the quality is much less related to the cost. The major costs are predictably constant while the success is determined by the creativity of the animator.

8. The Proposed Program Format: Talk Show

A talk show would be perfect opportunity to both satisfy the youth’s interest in celebrities and teach them concrete life lessons. In the talk show format, the

debilitations of undeveloped production facilities would be overcome while at the same time different segments of the youth captivated. Those who like music shows or soap operas will want to know what their heroes are really up to.

The show "Ups and Downs" will be aired every Thursday from 8.00 to 8.45pm on the Kenya Television Network (KTN). The magic bullet theory, on which advertising is partly based, affirms that people's thoughts and actions can be easily influenced by the media. This is especially powerful when the message is repeated frequently. The talk show will discuss exclusively the topic of marriage and will be aired regularly. It will have a total of 30 episodes running from the second week of January to the last week of November.

The show will be hosted by a middle aged woman with a panel of two couples and a marriage counsellor. The guests will consist of personalities who are usually in the limelight ranging from the all-popular entertainment sector to the political arena. The show will also include a live studio audience of young people who will be allowed to ask questions. Participation will further be fostered by inviting viewers to send in questions in advance via e-mail and short text messages which they would like to be answered by the couple in question.

8.1 The Active Audience

In the active audience theory, it is stated that the audience has the liberty to bring their own interpretation into the text. Depending on the level of their engagement, the audience can interpret media messages in a polysemic way; that is hegemonically, in a negotiated way, or oppositionally. This means that they have the possibility to conform to the frames presented to them (believe everything), accept

these frames critically (believe partially) or reject the proffered frames and come up with completely different meanings.⁵⁹

However, there is a contention concerning the ability of audiences to apply this freedom. The audience's interpretation rarely goes beyond the parameters set for the interpretation of the programs. The dominant ideas placed by the producers of the text almost always prevail.⁶⁰ Even though rocky marriages will feature in the show, the message will stress on the desirability and achievability of harmony as the key message.

The talk show will dwell on issues related to relationships and marriage. The aim of the show is to balance out the scales. In the real world dating and marriage are not necessarily tragic. The dominant duality of either the fairy tale endings or the divorce as usually portrayed is unrealistic. In the show, both triumphs and difficulties that successful unions have overcome will be explored.

The program aims to emphasise that love is a verb. Relationships and marriages will work, if people make conscious efforts to make them last. The fantasy that love just happens will be seen just as it is -- a fantasy.

8.2 *Synopsis*

The show will commence with the walking in of the hostess as the audience claps. The guest will already be on set when the lights come on. The hostess will introduce the guests, give some background information on each and then commence the show. Prior investigation will be done to furnish her with information on the interviewees so as to make the program interesting. To break the monotony of

⁵⁹ Cf. C. MCCULLAGH, *Media Power: A Sociological Introduction*: New York, Palgrave Publishers 2002, 159.

⁶⁰ Cf. M.R. REAL, *Exploring Media Culture: A Guide*, London: Sage Publications 1996, 107.

talking heads, video excerpts from the wedding (where available) and family setting will also be shown.

In the show a couple will be invited to share their experiences of life together. They will also discuss the challenges they faced individually as well as some memorable high and low moments. The audience will be invited to ask them questions and then the counsellor will give comments. The guests will then be given a chance to give their final words. The presenter will always wrap up the show by showing what has been the lesson of the day and giving the names of the next guests to build up the audience's anticipation.

The utopian portrayals of marriage or of marriages that start with a bang and almost always fizzle out or are constantly riddled with unfaithfulness tell young people that this is what should happen. In my talk show, I propose to show the two sides of the coin and from different angles. The guests will be from all walks of life and highlight what it is that makes or breaks the marriage. Having the program aired regularly will bring a new topic into the young people's discussion.

8.3 Important Considerations

8.3.1 The Name

The name is functional both manifestly and latently. On the manifest level, the denotation "ups and downs" openly suggests a roughness or not smoothness. In this way the viewers are psychologically prepared to meet both the beautiful and the ugly.

If the multinationals, such as the Coca Cola Company, have successfully popularised a meaningless word to mean something by harnessing the power of repetition, then promoting the idea of a realistic marriage under a meaningful name

is even more possible. For example the Fanta slogan is now “Bamboocha” which means having fun. The slogan is repeated and multiplied in all media outlets so that it resonates in the back of the mind of anyone who comes into contact with it.

8.3.2 *The Time*

I considered Thursday a suitable choice for several reasons. First of all, I would like the show to be in the prime time before the 9.00 pm news. I would have preferred to have it on the weekend when people are in relaxing mood but this time seems to be reserved for soap operas. I cancelled out Friday because a considerable number of young people go out.

According to the inheritance audience-flow theory, a considerable number of viewers of a given program stay on to watch the next program⁶¹. The early evening news at 7.00 is popular and captures a large audience who stay on. The timing of the talk show is meant to net this audience. The program will end fifteen minutes to time in order to give space to any discussions provoked by the program before the next big attraction begins.

8.3.3 *The Channel*

There are three main channels in which to choose from. The national service, Kenya Broadcasting Corporation is considered old-fashioned by the youth. KTN and NTV are favourite channels among the youth with KTN coming out as the more favoured for airing the “latest shows”. All my respondents watched at least one show from the KTN channel.

⁶¹ Cf. D. MCQUAIL, *Audience Analysis*, California: Sage Publications 1997, 82.

8.3.4 *The Presenter*

Female presenters are more emotive and are also better at cultivating dialogue. The age factor is very important here for if she is too old, young people will not identify with her or she with them. On the other hand, if she is too young, she will lack the moral authority to question or advice others. For this reason, the ideal age would be between the late twenties to early thirties.

8.3.5 *Other Panellists*

a. The Marriage Counsellor

In this show, counsellors represent the voice of sobriety. Special consideration will be taken to balance the genders in this area. The counsellor will usually speak last after listening to the proceedings and in reply to the questions arising. He or she will comment on the relationship and give advice where it is needed.

b. The Guests

The guest will be people who are in a marital relationship or in a relationship geared towards it, or have been in such a relationship. In presenting individuals who have been in relationships, the show will only feature those who can identify what went wrong and still portray a positive attitude.

c. The Setting

The show will be made in a large studio room. The audience will be seated in a theatre position. The panellists will be seated in a semicircular podium. The hostess will have a seat at the central position between the guests and the counsellor.

The seats will be easy and reclining to give a relaxed mood both to the set and the guests. The colours used will be bright but in the softer hues to bring out a cheerful air without being overbearing.

8.4 Possible Constraints

8.4.1 The Presenter

In making plans and projections, there is always the possibility that obstacles will crop up. My show is heavily pegged on getting a presenter with the right personality. The personality of the presenter could make or break the show. Shows built around the personality of an individual suffer major set-backs in the event the individual is indisposed. Getting the right candidate in the first place is difficult enough without having to look for a fall back candidate.

There is also a danger that the content will lean too much on one side and lose the purpose. If the presentation is too formal, the young people will not be hooked. On the other hand if it is too much on the entertainment side, message will be lost. It is again up to the presenter to strike the balance between the two elements.

8.4.2 The Language

Since the program will be aired in English, some people will be alienated both as guests and audience. There are celebrities who cannot speak English, if the host switches to Swahili to accommodate them, part of the audience will be lost. Bringing in translators is out of question because they will elongate the show and do an injustice to the invaluable emotive part of the message.

9. Conclusion

In this chapter, I urge media practitioners to seek inspiration from within and also nurture local talent. I have elaborated my proposal, a talk show and discussed the special consideration taken to arrive to the proposal and what I hope to achieve.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have sought to establish that marriage is an important institute in society. As well as in its manifestation, its importance has been portrayed by the sanctions surrounding it in all cultures from time immemorial. Over time deep changes have occurred due to various reasons. I set out to identify the position of marriage in contemporary society and the circumstances that have led to the present condition where marriage is valued at a superficial level.

To understand the present, we have to understand the past. The first chapter went back and provided some background information on the understanding of marriage from the past to the present. In so doing, the process aspect of the traditional understanding was discussed in contrast to the present practices. The role of media as an agent of change was introduced and analysed.

Culture has and will always change. It is in this breadth that change is mentioned both in its positive and negative light. The role of the media in bringing about change has been discussed from the wider perspective of culture to the narrower sphere of individual behaviour and choices.

The second chapter tested the hypotheses and provided explanations grounded on existing media theories. It proved the hypotheses that young people are both consumers of the media and are also influenced by the content. The findings showed that there is a correlation between their viewing patterns, favourite

programs, and their beliefs and practices. The chapter showed that the media does not just influence the youth but it is also specifically responsible for their negative perception on marriage. Using the cultivation theory and other theories, the relation between viewing habits and beliefs was investigated. The contribution of the media as an influencing factor was established.

However the audiences as being active media users was not overlooked. In various ways they are never at the mercy of the media and their participation was acknowledged and expounded using the active audience theories. The uses and gratifications theory specifically sought to clarify why the young people watch certain programs. It is from the fact that they seek entertainment, information and identification from the media that it was possible to come up with a solution. The solution that best caters for these needs in this context came in the form of a well tailored talk show.

From the second chapter, the third chapter was premised on the belief that the media is very influential. From this standpoint, in discussing about the solution, it was argued that the media has the same potential for good as for evil. The sources of the media's power were elaborated and a proposal on how to harness it to reverse the situation launched. The talk show proposed is meant to portray marriage with the honour it deserves and put marital life in perspective, contrary to the familiar shallow portrayal.

The special considerations made in order to come up with the application and the how it will be implemented were discussed. The work ends with a short discussion of the major shortcomings of the application.

The scripts and tentative budget have been included in the appendix.

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APPENDIX 1: SURVEY QUESTIONS

TANGAZA COLLEGE — THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF E.A.

THESIS

A QUESTIONNAIRE TO FIND OUT HOW TELEVISION PROGRAMS AFFECT THE CONCEPT OF MARRIAGE AMONG THE YOUNG PEOPLE

(PLEASE ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS ACCORDING TO THE INSTRUCTIONS)

1. Do you have access to television?

Yes No

If yes:

2. How many hours per day do you spend watching television?

1 – 2 hrs 3 – 4 hrs 5 – 6 hrs 7 – 8 hrs

3. You watch television

Alone with friends with family Other (specify)

4. List 5 of your favorite programs on TV

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

TICK ONE RESPONSE

5. Marriage is very important in the society

- Strongly agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly disagree

6. Dating should precede marriage

- Strongly agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly disagree

7. Married people are happier

- Strongly agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly disagree

8. Single people can take life easier

- Strongly agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly disagree

9. In marriage both partners should have equal responsibilities:

- Strongly agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly disagree

USING NUMBERS 1-5 WRITE NUMBERS IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE
(LEAST IMPORTANT-1, MOST IMPORTANT-5)

10. Marriage is about:

- Companionship Love Understanding Sexual fulfillment
 Procreation

TICK ONE RESPONSE

12. The most important thing about marriage is:

- The ceremony The honeymoon The promise The class

13. The ideal number of children in a family is

- 1-2 3-4 5-6 more than 7

14. The ideal age to get married is

20. Your Gender: Male Female

21. Your Age: 17 - 20 21 - 24 25 - 28 Above
29

22. Education level (tick the highest attained)

Primary Secondary University Postgraduate

23. Religion

Christian Muslim Other (please specify) _____

APPENDIX 2: LIST OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

With single parents

1. Are you satisfied in your present status? Why?
2. With your experience what do you think of marriage?
3. Would you recommend it to your children?
4. Do you discuss the topic with them at all?
5. Do you think your status will influence them in the choices they make in future?

With the youth

1. Do you think marriage is important in society?
2. Do you look forward to getting married? Why?
3. Do you envy your parent's marriage? Why?
4. Do you discuss issues on marriage with your parents?
5. What are your favourite programs?
6. Do you identify or envy the lifestyle portrayed?
7. Why do you think there are so many single parent families?

APPENDIX 3: TALK SHOW SCRIPT

Time	video	Audio
00.00.00 - 00.00.10	Hostess walks in the set	Clapping
00.00.10 - 00.07.10	Introduction to the show and the guests. The guests today are; Nameless and Wahu- local music celebrities	Introductory words
00.07.10 - 00.22.10	Part 1 The hostess engages the guests on their life. The emphasis is on the challenges and how they get over them.	
00.22.10 - 00.25.00	Commercial break	
00.25.00 - 00.35.00	Part 2 The talk continues: audience ask questions.	
0.35.00 - 00.43.00	The guests reply to the questions. The counsellor gives comments and answers questions from the audience. The guests say their parting words	
00.43 - 00.45.00	Wrap up by the hostess	

APPENDIX 4: TENTATIVE BUDGET

Format: Digital Recording and Editing for one session

One session comprises of four episodes

Personnel		
Hostess		60,000
Director		35,000
Producer		40,000
Camera persons	3×3,000	30,000
Lighting		10,000
Sound manager		10,000
Editor		40,000
	Sub-Total	195,000
Studio audience	30×300	27,000
Studio facilities		150,000
Camera and lights		200,000
	Sub-Total	377,000
Contingencies		100,000
Miscellaneous		50,000
	Sub-Total	150,000
	Grand total	572,000
Number of episodes		× 4
		2,288,000

The show will be divided into three sessions of three months each.

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