



# METHOD

## CHAPTER 2

### METHOD

This chapter presents the objectives central to understanding the phenomenon of romantic relationships in a specific cultural milieu and explicates the procedures for collecting and analyzing the data.

The chapter is organized under the following sections:

1. Key terms
2. Objectives
  - a. Broad objectives
  - b. Specific objective
3. Research design
  - a. Phase 1 and phase 2 of the study
  - b. Sample and sampling techniques
  - c. Tools for data collection
  - d. Procedure for data collection
4. Plan of analysis
  - a. Qualitative analysis
  - b. Validity and reliability issues
  - c. Quantitative analysis
  - d. Modes of data display

## Key Terms

- *Romantic relationship*: a mutual and special bond between an opposite-sex couple which is not formalized by law or public ceremonies. The relationship is special because the other person is called a lover, a boyfriend/girlfriend or a significant other and is different from other opposite-sex friendships/relationships.
- *Developmental outcomes*: are discussed in terms of
  - Endpoints: For example, finding a suitable mate or spouse
  - Competencies: For example, management of negative emotions
  - Implications: Leading to positive states such as positive feelings of joy, relaxation, satisfaction and security as perceived by the subjects for themselves (subjective or perceived happiness) or negative states of insecurity, loss of freedom and such.
- *Emerging adults*: College going individuals in the age range of 18-25 plus years belonging to middle or upper middle socio-economic class.

## Objectives

### Broad objectives.

- Know the romantic experiences and beliefs of emerging adults in the Indian context.
- Determine the contextual factors that shape romantic perceptions, beliefs and attitudes of emerging adults in the Indian context.

- Describe the nature of these relationships and the impact on developmental outcomes of emerging adults in the Indian context.

#### **Specific objectives.**

- Study the concept of romantic relationship and its connection to marriage among the emerging adults and middle adults in an Indian society.
- Know parental and societal attitude towards romantic relationships and its effects on romantic perceptions, beliefs and attitudes of emerging adults in an Indian context.
- Examine the generation and gender differences in the perceptions, beliefs and attitudes.
- Study the impact of quality of romantic relationship on perceived happiness.
- Study the gender differences in the way relationship quality affects happiness.

#### **Research Design**

The study used mixed methods. It adopted a qualitative approach called phenomenography and also used quantitative measures such as a rating scale to assess the quality of relationship and happiness to supplement the qualitative data. This is a phenomenographical study with interpretative perspectives. It is a phenomenography because it discerns patterns in conceptualization of the phenomena. A phenomenon is an “item of experience or reality” and phenomenography is the description of these experiences. Phenomenographers study how people explain to themselves and others what goes on around them and how these explanations or conceptualizations change (Tesch, 1990). The approach is interpretative because it seeks to postulate conceptual

linkages and find underlying principles which may be generally applicable to similar situations. In this sense, it is more theory oriented than other ethnographic approaches.

Understanding romantic relationship experiences in a given context requires that it be understood from the viewpoints of individuals who are influenced by and influencing the given context. The present study contributes to the understanding of cultural memes about love, intimacy, relationships and therefore, social life. It unravels the experienced realities of the participants.

#### **Phase 1 and phase 2 of the study.**

The study was divided into two phases. The first phase focused on a cross-section of the society for discovering their views about the phenomena. The cross-section included emerging adults (EA) and middle adults (MA) who had children in the phase of emerging adulthood. The second phase focused on the experiences and pairing processes entailed in romantic relationships, as described by emerging adults, who were involved in a romantic relationship for at least a minimum period of six months at the time of data collection. The following section addresses aspects pertaining to the participants of the study.

#### **Sample and sampling technique.**

##### *Sample.*

- The participants of the study included college going emerging adults in the age range of 18-25 plus years, who were
  - either currently engaged in romantic relationships, or

- not currently involved.
- Middle adults in their 50-60 plus years, having children in the age range of 18-25 plus years.

Table 3 presents the rationale for selecting the sample.

*Rationale for sample.*

Table 3

*Sample and rationale*

Participants	Rationale
Why emerging adults?	The purpose is to understand romantic relationships from the perspective of emerging adults as the study is concerning them.
Why individuals presently involved in romantic relationships?	They provide information based on their experience and hence the data collected is of phenomenological value.
Why individuals who are not currently involved and may have no past experience either?	Information from this group will place the phenomenon in context as it will report the 'outsiders' perceptions and observations, that is, providing societal perspectives.
Why middle adults?	To understand relationships in India, it is vital to take into account the views of the parents. To ensure the privacy of the individuals (EAs), it was decided to include middle adults who had children in the age group of 18-25 years, and not necessarily the parents of participating EAs.
Why equal representation of men and women?	To capture the voices of both genders and to compare the impact of the phenomenon on both groups in the context.

*Sampling technique.*

Purposive snow balling technique helped in finding prospective participants.

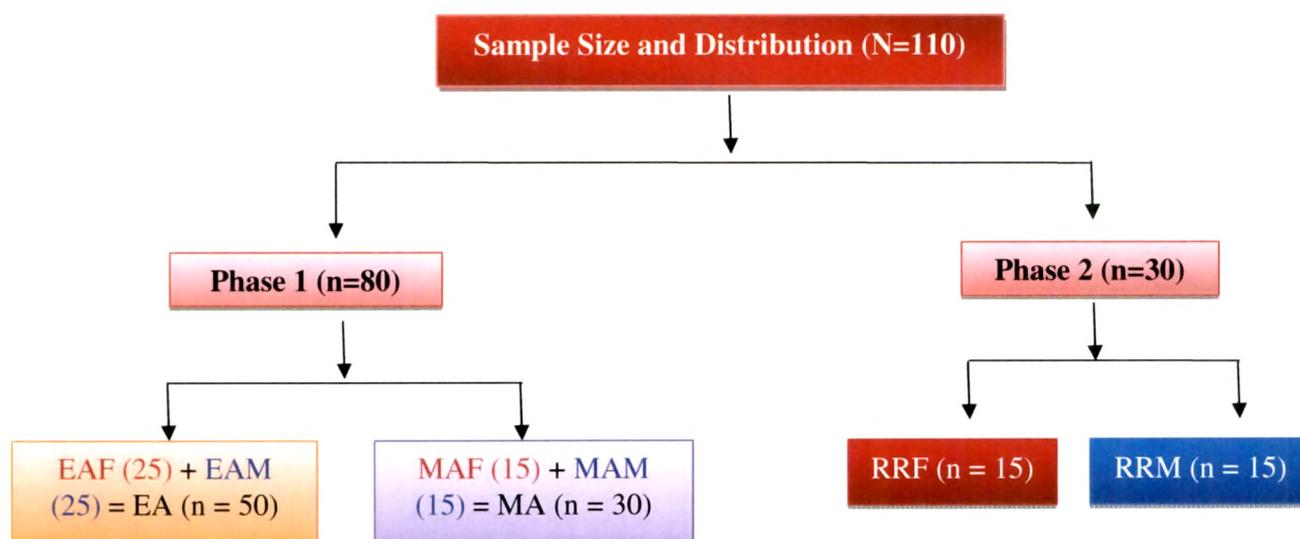
*Process of identifying the participants.*

The emerging adults were contacted through various colleges of Baroda. Emerging adults currently involved in a romantic relationship were contacted through their friends. The researcher also approached couples sitting in gardens or university campuses. Middle adults were contacted through residential societies and also through emerging adults taking part in the study.

The researcher made sure to communicate to the prospective participants that confidentiality and their 'privacy' will not be breached and that they were free to withdraw from the interview anytime they felt uncomfortable or simply chose not to answer any question which they found indiscreet. Moreover, they were informed that the interview would be scheduled at any time and place they felt appropriate. The couples, who were approached or 'disturbed' when they were spending some quiet time in the gardens, were friendly but shy about listening to the researcher about the study. In two cases the emerging adult was discouraged by their romantic partner from lending an ear to the researcher. In one case, it was the girlfriend and in the other it was the boyfriend. Only one emerging adult girl opted out of the study after giving informed consent because she felt the questions were too 'private'.

Figure 3 displays the sample size and distribution across the two phases of the study.

*Sample size and distribution.*



*Figure 3. Sample size and distribution.*

EAF - Emerging Adult Female

EAM - Emerging Adult Male

MAF - Middle Adult Female

MAM - Middle Adult Male

RRF - Emerging Adult Female Currently Engaged in a Romantic Relationship

RRM - Emerging Adult Male Currently Engaged in a Romantic Relationship

*Note: For middle adults most of the questionnaires were filled by the researcher after recording their verbatim responses. This was more time consuming than a self-administered questionnaire. Hence, it was decided to reduce the sample size for middle adults from 50 to 30: 15 middle adult females and 15 middle adult males. The data provided were rich interview texts and the time taken for each was 3 hours on an average.*

### **Tools for Data Collection**

All tools were constructed by the researcher.

1. Demographic Form: Age, gender, income group, relationship status, length of relationship (in months), romantic partner's age, sex, and occupation, parent's education (Appendix A).
2. Open-ended Questionnaire for Emerging Adults (Appendix B).
3. Open-ended Questionnaire for Middle Adults (Appendix C).
4. Open-ended Interview Guideline (Appendix D).
5. A 5 point Likert Type Rating Scale on the domains such as satisfaction, happiness, commitment, acceptance, passion, trust, and understanding for Emerging Adults currently engaged in a romantic relationship to supplement their qualitative responses (Appendix E).

Table 4 presents the objectives, tools and domains covered.

Table 4

*Objectives, Tools and Domains*

No.	Objectives	Tools	Domains Covered
1	Study the concept of romantic relationship and its connection to marriage amongst the emerging adults and middle adults in an Indian society.	Open-ended questionnaire for emerging adults. Open-ended questionnaire for middle adults.	Concept of romantic love/romantic relationships Perceptions of intimacy Love marriage connection.
2	Know the beliefs of emerging adults and middle adults about parental and societal attitude towards romantic relationships.	Open-ended questionnaire for emerging adults. Open-ended questionnaire for middle adults.	Attitudes of parents and the society and need for support, existing norms of the society, suggestions for a better society.
3	Examine the generation and gender differences in the beliefs, attitudes and perceptions.	Open-ended questionnaire for emerging adults. Open-ended questionnaire for middle adults. Open-ended interview guideline for emerging adults currently engaged in a romantic relationship.	All domains, where ever applicable.
4	Study the impact of quality of romantic relationship on perceived happiness.	Open-ended interview guideline for emerging adults currently engaged in a romantic relationship. Rating scale for emerging adults currently engaged in a romantic relationship.	Relationship experiences happiness, satisfaction commitment, passion, trust, self-disclosure.
5	Study the gender differences in the way relationship quality affects happiness.	Open-ended interview guideline for emerging adults currently engaged in a romantic relationship. Rating scale for emerging adults currently engaged in a romantic relationship.	All domains, where ever applicable.

The focus of the study was to understand romantic relationships as a phenomenon in an Indian context and hence for the phase I of the study an open-ended questionnaire was developed. The open-ended questionnaire was designed for emerging adults and middle adults to know the perceptions and beliefs related to the domains: concept of

romantic love and romantic relationships, perceptions of intimacy, love-marriage connection, contribution to general well-being (e.g., happiness), society's attitude and parental support.

Of the 20 questions, 15 were common for both emerging adults and middle adults. The last five questions were differently worded for both to make it relevant to them for their particular life stage. For example, in the domain for parental support the question for emerging adults is

- What is your parents' attitude towards opposite-sex friendships and romantic relationships? What do you feel about it? (Appendix B).

and for the middle adults it is

- If your daughter told you that she is into a romantic relationship, what would be your reaction? How would you feel? What would you do? Why? (Appendix C).

For phase 2 an open-ended interview guideline (Appendix D) was used to gather data from individuals involved in a romantic relationship. The guideline comprised 29 questions related to the domains: concept of romantic love and romantic relationships, making pairing contacts, perceptions of intimacy, and expectations from romantic relationships, love-marriage connection, contribution to general well-being and parental support.

All the tools were developed by the investigator. They were translated in Gujarati with the help of a friend competent in Gujarati. A component of Kephart's (1967) Love-Marriage connection scale has been included after re-wording and extending it

to make it more suitable for the purpose of the present study. For example, the original item was:

If a boy (girl) had all other qualities you desired, would you marry this person if you were not in love with him (her)?  
(Yes/no)

It has been changed to:

If a man (woman) had all other qualities I desired, I would marry this person even though I was not in love with him (her).  
(Agree/Disagree/Undecided)Why?

Also, probes were included during interview.

The rating scale (Appendix E) on the domains satisfaction, happiness, commitment, acceptance, passion, trust, and understanding was used for emerging adults currently engaged in a romantic relationship to supplement their qualitative responses. The rating scale had 22 statements and the participants rated them according to how much the statement was true with reference to their current relationship.

#### **Field testing the tool.**

The tools were administered to five emerging adults and five middle adults to check the language comprehension and appropriateness of the questions before giving them to experts to establish content validity.

### **Content validity.**

The tools for Phase 1 and 2 were content validated by experts from the fields of Human Development and Family Studies, Psychology, Anthropology, Sociology and Education. The following feedback was received:

- Both the questionnaire and the interview guideline were found to be exhaustive.
- More explicit probes on issues related to inter-caste and inter-religion pairings while talking about social norms was recommended.
- An item related to middle adults opposite-sex relationships before their marriage was added.
- Other suggestions included restructuring certain questions to improve comprehension and reordering items in the rating scale.

Based on the suggestions, necessary changes were made in the tools. Before finalizing the tools they were field tested again on four people; two emerging adults and two middle adults. The questions were easily understood by all respondents, but they found the tool slightly lengthy to complete. They also found the first question most difficult to express in words, and wanted the researcher to explain what she meant by “romantic love”. It became necessary to clarify that it is their concept, ideas and feelings about romantic love which are pertinent to the research and therefore they are free to report their views, and that there are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Further, it is not about what *others think or feel* but about what *they think and feel* about the phenomenon under study.

**Procedure for data collection.**

As mentioned earlier the emerging adults were identified through colleges and other educational institutions and residential societies. Middle adults were contacted through residential societies. After giving credence to the confidentiality to the respondents, written consent procedures were followed. The demographic details were filled out and an identification code was assigned to each participant. For example, the identification code EAF 01 stands for Emerging Adult Female respondent no. 1 and similarly RRF is Emerging Adult Female currently involved in a Romantic Relationship and MAM stands for Middle Adult Male. Therefore, there are six categories viz. EAF, EAM, MAF, MAM, RRF, and RRM. The open ended questionnaire for EAF, EAM, MAF, MAM (phase 1) consisting of twenty open-ended questions took about 1.5 hours on an average to complete. All questionnaires were filled in the presence of the researcher and at times the researcher filled the questionnaire as dictated by the participants. Each interview for the RRF and RRM (phase 2) comprising the 29 open ended question guideline and a 22 item rating scale took an average of approximately 3.5 hours to complete.

***Reflections on data collection.***

Most participants found the questionnaire interesting but quite lengthy. They reported that they had not given a thought to such questions and it was interesting to learn about their own thoughts and they could write a lot about it. This was more so the case with the emerging adults, especially with the girls. Many participants preferred to talk extensively than write an open-ended questionnaire, reiterating the emphasis on oral tradition in the Indian culture till date. This was, however, more the case with the middle adults. There were a few emerging adults who said they loved to write and had

been missing it since long and were happy to write extensively on this topic particularly.

Many individuals currently involved in a relationship were happy to talk about their relationships. Some reported that their partner may not like the idea of giving such interviews. However, when privacy and confidentiality was assured along with their right not to answer certain questions or withdraw from the interview if they felt like, even midway, most of them were willing to talk. There were no incidences of dropouts during the interviews or refusal to answer any specific question.

The investigator found that by and large girls were able to articulate their thoughts and feelings quite clearly and quickly compared to boys, with reference to their own relationships. Although the boys talked less, their interviews were longer (in terms of time) compared to the girls, on an average. They would think and smile and wonder mostly and talk less and use few words. This could have an implication for methodology as we know from researches and common observations that men are not used to talking about intimate topics as much as women, and also they are not used to talking face to face, or making eye contacts even while doing things together in their close friendships with other men (e.g., Fisher, 2006). However this bias, in favor of women, was taken care of to an extent because men's account of what love, intimacy and relationships mean, are equally represented.

The researcher also understands that the questions were too erudite for a topic such as this as it is not easy (nor otherwise desirable) to literally define love, intimacy or even a relationship. Nevertheless, it was important to do the groundwork as previous studies are almost absent in this area, and hence the tools, by purpose, were designed to capture the details and nuances associated with the phenomenon.

## **Plan of Analysis**

### **Qualitative analysis.**

The unit of analysis is “utterances” of the participants from in-depth interviews and notes of respondents from the questionnaire. The data from each participant were viewed as a whole rather than coding them after taking snapshots of particular questions and assigning them to categories.

Each complete verbatim describing a particular attitude was coded under categories (interpretative perspectives) and the same verbatim was coded under several categories at times. As the categories got filled with “data” and each category was properly characterized, the investigator looked for the frequency of occurrence of each perspective in the different groups of participants. This was done so as to get the total picture as well as to make inter-group comparisons between gender and age. The qualitative data were quantified into frequencies wherever applicable (Maxwell, 1996).

The aforementioned outcomes were accomplished by employing the following:

1. All the interviews were transcribed by the investigator.
2. All the transcripts and respondent notes from the questionnaire were digitized by the investigator and her typists.
3. The .doc (MS-Word) files were converted into rtf (rich text formats) files imported to text analysis software called MAXQDA (2007).
4. MAXQDA text analysis software facilitated easy access to multiple transcripts at the same time.

5. It was possible to assign whole verbatim to different codes and refine the coding process as more and more codes were included in particular categories.
6. The verbatim quotes were then retrieved under the codes along with their sub-codes and frequencies and exported to excel files in order to create tables and graphs.
7. MAX MAPS were used to display certain results.

#### **Validity and reliability issues.**

##### ***Strategies for ensuring validity.***

The following strategies were employed to eliminate validity threats:

- a. Member Checks: During the process of interview systematic feedback was sought from the participant. The interviewer narrated it back to the participant, using her own words to check whether the meaning of what was being said was rightly understood by the investigator. In case of disagreement, clarification was sought immediately. For the data from open-ended questionnaires in the form of respondent notes, clarification was sought telephonically in case of any ambiguity or doubt.
- b. Triangulation of sources: The data were collected from a cross-section of the society using both qualitative and quantitative methods.
- c. "Rich" data: The interviews and open-ended questionnaire were dense with information revealing picture of their beliefs, attitudes and concepts in great detail. The unit of analysis is the utterances from the interview transcripts.

- d. Searching for discrepant evidences: Each complete verbatim describing a particular attitude was coded under categories (interpretative perspectives) and while looking for the frequency of prevalence of these perspectives in the data, unique cases where also documented (Maxwell, 1996).

***Inter-coder reliability.***

To check the inter coder reliability, 10% of the total data were independently analyzed by two coders. The percentage agreement was established after analyzing the coded information for agreement and discrepancies. Most instances of disagreement were related to the names of the codes rather than conceptual discrepancies. For example, “understanding each other’s silence is love” was coded as “intuitive oneness” by one coder and “telepathy” by the other. This was sorted by mutually agreeing and retaining the most suitable code for the number of responses within that code.

The percentage agreement of 94.51% was calculated using the following formula

$$\text{Agreement (A)} = (U - De) / (U + 1/2X) * 100$$

Where,

U = total number of instances agreed (+signs)

De = total number of disagreements in coding

X = total number of clauses coded by one person and not by another (Saraswathi & Dutta, 1988, p. 31). The percentage of consensus was calculated for instances of discrepancy in codes.

**Quantitative analysis.**

- Means and standard deviations for all domains (satisfaction, acceptance, passion, trust, commitment, understanding and happiness) of the rating scales were computed.
- Pearson's correlation was used to identify relationships between happiness and each domain (satisfaction, acceptance, passion, trust, commitment, and understanding) of the rating scale separately and also for all combined domains.
- The t-test was used to analyze data from rating scales and for gender comparisons.

**Modes of data display.**

In the next chapter, an attempt is made to interpret the data to derive information and generate knowledge by converging, correlating and identifying linkages, patterns and underlying principles associated with the phenomenon and its processes. The following modes of data display are employed:

1. Frequency and verbatim tables
2. Charts
3. Diagrams
4. Love tales

Chapter 3 presents the results and interpretations.