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A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF

AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN'S ATTITUDES TOWARD MARRIAGE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY

BY

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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"God never puts more on us than we can bear….He didn't bring me this far to leave me now." This is the mantra that I said to myself over and over again as I traveled this journey through my doctoral program. Throughout this journey, there were many hurdles and barriers that sometimes made me question how much I could bear. Each and every time God would be timely in that the people he placed in my life were always there to talk with me, laugh with me, cry with me, pray with me and just be with me. I am so blessed to have so many people who love and care about me; so much so that I do not have the space to thank them all individually, but I thank you all collectively for I certainly wouldn't have made it without you. There are particular people who showed up and showed out in my life and I would like to honor them by name. First I start with my ancestors of the Barrie and Caulker families, whose warrior spirit and honor gave me the volition to take on such a great task and whose legacy gave me evidence that I am destined to be extraordinary. To my childhood best friend Laurie, you have been my right arm for the last two decades. You are my innocence, a living breathing reminder of my growth….my sister. Thank you for always telling me what I needed to hear and challenging me to be a greater version of myself. To my college roomies, my girlfriends, and my golden girls: LF Drizzy and T Robe you ladies "give me life"! There is so much I would like to say to you to as thanks for riding this life thing with me, but I will sum it all up with "Thank you for being a friend." To my "Gurls": Neicey, Steph, Nat, Mak,

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

The decline in the rate of marriage in the African American community has been documented in both the empirical literature and pop culture. Initially researchers postulated that the upward mobility of African American women had diminished their will to marry, but studies found opposing evidence to that theory and so the focus switched to African American men. Early studies about African American men and marriage indicated that the sex-ratio imbalance, the educational disparity between African American men and women that leads to economic frailty was the major cause of the disparity in marriage (Davis, Emerson, & Williams, 1997; James, 1998; James et al., 1999; King & Allen, 2009). While external factors and the way those external forces affect African American men's marriage behaviors have received attention in the literature, no attention has been given to the intrinsic psychological processes that affect how African American men conceptualize marriage. The purpose of this study was to explore African American men's attitudes toward marriage. What do African American men think about marriage? How do they form their attitudes about marriage? What messages have they received about marriage? A series of focus groups were conducting with African American men aged 24-34 years (N= 17). Participants were asked questions that inquired about how the men feel about marriage, how they learned about marriage, and what they learned about marriage. Guided by a phenomenological premise, axial coding data analysis revealed several themes including positive and ambivalent attitudes towards marriage, struggles of Black masculinity, dilemmas within the Black male-

female dynamic, and role confusion; resulting in Gender Role Conflict as it relates to marriage. Suggestions for future research and theory regarding African American men and marriage and clinical implications for individual and couples work with Black men is discussed.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Recently, the state of marriage in the African American[1] community has been a

frequent topic of discussion in both colloquial and academic spaces. Popular media have

reported statistics which say that 45% of African American women have never been

married as compared to 23% of white women, that the rate of divorce in the African

American community are three times that of the general population, and that if every

African American man in America married an African American woman there would still

be one out of 12 Black women that would never marry if they wanted to marry a Black

man (McFadden, 2009). These statistics could understandably cause great concern in the

African American community about the future of the family if stable marriage unions are

not forming and sustaining themselves. Early research postulated that marriage in the

African American community had declined because Black women had closed the income

gap with African American men and so no longer saw marriage as an attractive option

(Goldschneider & Waite, 1986). Later studies found that Black women in early adulthood

are the most likely group to expect to get married and they are also more likely than any

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[1]The terms African American and Black will be used interchangeably within the body of this
paper. However, it is important to note that both words refer strictly to people of African descent born and
raised in the United States of America.

other group to perceive positive economic and social/emotional benefits from marriage (Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993).

Because the idea that Black women were not interested or motivated to marry had been refuted, researchers turned their attention to Black men. Early studies about African American men and marriage indicated that the sex-ratio imbalance and the educational disparity between African American men and women that leads to economic frailty was the major cause of the disparity in marriage (Davis, Emerson, & Williams, 1997; James, 1998; James et al., 1996; King & Allen, 2009). While systemic and contextual factors that affect African American men's marriage behaviors have received attention in social science literature, there is little attention given to the processes that affect how African American men feel about and conceptualize marriage. What do African American men think about marriage? How do they form their attitudes about marriage?

Who is the African American Man?

The history of the African American man did not begin with slavery. His history began thousands of years ago on the continent of Africa where his ancestors were chiefs, kings, mathematicians, and great warriors (Akbar, 1991). That legacy was shattered when he was captured, chained, and sold in the transatlantic slave trade. He arrived in a foreign land where he was no longer human. He was bartered and sold like cattle (Franklin, 1974). After the physical slavery was over, he was left with a damaged spirit and lived within a system that continued to devalue him. Society stigmatized him as a simple brute, with great sexual prowess. He now lives in a society where he fights to establish his manhood and maintain his humanity. Majors and Billson (1992) comment

3

that being male and Black has meant being psychologically castrated, and rendered impotent in the economic, political, and social arenas that whites historically dominated.

The psychological research on African American men is sparse and is often from a pathological or deficit framework (Laubscher, 2005). Early theorists in Black Studies argued that Black men failed to learn what being a man really entailed (Hunter & Davis, 1994). These researchers speculated that in the absence of appropriate models of manhood, based on Puritan patriarchal values, the cycle of inadequate male performance and poor family functioning would continue to produce ill-prepared males. Three decades of research that followed failed to question this argument, which fit with the prevailing racist imagery of black men as eternal boys (Hunter & Davis, 1994). In the literature, this trend continues with many studies focusing on why African American men fail as fathers, or why they have low academic achievement, engage in violent behaviors, or how poverty predicts a specified outcome. There are few studies on African American men that are focused on the resiliency of African American men, the positive outcomes that result from positive African American fathers or studies with African American men who succeed and come from middle class homes with two parents. It is important to examine negative factors such as the achievement gap that many African American young men suffer from and the deleterious effects of poverty, but with the research so heavily skewed in the deficit framework, a balanced view of the African American male experience is lacking. In many studies, African American man's manhood is judged in comparison to white men. The hegemonic model that says men are to be successful, competitive, and aggressive are values that are in direct conflict with the Africentric

values of cooperation, promotion of group, and survival of group (Bowman, 1990;

Franklin, 1999; Hunter & Davis, 1994). Furthermore, the status of African American men

often makes it difficult for them to be successful if they adhere more closely to the

hegemonic model of masculinity (Lawrence-Webb et al., 2004). The overrepresentation

of studies that compare African American men to White men, wherein Black men's

results are interpreted based on the level of similarity or dissimilarity to the White men's

results is a serious methodological concern. African American men are a unique and

complex group and more work needs to be done using within group comparisons. The

diversity in methodology would provide a more valid and reliable cannon of literature on

African American men. The current mono-method bias of research adds to literature that

frames African American men from a pathological or deficit perspective.

Hunter and Davis (1994) asked African American men to define who they are as

men. They found that (1) a sense of self direction-to have one's own will to pursue the

path chosen, (2) economic viability, and (3) perseverance were essential components of

being a black man. They further found that beyond the self, family was central to men's

definition of manhood and part of what was perceived to give a man's life meaning.

These men saw the family as an extension of themselves, and a reflection of their legacy.

The men endorsed constructs that embody a worldview that links manhood to the

collective "*We*" and to spirituality. Proper development of manhood is necessary for

inner strength and the ability to survive in an oppressive environment (Hunter & Davis,

1994). Marriage is included in the many arenas which the history of oppression has

affected the African American man and the African American community at large.

African American Men and Marriage

The sex ratio imbalance theory (Guttentag & Secord, 1983) postulates that due to African American women outnumbering African American men by such a large number two phenomena could be taking place: (1) logistically there are not enough African American men for African American women to marry, and that (2) African American men use the power in the lack of their numbers to "play the field" (Allen & Olson, 2001; Hutchinson, 1999; James, 1998; James et al., 1996; King & Allen 2009; Marks et al., 2008; Taylor, 1990; Taylor 1998). African American men make up only 7% of the US population, but make up 40% of the prison population and have the highest rate of death by homicide between the ages of 15-34 (United States Census Bureau 2000; United States Department of Criminal Justice 2002). These statistics give credence to the idea that logistically there are not enough black men available for marriage. The second phenomenon of "playing the field" is likely as a result of the sex ratio imbalance. South (1993) found that African American men did not perceive the sexual benefits of marriage due to the sex ratio. One of African American male participants in Wilson's (2003) study said, "why get married when you got six to seven [women] to one guy, really…why get married when you can "play the field?," prompting agreement from other study participants (p. 15). There appears to be some evidence that African American men use the sex-ratio imbalance as a means to "play the field" and avoid committing to one sexual relationship because of their access to multiple partners. While some researchers have found that the African American men in their studies felt that they could not get more benefit sexually from being married, other studies found that African American men find

a great source of emotional support from marriage. When asked, men and women appear to realize the differential benefits of marriage for men, such as the findings that married men are healthier and happier and have higher incomes and more sex than unmarried men (Kaufman & Goldscheider 2007). Also, Black men who are married were less likely to engage in maladaptive behaviors such as alcohol or substance abuse, were less likely to have a psychotic disorder, and felt more emotional support and reported feeling overall happier and had a healthier well-being (James & Tucker, 1996; Laurant, 1997; Kaufman & Goldscheider 2007). However, Ball and Robbins (1986) found that being married was associated with lower levels of life satisfaction among African American men. This is an example of the mixed results in research on African American men which leaves the question of how African American men feel about marriage and the explanation for marriage behaviors of African American men unanswered.

In addition to the sex ratio theory, another phenomenon that was cited in the literature is the concept of "marriable men." This concept alludes to the fact that, regardless of the numbers, many African American men are not "marriable" according to the standards of African American women and African American men (James, 1998). Colloquially, the role of men in marriage is based on the traditional value which holds that men's primary roles are to be the bread winners of the relationship. Although African American women endorse egalitarian roles in marriage they prefer that the male be more economically stable than them (Davis, Emerson, & Williams, 1997). According to Cazenave (1983), a major factor in the perceptions of male-female relationships for black men has to do with their own sense of security as evidenced by their relative position

with the social system and their acceptance of its ideologies in regard to the realities of racism and appropriate gender roles. Tucker and Taylor (1989) reported that Black men are seen as unable to fulfill a highly salient traditional breadwinner role which reduces their propensities for marriage. The institutional racism within our educational system significantly contributes to African American men's high dropout rates, high rates of failure, low academic performance, and experiences of alienation (Mahalik, Pierre, & Wan 2006). Their rate of graduation from high school and matriculation in college has steadily declined since 1976 (Majors & Billson, 1992). This lack of education contributes to the underemployment of African American men. Joblessness has been linked to both the prevalence of female-headed households and increase in the number of divorces and separations among African Americans (Taylor, 1998). If the standard held is that men are to be the breadwinners of the household then African American men are falling below acceptable standards. Knowledge of their "shortcomings" could serve as a deterrent to marriage. Black men may perceive a wife as a greater economic burden given their own limited resources (South, 1993). The oppressive society, in which African American men are reared, often sends them messages that they are not capable individuals and so their attitude is that a wife will be a burden on their already stressful existence. It is important that black men identify and feel good about the group to which they belong. Similar to consciousness about one's cultural heritage and attitudes, beliefs about one's race are also likely to serve as coping resources for black men to the extent that they help provide a positive sense of self and self affirmation (Mahalik, Pierre, & Wan, 2006). The family plays a significant role in the way that African American men come to understand

themselves as racial and male beings and how they interact and understand themselves in relation to their environment.

Familial Socialization

It is important to explore what experiences shape black men's conceptualization and attitudes about marital relationships. Riggio and Weiser (2008) state that marriage attitudes are likely to be enmeshed in a complexly structured cognitive schema that contains beliefs and feelings about romantic relationships acquired through experience. Experience does not have to be confined to personal experience, especially in communities where the experience of the whole is an integral part of the experience of the individual. James, Tucker, and Mitchell (1996) found that the importance of marriage was the only significant predictor of happiness among men and greater happiness was associated with the greater importance assigned to marriage. The manner in which African American men are socialized about marriage by their families will play a large part in the way that African American men experience intimate relationships and the institution of marriage.

The socialization process is more complicated for families of color than White families as the socialization process for children of color must include preparation for racial barriers and negative stereotypes in addition to promoting overall self esteem and positive self worth and concept (Hughes et al., 2006). Within these socialization processes there are messages about marriage and family and the role that black men play. Socialization is not a responsibility held solely by the parents in African American families. The kinship network, which is comprised of extended family, family friends,

neighbors, church members, fictive kin, etc., plays a salient role in socializing children in African American families. In fact Bynum-Smith, Burton, and Best (2007) showed that greater reliance on extended kinship support predicted more positive vocation and school orientation among African American adolescents and that the kinship networks have been associated with reduced stress in African American college students. Boykins and Toms (1985) refer to African American family socialization experience as a 'triple quandary' in that African American families must teach their children the values and acceptable behaviors of mainstream United States society, they must instruct them on how to cope and deal with their minority status, and also maintain the standards, practices, and ideals of African American culture. Messages taught when child rearing and how they affect several different areas of outcomes within children is heavily researched. Familial socialization is a dynamic process with several overlapping and parallel mechanisms in the form of individual socialization processes that work together and individually. In familial socialization, a kinship network shapes a child's values, worldview, and societal interaction through racial, cultural, and gendered-racial socialization processes so that the child may become a competent adult member of the society in which they live (Brown et al., 2009; , Hill, 2001; Hughes et al., 2009; Rodriguez et al., 2009). Yet, research on adult outcomes of familial socialization focuses mostly on academic achievement, career outcomes, stress and coping, self esteem, and racial/ethnic identity. There is little research on how familial socialization affects adults' social interactions. The ability to establish and maintain intimate relationships, leading to marriage, is an important task in adulthood that needs to be explored with African American men in light of the historical

and systemic factors that have been postulated to affect marriage rates in the African American community (Dolgin, 2010).

The purpose of this study is to explore African American men's attitudes toward marriage. Furthermore, this study intends to explore how these attitudes are formed and what messages they receive about marriage.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CRITIQUE

Overall, the research on African American men and marriage took place in the

90's with mixed results. The section above discussed that most of the literature on

African American men and marriage focuses on external forces and how those forces

influence how African American men view marriage and engage in marriage behaviors.

This chapter will review and critique literature on African American men's attitudes

toward marriage and those factors that influence their attitudes. It will begin with a

historical review of the factors that have influenced the intimate relationships between

African American men and African American women, followed by the current status of

marriage in the African American community and conclude with a review of the familial

processes: racial socialization, cultural socialization, and gendered-racial socialization

and why this study is unique in its assessment of African American men's attitudes

toward marriage.

Some researchers suggest that external barriers have significantly impacted

African American men's views and attitudes negatively toward the idea of marriage,

while others contend that despite external barriers African American men have positive

attitudes toward marriage. Among the reasons why African American men are postulated

to have negative attitudes toward marriage, economic viability and stability was the most

widely posited. South (1993) stated that black men do not perceive themselves as capable

of maintaining their preferred standard of living if they took on a wife and children. He

also indicated that due to their lack of perceived resources and perceived "breadwinner"

role capabilities as compared to their white male counterparts not only did they perceive

fewer benefits from marriage; they also felt that it would cause them undue stress. This

study, like others, compares black men to white men (Allen & Olson, 2001; Lupo &

Western, 2005). As mentioned previously, sole reliance on comparison of African

American men to Euro-American men is a design flaw. As comparison groups either the

researcher is assuming both samples are similar or that one group (Euro American men)

is the base or control group for the other group (African American men) to be compared

against. Both assumptions are erroneous as both groups have unique characteristics that

make them dissimilar and so cannot be compared. Nor are Euro American white men and

appropriate reference group for which to compare African American men due to the

uniqueness of African American men (Creswell, 2009; Heppner, 2008). Also, the lack of

studies comparing African American men to other African American men leaves a gap in

the literature on the intragroup differences of Black men's marriage attitudes and

behaviors.

James (1998) found that in 1970 African American men with lower income levels

were more likely to marry than those with higher income levels. In 1980 and in 1990, as

income increased, so did the likelihood of marriage among African American men;

however, she also found that Black men with college degrees were significantly less

likely to marry relative to high school graduates. She also noted that manner in which the

positive relationship between income and African American male entry into marriage

occurs between 1970 and 1990, with 1990 having the strongest positive relationship between income and entry into marriage; that over time there is more emphasis put on the ability to have economic stability and reliability. James' study is useful in describing the marital trends and contextual factors that correlate with those trends, but it fails to provide explanation for those trends.

Though economic viability has been stated as one of the major reasons that black men have negative attitudes toward marriage or that it has played a major role in the trend of marriage behaviors, there are studies that refute this idea of economic stability as a barrier to marriage for black men. Bowman (1990) found that though economic instability is stressful for African American men, those men who were part of a close family which included an extended family network practically eliminated the independent effects of husband role discouragement and father role discouragement. The study did not indicate that the family eliminated the worry associated with objective unemployment. He reported that the worry still existed, but was essentially buffered by the effects of family support. It is important to examine the context in which we live and how the environment plays a role in the functioning of people's lives, but it cannot be the only reference by which we assess African American men's marriage attitudes and behaviors. King (1999) addressed this when he said that this [strict contextual and systemic] perspective ignores the important role that personal decision-making plays in the decision to marry or seek to marry. He goes on to comment that it ignores the reasonable assumption that African Americans are not, and have never been, powerless captives of "situational constraints."

The relatively high marriage rates of African American men and women nearly a century ago are evidence of African Americans' ability to behave in a manner consistent with their values under extremely difficult and turbulent economic, political, and social conditions (Gutman, 1976; King, 1999; McAdoo, 2007). King (1999) explored African American men's attitudes toward marriage and found that the Black men in his study had a generally positive attitude toward marriage. He also found that older men in the study tended to have more positive attitudes toward marriage and felt that the advantages of marriage had not eroded over time in contrast to the younger participants, many of whom had never been married and did not have dependents. He surveyed 465 African American men over the age of 18. His questionnaire asked the participants in his study to respond to a set of statements created by him. The statements were meant to measure (a) the extent to which respondents value marriage in general, (b) respondents perceptions of the impact marriage has on an individual's psychosocial development, (c) the relative importance of marriage to the respondents, (d) respondents' perception of their friends, acquaintances, and family members commitment to marriage, and (e) whether or not respondents felt marriage is as advantageous now as it was in the past. This study is important because it is one of the only studies whose purpose is to shed light directly on the way in which African American men personally view marriage. He found that overall African American men have a positive attitude toward marriage, but the instrument he designed to assess their attitudes does not reveal what it is that they feel or think about marriage or how they came to believe what they believe about marriage.

Male-Female Intimate Relationships

William Lynch, a slave owner from the 18th century, wrote a letter to fellow slave owners delineating methods to keep control over the slaves. He advised that they take differences among the slaves and exaggerate them and use those differences to create mistrust, envy, and fear amongst slaves such that they would remain divided for 300 hundred years. Among the differences on this list he indicated that the slave owners should pit man against woman and woman against man (Lynch, 2009). This method of divisiveness did not end with the abolition of slavery. It continues today with the messages that are disseminated to the masses about African American men and women (Heagans, 2003). In place of reality, White America, or what some have referred to as "White supremacist ideology," has presented negative, stereotypical images of African Americans and their culture (Washington, 1996). Images of black men as dumb, abusive, with incorrigible criminal minds, lazy, well endowed and with incredible sexual prowess as well as the images of black women as loud, argumentative, domineering, and central to the emasculation of her man have become indoctrinated into the minds of both African American men and African American women and thus each see the other with mutual inadequacy (Bethea, 1995; Thomas, Barrie, & Tynes, 2009; Washington, 1996). This consistent lack of positive imagery is psychologically devastating to African Americans and their own female-male relationships. Jones (2005) questions the ability to love and cherish another African American, if African American men or women have contempt for themselves because of their poor racial identity. The internalization of negative messages has placed a roadblock in the communication between black men and black

women. Each group is fighting with the effects of stereotypes and racism. The result is

devastating as Gary and Berry (1985) found that "among a stressful life events such as

unemployment, residential mobility, frequency of illness, number of arrests, and

sociocultural factors such as religiosity, family type, racial consciousness, and number of

friends, one of the best predictors of depression scores for Black men is conflict between

Black men and women" (p. 127). The main causes of conflict—stereotyped views and

inauthentic communication—often leave African American men unable to disclose

themselves to their partners and leave African American women frustrated with poor

communication and the resulting effects (Bethea, 1995). The lack of communication

perpetuates ignorance in each group that keeps them estranged from one another.

        The lack of communication abilities and internalization of stereotypes also has

effects on the overall health of the African American community as African American

men make up more than 40% of the prison population in the U.S., are three times as

likely than their white counterparts between the ages of 15-34 to be killed (U.S. Census

2000, U.S. Dept of Criminal Justice 2002); furthermore, African American women have

the highest prevalence rate of new HIV cases, particularly between the ages of 15 and 24

(Center for Disease Control, 2005) and more than 65% of African American children

were born to unwed mothers in 2005 (U.S. Center for Health Statistics). These statistics

contribute to the phenomena, sex ratio imbalance and economic instability, so widely

cited as primary reasons for tenuous state in African American male-female relationships.

The research delineated ways that these issues can be addressed. A solution to this

problem is a systematic one in which the media and other macro level agencies must be

steadfast in resolving by ceasing the continuous messages of African Americans

cultural values and practices as pathological and stereotypical messages that leads to self

loathing in the African American community (Boyd-Franklin, 1998; Jones, 2005; Sue,

1994). Another solution to the problem is programming by multidisciplinary

professionals to help resolve the issues of internalized racism and poor communication

between the sexes (Bethea, 1995; Parham, 1993; Parker, Berieda, & Sloan, 1984). With

the implementation of these recommendations, new research outcomes can begin to be

found within the black marriage literature.

Black Marriage

The statistics on the African American marriage rates are alarming. Because of

these statistics, researchers began doing studies trying to figure out why African

Americans do not marry and/or why they have the highest rate of divorce (U.S. Census

Bureau 2000). They were trying to figure out what was "wrong" with the African

American community and the individuals that comprise it. These approaches led to a

deficit model of examination that emphasizes problems and pathology. In their

assessment, studies often compared African American couples with white couples to note

the differences and how those differences are the cause for the pathology in the African

American union (Broman 2006; Christine, 2005; Goodwin, 2003). This is a design flaw

for the same reason that it is for comparing black men to white men in marriage attitudes.

This frame of reference furthers the idea that African Americans are more likely than not

unable to sustain healthy enduring marriages. In truth, many African Americans

experience well functioning marriages, yet "little research exists on (their) positive

marital adjustment, happiness, and satisfaction" (Marks et al., 2008, p. 172). The

literature that exists on stable and happy African American marriages found that there are

several factors that are at play that are unique to African American marriages: (1)

egalitarian orientation, (2) spirituality, and (3) extended family network (Allen & Olson,

2001; Brooks, 2006; Marks et al., 2008). Marks and colleagues explicitly state that black

couples who have a stronger role sharing [or egalitarian] orientation…are more stable

than those who have a weaker role sharing orientation. This does not hold true for whites.

He and his colleagues found that couples that endorsed a more shared and cooperative

perspectives were happier in their marriages. The couples in these unions shared child

rearing responsibilities and housework responsibilities. The role of spirituality is also

widely cited in the literature. It has been referred to as being "equally yoked" (Allen &

Olsen, 2001; Bowman, 1990; Lawson & Thompson, 1995; Marks et al., 2008). Black

couples rely on their faith for strength in the face of turbulent times. They find their place

of worship and their shared spirituality as strength in the bond. These couples also found

their unions to be sacred. Mahoney, Pargament, Murray-Swank, and Murray Swank

(2003) found that spouses who view their marriage as "sanctified" or sacred tend to have

stronger marriages. The extended family played a dual role in the lives of African

American couples. Though the extended family/kinship network is a source of strength,

the participants in Marks et al. (2008) study reported that they were often the "go to"

people when people in their extended family/kinship network needed assistance. They

reported that it did cause stress on their marriage, but that storm was weathered because

of their mutual commitment to helping their families and they also knew that the network

was available to them whenever they had a need. These values that appear to be key in

the stable functioning of African American marriage unions are values held within the

Afrocentric worldview. Afrocentricity is defined as anything that is related to ethnic and

cultural roots in the African and African American experiences. Within Afrocentricity,

there are several values that are defined within cultural values and egalitarianism, strong

extended family/kinship network ties, and spirituality as major value systems within the

Afrocentric worldview (Asante, 1989). It appears that adherence to the traditional

Afrocentric values are instrumental in the maintenance of stable African American

marital units. McAdoo (1997) stated that there is convincing evidence that ethnicity and

culture play a critical role in shaping the relational experiences of African Americans.

These ethnic and cultural values are taught throughout the life span within African

American families.

Summary of Conceptual and Methodological Issues

The discussion about African American men's attitudes toward marriage has not

yet been settled or even come close to a relative consensus among scholars. The studies

to date about African American men's attitudes toward marriage have placed too much

emphasis on external and systemic factors that are affecting marriage behaviors. It has

not yet been assessed how African American men conceptualize the institute of marriage

in light of or in line with these external barriers. The studies that have attempted to

directly address their attitudes toward marriage used small unrepresentative samples and

really measured how their participants described marriage and how they felt society

viewed marriage. In other studies, the authors compared African American men to White

men and drew conclusions about propensity and drive to marry. These studies misused comparison samples by comparing these two groups, most often using White men as the reference or norm group. Many of the conclusions led to a pathological conceptualization of African American men and their marriage attitudes. This pathological stance is one that perpetrated in the literature regarding African American marital stability or lack thereof. In addition, studies that found that external and systemic factors had an impact on propensity toward marriage made no suggestion for future research to explore other possible reasons African American men were not getting married or how their attitudes toward marriage were even formed. Also, the legacy of oppression and racism has impacted the trajectory of the African American male in a very unique way. This unique experience makes it necessary to take an intragroup perspective on researching African American men. The sole reliance on between group comparisons has provided little insight into implications for addressing African American men's attitudes toward marriage.

This study is unique in that it qualitative, whereas most other studies used quantitative methods to not only examine African American men's attitudes toward marriage, but also how those attitudes come to form. I aim to assess African American men's attitudes toward marriage, how they are socialized to conceptualize marriage, and what messages they received about marriage. While I have made the argument that more emphasis needs to be placed on the internal messages and the intragroup process associated with African American men's attitudes toward marriage, I am not disregarding the external barriers to marriage behaviors and the effects that those systemic factors

might have on intrapsychic feelings toward marriage. Indeed there is a long history of oppression and racism that have led directly to the fluctuations in marriage patterns over the decades within the African American community

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Participants

The sample consisted of 17 African American men (N=17) between the ages of 24-34 years from a large urban metropolis in the Midwest. There were 11 participants between the ages of 24-29 years, and six participants between the ages of 30-34. Fifteen of the participants reported that their relationship status was single and one person reported that they were in a committed relationship. Fourteen of the participants reported having no children and two reported that they had two children. Eleven participants reported that their highest level of academic achievement was a bachelor's degree; four reported that they had some college, and one reported that he had some high school. Nine of the participants reported growing up in a two parent household and eight participants reported growing up in a single parent household headed by their mothers. Four participants reported that their parents' income was between $10,000 and $40,000; seven participants reported that their parents' income was between $40,001 and $75,000, and six participants reported that their parents' income was greater than $75,000. Six participants reported that their current income was between $10,000 and $40,000; nine participants reported that their current income was between $40,001 and $75,000, and two participants reported that their current income was more than $75,000. Fourteen

participants reported their religion was Christianity, two participants reported their religion as other, and one participant did not report his religion.

Instruments

A focus group script included open ended questions and standard facilitator prompts that inquired about how African American men feel about marriage, how they learned about marriage, what they learned about marriage, and what they seek in an ideal partner was created for the study. A demographics form that included age, marital status, number of children, education level, type of household they were reared in (e.g., single parent, two parent), number of people living in the home growing up, parents' income when they were growing up, their current income, and their religion. Their current employment information was not asked because the primary researcher and committee of reviewers felt that education level and current income could provide enough information about their SES that additional questions about employment were not necessary. The script initially had 10 questions. It was reviewed by other graduate students and experts in the field on qualitative inquiry and African American males. Revisions were made to include questions that better inquired about what the primary researcher was intending to explore. The standard prompts were included so that in the instances where study participants asked for clarification of a question a standard response across all groups would be given. The prompts were carefully created such that they did not imply any cues about the answer which the participant should give. After several reviews and edits the final script had 15 questions (see Appendix A). Participants also filled out a demographics form that included questions about age, current relationship status, number

of children, highest level of education, current financial status, financial status of family of origin, and religious orientation (see Appendix A).

Procedures

Participants were recruited for the study through flyers, email blasts, and social networks (Facebook, Twitter, MySpace). Participants contacted me through email or phone. They were given a brief overview of the goals of the study and were given four separate dates and times of established focus groups and they indicated which group they were available to attend. Participants were offered entrance into a drawing for one of four $25 gift cards to a major department store for participating in the focus group study. Four focus groups with a semi-structured interview were conducted at a public library. Each focus group lasted approximately two hours.

The purpose of focus groups was to understand how people feel or think about a certain idea (Kreugar & Casey, 2000). Kreugar and Casey recommend no more than six to eight participants for non-commercial research, as too many participants are difficult to control and does not allow for depth of exploration. The average group size for this study was four, with the largest group consisting of seven members and the smallest group consisting of three members. Participants filled out demographic forms and preferred method of contact forms. The preferred method of contact was used to contact participants whose names were chosen from the gift card drawing. Participants were also given name tags for the option of giving themselves a pseudonym to maintain their anonymity in the transcription process. Each focus group was digitally audio-taped and later transcribed verbatim.

Analyses

Qualitative research is an approach used to answer questions of How? or What? as opposed to Why? It is used to understand the meanings of how people experience the world and attribute meaning to their experiences (Morrow, 2007). Qualitative research can be approached in many different ways depending on the question at hand and the foundations of the field of the researcher. These foundations are referred to as paradigms. Within these paradigms, the method of data collection and analysis are indicated. This study is exploring the attitudes that African American men have about marriage, how they form those attitudes, and what the messages are that they received about marriage. I am approaching this study with an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm which has a relativist ontology in which there are as many realities as there are participants and in which meanings are often co-constructed by participants and researchers (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative inquiry begins with a question rather than a hypothesis. The questions lead to particular data gathering strategies and as data accrue the analytic strategy begin inductively as the researcher works to understand the meanings of participants (Morrow, 2007).

I approached this study from a phenomenological perspective with a theory oriented purpose. The phenomenological perspective seeks to describe what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. In this way, researchers work more from what the participants' statements and experiences are rather than how the researcher interprets their experience (Creswell, 2007). The basic purpose is to reduce the experiences of persons with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence

(Creswell, 2007). My approach is theory oriented because as I am learning about the way African American men are experiencing the phenomenon of marriage, I am looking to formulate a theory about how the experience is formed and what factors affect that experience. I have used preexisting literature and theory as a means to focus this research. Within a theory-oriented project, theory serves only as a template (Haverkamp & Young, 2007). Phenomenological procedures and grounded theory procedures are similar in that they both seek to reduce data down to common themes found in the participant data.

I analyzed the data using open coding. Open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) requires the researcher to go through the transcript line by line extracting themes and categories from each participant's statements. I followed this process with axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) wherein I went back through the data and began to group themes and concepts found in open coding. Furthermore, axial coding allowed me to create subcategories and thus provide an opportunity to contextualize circumstances, events, and phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

In the collection and analysis of qualitative data, there is always question about when there is enough data to be representative of the phenomena being studied. The term saturation addresses this concern. Saturation occurs when there is redundancy in the data and the addition of more participants would not add to the information provided in the data. There is no set number in the literature about how many participants are needed to reach saturation. Suzuki (2007) states that phenomenological studies involve in-depth interviews lasting as long as two hours with approximately three to ten participants. Grounded theory studies seeking to generate or discover theory that relates to a particular

situation should include 20 to 30 interviews that are usually less in depth. This study falls somewhere in the middle between these two approaches. Saturation was met in this study after the second focus group as no additional themes emerged from the third and fourth focus groups.

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that to increase the reliability of qualitative data is to have outside raters review the data and calculate the interrater agreement. To do this, three outside raters were given the themes ascertained by the primary researcher with quotes that were representative of each theme. They were presented in random order and the raters were to match the themes with the quotes they felt represented those themes. They were not told how many quotes were to be matched with the themes and were not informed if all of the quotes were to be used. The themes were marked with number and letter code combinations and the raters marked the back of each quote with the theme they felt it corresponded with. If they did not feel it matched with any theme they wrote "none". After this the agreements and disagreements were counted and interrater reliability was calculated. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), interrater reliability is the number of agreements between raters divided by the sum of the total number of agreements and disagreements. They suggest that an interrater reliability of 80%-90% is acceptable. An interrater reliability of 88% was achieved in this study. Additionally, in line with phenomenological theory, a member check was conducted with five of the participants to add to the validity of the results (Moustakas, 1994). The members were given copies of the transcript of their group as well as copies of the themes generated with the corresponding quotes used to generate those themes. They

were asked if they felt as if their voices were properly represented in the transcript and if they agreed with my interpretation and themes. All five participants agreed with the interpretations and felt as though their individual voices had been properly represented and interpreted.

The Self of the Researcher

In qualitative research, investigators cannot be separated from the research process; they are inextricably linked (Yeh & Inman, 2007). For this reason, it is recommended that researchers examine themselves and the role that they play in the participants experience of the inquiry and in the interpretation of the data (Creswell et al., 2007; Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007). When examining the marriage attitudes of African American men, I needed to consider my gender, age, and race, and my role in the research process. As the primary investigator, I identify as a single, African American woman who is in her late twenties. I have post secondary education and come from a two parent household. I am like most of the participants in that I identify as African American and I have post secondary education. I am also in the same generation as all of the participants.

I am different from all the participants in that I am a woman. This gender difference is of particular importance as the topic of marriage in the African American community has received a lot of attention in pop culture in the last five years. When planning the project, I thought that the gender difference and the nature of the topic might make the participants answer in socially desirable ways as not to offend me, be more crude or frank in their efforts to communicate to African American women in general

through me, and that they would have assumptions about my own personal interest in the topic. In an effort to combat this, I tried to make myself as asexual as possible wearing large sweatpants and sweatshirts and putting my hair under a hat. I was hoping that it would allow them to see me as just a person asking questions versus seeing me as Black woman. In the first focus group, the men were talking about the difficulty in relating to African American women and one of them spoke directly to me saying, "its partially ya'lls fault. Sistas make it difficult because ya'll want perfection." In that moment, it became ever present that my gender and age would play a role in the way the participants experienced the focus groups and the way that I would experience them in the focus groups. I continually monitored my emotions during the focus groups and during analysis and interpretation. I would often take a step back from the data if I found myself having too strong of an emotional reaction to the data. I also sought supervision with my dissertation chair, also an African American woman, about my reactions to the focus groups and the data, in an effort to interpret the data from the most objective perspective possible. In line with the phenomenological paradigm, the participants are the experts on their experiences and I facilitated a process by which the participants' voices could be heard and set aside my biases as they relate to the topic. As a single, African American woman in her late twenties, I do have a personal interest in the research. As an African American female scholar whose primary focus is on African American people, I have chosen to explore African American men's marriage attitudes as it relates to them marrying African American women. While this is not a stance that is explicitly translated to the participants through the questions asked in the focus groups, it is the lens by which

I have framed this study. I am very concerned with the status of the African American community. I believe that the family structure has major implications for advancement of the African American community and I hope to use the results of this study begin my career in examining phenomena and mechanisms that affect the Black family and ultimately the African American community at large.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to explore African American men's attitudes toward marriage, to explore how African American men's attitudes toward marriage are formed, and to explore what messages they received about marriage growing up. There were a total of eight focus group questions asked to address the three research questions. Six of the questions inquired about the participants' attitudes toward marriage and two questions inquired about how messages regarding marriage were presented to them and about the exact messages regarding marriage that were received. The questions that inquired about their attitudes toward marriage were: (1) How do you think and feel about marriage as an institution in general and how do you feel about it as it relates to the African American community? (2) How do you think African American men feel about marriage overall? (3)What are some positive things about being married? (4) Are there positive things about being married unique to African American men? (5) What are some negative things about being married? (6) Are there negative things about being married unique to African American men? The questions that inquired about how messages were received and what the exact messages that were received were: (1) How did you learn about marriage growing up? (2) What did you learn about marriage growing up? Transcripts were coded by the primary investigator using axial coding method and the codes and raw data were then reviewed by outside reviewers to calculate interrater agreement as outlined by

Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Huberman and Casey (1994). The themes that were developed and the sample statements that support the themes are presented in this section. The results will be presented using the percentage of participants that responded in line with that particular theme as well as presented with how many of the four focus groups that the theme was cited. Participants are identified by pseudonyms they provided for themselves at the time of data collection.

African American Men's Attitudes Toward Marriage

Research Question 1

The first question, which asked how they personally felt about marriage as an institution and as it related to African Americans, generated 76 codeable responses from all four focus groups related to their attitudes toward marriage.

Positive attitudes toward marriage – Thirty-one percent of the participants indicated positive attitudes toward marriage. Positive attitudes consisted of individual desires to marry and the belief that marriage was necessary for the advancement of the African American community, 11% of the responses indicated a personal desire to marry, and 20% of the responses indicated a necessity of marriage in the African American community for advancement and betterment of the community.

Positive attitudes, individual – The participants commented on their attitudes toward marriage as it relates to them individually. Responses that reflected positive attitudes regarding marriage included Brad (26, single) who stated "…about the actual prospect of getting married I'm excited about it." Weezy (28, single) stated "I would like

to get married ultimately…", and Thomas (29, single) stated that "…for me personally I look forward to marriage and being a father one day."

Positive attitudes in relation to African American people – Many of the participants expressed sentiments that marriage is beneficial for African Americans as a whole. For example Reggie (27, single) stated "it's a necessity within our community…a strong black family leads to strong community and we lack a strong community because we don't have many strong black families. And marriage brings forth that. So I definitely think it's a necessity." Clifford (32, committed relationship) stated that:

> marriage is a very wonderful thing. Especially as it relates to black marrying people because there's been so much…that's been going on from generations to generations that it's been dividing our families; been causing too much chaos and confusion in the neighborhoods…it's very important that we come together in the mindset and order, especially the way that God designed it to be so that way everything can begin to restore itself back into the right flow.

Ambivalent attitudes towards marriage – Thirty-eight percent of the participants indicated ambivalent attitudes toward marriage. This ambivalence was broken down into four subthemes: internal conflict over marriage (defined as ambivalence toward marriage due to personal apprehension and fear of marriage readiness); lack of healthy marriage role models (defined as feeling as though lack of role models of successful marriages makes them unsure of their ability to sustain a healthy marriage); female-male ratio (defined as the effect that the high number of single African American women compared to African American men has on their decision to commit to one woman when they can have access to several), and general ambivalence (defined by the men's general ambivalence toward marriage with no direct source).

Ambivalence – not ready/apprehensive – Seventeen percent indicated that they did not feel ready and had some internal conflict over the decision to marry. Reggie (27, single) states "…personally um, I struggle with what a lot of the African American males probably struggle with - at least my peers - in feeling like I don't know when I'll be ready…like…I do want to and I don't… So I struggle with conflict in that." Brandon (28, single) states "personally like the idea of being married one day. I'd like to see myself getting, being married. Not at this time; I don't think I'm established enough of where I'd like to be professionally, you know emotionally."

Ambivalence – lack of role models – Nine percent of participants indicated that they lacked role models to show them what healthy marriage looks like. Maurice (34, divorced) comments that "…as black men a lot of times we don't really have a role model as to show us what it is to be a husband." Yannick (24, single) in the same focus group concurs, saying, "…I feel like in relation to African Americans in particular it's like we don't have that, we don't have that role model like someone said. We don't have that role model to benchmark off of, to kinda say this is what we need to be like in order to live our lives."

Ambivalence – female-male ratio – Seven percent of participants indicated that the female-male ratio, whereby there are significantly more available women than men affected their attitudes toward marriage. Thomas (29, single) stated:

> In relation to African American people I think there's a lot of, a lot of bitterness and a lot of baggage with African American, between African American men and women in relationships… I know that there are a lot of cats who are just kinda in the street doing what they do because there's such a disparity of women to men. You know if you're young and

professional and you got yourself together there's a lot more women out there than there are men who are in the situation. So you kinda got your pick so why should you settle or why should you, you know pick just one when there's plenty of women who are out there ready to do whatever? So it's tight.

Similarly, DJ (29, single) stated

(I)   contemplated that question and realized that there is a 2:1 ratio, at least a 2:1 ratio of women to men in the world. And in the United States and amongst the African American community the ratio is sometimes larger because of the African American men's death and other, other…factors. So you're looking at uh, like brother Wheezy said, a 6:1 ratio. And if we're dealing in strict monogamous marriages then what is to come of those other five sisters?

Ambivalence – General – Finally, about 5% of the men indicated general ambivalence toward marriage. For instance, Ryan (30, single) stated "…But I don't know. I think up until recently for me I'm still like, kinda like on the fence." Jamison (28, single) reported that "I look at it as purely optional. It's just uh, one role in society to take. Not necessarily a goal but an option."

Negative messages – None of the men in any focus group directly stated or indicated negative attitudes toward marriage. Positive attitudes and a continuum of ambivalence toward marriage were divided among all of the participants present at the time that the question was asked.

The second question which focused on how they felt African American men as a group feel about marriage generated 61 codeable responses related to their views on African American men's general attitudes toward marriage. These themes were discussed in all of the focus groups. Themes of fear/apprehension, chore, and struggle emerged.

Fear/apprehension is operationalized as the fear of entering a marriage union for any

reason. Chore is operationalized as African American men feeling as though marriage is

an event that they will eventually have to get to at some point in their lives. Struggle is

defined as the idea that African American men perceive the daily functioning of the

marriage union as a struggle that they would have to endure as married person.

Fear/apprehension – Twenty-one percent of the responses were about

fear/apprehension of marriage. Weezy (28, single) comments that "I think that black men

do aspire to be married but it's you know with a great deal of apprehension." Brandon

(28, single) states

> I think overall as a group most of 'em are really scared of the idea
> generally for…I mean it could be a number of reasons…emotionally they
> might not be prepared because they might not have seen what a real family
> looks like. You know growing up a lot of black men you know grow up
> without fathers; their mothers raised them. They don't have, they don't
> have that type of support from a dominant male role model so they end up
> you know creating their own; their own image when I say that. Generally
> they, yeah generally they're just scared. They don't know, they don't
> know what to expect.

Chore – Sixteen percent of the responses were about marriage feeling like a chore.

Yannick (24, single) commented that:

> So when I think about marriage it's something that's coming and you'll
> just procrastinate that thing 'til it's like… …'til that thing is all the way
> down the road and you're just like alright I'm gonna get to it eventually,
> I'm gonna get to it eventually. It's like taking out the trash or washing the
> dishes; like when you come home it's like man I just get, I just get at it
> tomorrow. You know you just keep, you just keep pushing it off and
> pushing it off. And I mean that's kinda where everything kinda falls in
> with the whole marriage perspective because you have this woman on the
> side of you and she might be perfect for you, she might be great but you
> lack the maturity to pretty much execute. You know what I mean? You
> don't wanna execute that marriage; you look at it as like a chore,

something you just gotta do and you just keep pushing it off. Just let it stay on that end until time runs out and then she just passes by.

Thomas (29, single) stated

I would actually say as a whole African American men from my experience feel like marriage is something that one day you just you gotta do. Like it's almost like a chore - I'm gonna have to at some point slow it down…

Struggle – Finally, 10% indicated that marriage was perceived as a struggle. Scott

(27, single) states

I think they view marriage as a struggle. You know it's easier to do, you know to act, you know to act like high school when you um, when you get older. It's easy to play teenager type games and deal with women of that sort. But when it comes to marriage it ends up being, it's commitment. It's like you argue with somebody you gotta stay in the same house with 'em; you just can't, you can't leave. You gotta stay there and deal with the problem instead of like 'whatever, I'm out.' You know and that's, and it's more of a struggle. People like, especially right now, they like things, it's fast living right now. You want everything to come to you so fast. Marriage is like a slowdown, a struggle to slow grind. You have to deal, you have to really consider - let somebody else in to consider and deal with they feelings. Instead of just being out and just going and coming as you please. I think so. As far, to sum it up in one word I would say it's a struggle.

Reggie (27, single) followed up with:

I also feel like um, in that light African American males um, feel as though it's easier to look out for self. I think we do have a um…it's hard enough being an African American male let alone having a family; a structured family. …it's kinda like renegade out here- we all for our self. So in that it's like survival; I gotta take care of me.

The third question inquired about what they believed were positives of marriage and generated 32 codeable responses that appeared in all of the focus groups. Support from wife and financial relief emerged as themes related to what the men in this study

perceived as benefits of marriage. Support from wife is operationalized as unconditional positive regard for husbands on the part of the wife. Financial relief is the idea that the wife's potential income will provide relief of some financial burden that men would carry alone if they remain single.

Support from wife – Thirty-one percent of participants indicated support from a wife as a benefit of marriage. For example, Clifford (32, committed relationship) passionately states:

> Having that wife. That's better than anything in the world because that's the one who you can go to war with. That's the one you can literally be broken in front of. I mean even in family you gotta be hard and you gotta, you know there's a certain expectation- especially in the black community- or way you're supposed to be. But see that's the one you can literally pour your heart out to. That's the one who's got your back through the ups, the downs, the ins, the outs…

Thomas (29, single) adds:

> …just really having somebody who's got your back no matter what. You know on the loneliest nights where you really don't know if you've got what it takes to make it to the next level and that person who's gonna be willing to say 'baby, nobody can do it better than you.' Like you, you can't, you can't trade that in for the world. And that's, that support system, that structure is one of the things that I look forward to the most.

Reggie (27, single) said "…knowing that you have um, another half that is in that struggle with you and that basically has your back through thick and thin. You know like, it's just always good to have somebody who is on your side and on your team."

Financial relief – Finally, 22% indicated marriage provides financial relief.

Jamison (28, single) stated:

> Joint income…Uh, joint credit. If you pick the one right, brainstorming ability. So if you got a winner she can think just as fast as you can and two

brains are better than one. In theory if you, if you grab a winner you should be able to be quite prosperous in America. Because two incomes plus two knowledge bases…it's kinda hard to lose if you got multiple resources and somebody that's got your back if worse comes to worse. So that's definitely a benefit.

Ryan (30, single) concurs with Jamison, saying, "I definitely think it's like with the income it's probably the number one thing. But definitely I think you know it gives you an opportunity to maybe get to that next step in your life maybe faster by having somebody else." Weezy (28, single) states "…You know you double your income and then you cut your expenses in half because you're sharing the expenses and you're bringing in you know hopefully twice the amount of revenue if both the people are gainfully employed."

The question that inquired about positives of marriage unique to African American men themes generated 28 codeable responses, and was present in three of the four focus groups. Thirty-six percent indicated the relationship with black women as a unique positive aspect of marriage for African American men. The relationship with Black women refers to the intimate relationship between Black men and Black women and how the functioning of the relationship is a benefit of marriage unique to Black men.

Yannick (24, single) commented that:

…when a black woman and a black man get together and they form that bond I don't think there's any stronger connection in any race. I honestly feel that way… I feel like that connection is so far, it's like Super Glue; it's like you just can't get it off. Like there's nothing you can do to tear that bond away. And when you have it, when it's there, it's just there. Like there's no taking that away; there's no detachment. There's nothing that can really ever sever that relationship. I think that the bond is so strong that there is nothing or no one that can ever separate that. So when I think about positive that's pretty much what I think, I think that's what it is.

Weezy (28, single) spoke more on the uniqueness of Black male-female marriage:

>…the tangible thing in terms of support that is specific to the black male is marrying a black woman. Because it's been my experience that black women are more loyal and you know… marrying a black woman who you know will be like you know it'll be ok and is used to you know dealing with adversity and triumphing with her mate. So I think that might be, that support that he was saying and that stick-to-it-ivenss that black women inherently have I think that might be that tangible piece that we've been looking for.

DJ (29, single) noted that:

>…the black woman has access to certain things. She has access to the top that the black male um, doesn't gain access to. So um, yeah. It's certain things that yeah in this country you need a wife for this, for that, for this, for that to be looked at a certain way. But um, for the black man - though the Black woman lies at the bottom of the matrix of domination - she falls at the very bottom of it - she is a female and she is black and she's usually poor. Though she falls at the bottom of all of that she still has access to things and because of her access it gives us some limited, black men, some limited access.

Maurice (32, divorced) stated that:

>…compared to black women I'm telling you there are some things that, like that I found that were like different. Like we all know how we are. We go out every day and we put on a face and we perform, we're professional, and we talk the way we need to talk and we say the things we need to say. And then we go home and we be like 'these crackers' or 'these people'…and when I, and like you know when I was in a relationship with a white girl she was like 'why do you say that? You don't mean it.' And I was like yeah…I do actually but… (laughs). You're just different. You know what I'm saying? But it was like, and like when I was [with a Black woman], like you never had to, I never had to explain that. You know what I mean? Like I never, like she got me. Like when she came home like that's, that's what you have being in a relationship with another black woman like you can relate. You know what I mean? Like you can understand what you're dealing with. You, that's what's unique to us.

The question that inquired about negative things about being married generated 30 codeable responses and was included in all of the focus groups. Loss of freedom emerged as the sole theme describing what the participants thought were negative aspects of marriage. Loss of freedom refers to the loss of total independence and sole decision making powers the men anticipate as part of the marriage experience.

Forty-three percent of participants indicated loss of freedom. Reggie (27, single) states:

> …compromise. You don't have to compromise when you're not married as much, especially in your personal life. You might, in all of the times that you have to compromise in this world a lot of men, especially African American men, find some solace in their 'me' time or in they personal time. So you don't have to compromise if you're single.

Brandon (28, single) follows up by saying:

> …you miss out on a lot but not necessarily a whole lot would be like male camaraderie. Like I'll give you a perfect example…a couple of weeks ago my guy called me up and was like 'yo, I got…' you know like right at the last minute was like 'yo, I got tickets to the Bulls game. You wanna go?' I was like yeah, I'm there.' You know being married let's just say you're married with those three kids, you don't have that option. You have to go check with you know the wife first most likely…so it's just certain things you just can't do…but guys, you know guys kinda just like to be around guys sometimes you know. It ain't nothing personal you know but it's just, you know it's just some things we can talk about around with just men that we can't say when women are in the room.

The question that inquired about negatives of marriage unique to African American men generated 23 codeable responses, presented in all of the focus groups. Pressure from single Black women, daily struggles of Black masculinity, the relationship with Black women, and kinship responsibility emerged as themes related to what the participants viewed as negative aspects of marriage unique to African American men.

The pressure from single Black women refers to the idea that married black men are pursued by single African American women and the unsolicited temptation that they experience as a result of the pursuit. The daily struggles of Black masculinity refers to daily assaults on the identity of Black men via discrimination, racism, and microagression experiences that black men endure that would be compounded by adding a wife and children to his experience. The relationship with Black women refers to the intimate relationship between Black men and Black women and how the functioning of the relationship is a negative of marriage unique to Black men. Kinship responsibility is the idea that marriage stability makes one more likely to be called upon and expected to take care of other members of the immediate and extended family network.

Pressure from single Black women – Twenty-two percent of the participants indicated pressure from single Black women. Scott (27, single) stated:

> …we're more of a commodity once we're responsible and you know people see that we are- especially from the opposite sex also. When you're responsible and you're married and you're doing what you're supposed to do I think women are attracted to that since, especially black women; African American women. They're attracted to it since it's a lack of that in our community, period. So I think it brings on more problems from the opposite sex looking at you like 'he's responsible. He can actually hold down a family. I like him.' And then what they like about you is what they end up ultimately just about gonna destroy because they're attracted to that and it's a lack of it. So therefore you gotta, you get a lot of hanger-ons. (laughs) You know people, just women just around because of your status and how you do things I think. A wedding ring is more attractive because it's odd in our community to see a young black man with a wedding ring. It's odd so it's attractive…and so therefore women will want to be around guys that are married more because they attracted to his responsibilities.

Jamison (28, single) stated:

…it seems to be unique with African American men- is that a lot of African American women have single, gunned for African American men that's married. It's kinda like once you see 'em married it's kinda… I've seen it so often where if a man is married it seems that he established that, that is the man that they look after because he has the characteristics that got him to that point… I think that's definitely a negative because it's extra; you're adding extra stress when it's really you're not, you're not asking for it it's just being perceived. You just seem as a pick.

Daily struggle of Black masculinity – Seventeen percent indicated the daily

struggles of Black masculinity as a negative aspect of marriage unique to African

American men. Thomas (29, single) said:

…definitely African American men. But there's something…this is about being married. I mean…alright. African American men we have the weight of the world you know on our shoulders from a very, from a very young age. You know we're dealing with, with discrimination, we're dealing with you know when this person said this like you know when you're in corporate America, right, and this person said this were they really giving me a sly hint that you know this is about as high as you can go. Or you know you just, you're always analyzing what's going on in the world because you, racism is not dead. So we constantly have that conversation in our mind about can we really you know make it to where we wanna make it to. Are all the options really there? You know can I really trust this person? Trust is always an issue. You know it's, there's a lot of stuff that's engrained with us from a very young age that make it um, that sometimes put constraints on what we think is possible for ourselves. And so it's a constant battle to, you know to get yourself back to growing you know and staying in that positive conversation.

Relationship with Black women – Seventeen percent of the participants named

the relationship with Black women as a negative aspect of marriage unique to African

American men. Weezy (28, single) referred to Black women as a double edged sword:

it's been my personal experience that the same um, I guess competitive drive that black women have to stick by you, I think it's also a double edged sword because I find that African American women are less submissive than other women. And I think sometimes when you just don't wanna hear it anymore and you just want her to shut up I think that could

be a problem. Like some women know ok let me just back off. But it's been my personal experience that I have to deal with a lot more rhetoric and feedback and attitude that I normally wouldn't have to with another… I think as a rule of thumb more often than not black women are generally more combative in a relationship than women of other ethnicities.

Yannick (24, single) said:

That aggression thing is number one. I mean it's, I mean for me, to me it is. I mean we just, we fight, we argue. And I think that African Americans as a whole our egos are like up here, like up here somewhere and we will not lose that for nothing. Like, and it's a, it's a form of enslavement. It's a form of being trapped in your own mind because I really feel like people's egos are just so high up there they will not, they won't let go of that for nothing. Like for nothing at all. So when you're dealing with somebody else who won't do the same thing its constant bickering, constant fighting. That's all there is.

Kinship responsibility – And finally 13% cited the kinship responsibility as a

negative aspect of marriage unique to African American men. Reggie (27, single)

comments that:

You know you got your family members if, that see you doing well and you know you feel a sense of entitlement. Well not entitlement…you feel a sense of um, need to help them out; to give back and/or, or a.k.a. having a little more weight on your shoulders. Um, marriage adds to that because you got your immediate family, you got your siblings, you got your cousins, you got - like I said if you're well to do - you got outside; you got your church, you got everybody looking at you to be Barack Obama or Jesus Christ. You choose. They looking at you to you know be this being of (chuckles) almost like a messiah…. I think that's one that might go unnoticed is that um, it adds stress; a different kind of stress than a normal man/woman marriage.

Formation of Marriage Attitudes

Research Question 2

The second research question wanted to explore how African American men formed their attitudes and views toward marriage. To do this, the participants were asked the following question: How did you learn about marriage growing up?

The question that inquired about how they learned about marriage growing up generated 55 codeable responses. Cultural socialization, where norms of the group are transmitted to the child, was the primary method by which these men learned about marriage and was mentioned in all four of the focus groups. The kinship network, a combination of explicit and implicit messages, media influences, and married primary caregivers emerged as themes related to where the participants received messages and learned about marriage. The kinship network refers to the immediate and extended family members, which can include neighbors and religious institution members. The participants pointed to this network as a source of reference when thinking about how they learned about marriage. The combination of explicit and implicit messages refers to the method by which the messages they received were transmitted to them. Media influence is defined as the role that television programming played in teaching the participants about marriage. Married primary caregivers includes parents, grandparents, or other extended family who the participants lived with and identified as primary caregivers; and where they received messages and learned about marriage.

Kinship network – Of the participants indicated they learned about marriage from their kinship network. Yannick (24, single) stated:

I didn't have anything except for watching my neighbors and a couple of my friends who lived on the block which were of different races - they were, they had married parents and I was looking at them but I didn't have it in the house. That's all I had. So I didn't really, I didn't really have a whole marriage perspective or understanding of what marriage was really about. I kinda painted a perfect picture for myself.

Kenny (29, single) stated, "…my main thing I focused on as far as marriage growing up was my grandparents because they was like the only couple that was still together; like not off and on and you know stuff like that. They was, they was going hard from day one."

Explicit/implicit messages – Eighteen percent indicated that they received both explicit and implicit messages. Brad (26, single) stated

…it was something that you, that you just learned. I, I have no, I don't think I even had a conversation with my parents about marriage before I turned, what, 21, 22 years old. But I just saw you know from the good times, the bad times, the fights, the disagreements, the vacations you know I just saw what made me think this would be kinda cool - to have my own one of these at some point. You know? Um, shows like The Cosby Show did enhance what I already saw at home. You know it wasn't all a fairy tale like it was on TV. It wasn't' all a fairy tale like it was on TV at my place but you know. I still you know, I learned that from like I say my home, most of my friends - like I say, I'll say 90% of 'em - and then you know my pastor is married to his wife; so the church I came up in....

Kenny (29, single) said,

The people that I watched in seeing good, positive things from I got more from them and that's, and that's not with them telling me stuff…but then you got the people that wanna tell you everything about it like 'man, you ain't gonna be able to do this' and 'man, you ain't ready for marriage' and woo-woo-woo. But these are the people that can't stay married.

Clifford (32, committed relationship) said that he learned, "…just watching him take care of my grandmother."

Media images – Thirteen percent indicated they learned about marriage from television. DJ (29, single) and Weezy (28, single) have an exchange:

DJ: ….TV.

Wheezy: I was just about to say that. I'm sorry to jump in… (laughs)

DJ: TV, TV, TV. Oh no, brother. (Laughs)

DJ: …would say television or uh, society but not in house…I can't think of any friends that came from a two parent home. I don't know any. None of my friends, all of us come, were raised by our mothers. So yeah. Television taught me what you're supposed to do, what marriage is supposed to be. Other than that, shit I don't know.

Randall (31, single) states:

…the media kinda beats in your head like you, like you look at all these shows where you got like (chuckles) you think it's funny when it's serious like you have like the Simpsons, you have like the Cosby Show you got like…you know, you know that model of how you know the woman is supposed to take care of the household and the guy is supposed to like, like you was saying, supposed to take care of like handy, handyman kind of duties. I mean that's kinda beat in our heads… from like TV and media.

Married primary caregivers – Finally, 11% of the participants indicated that they learned about marriage from their married primary caregivers. Thomas (29, single) emphatically said, "…for me I definitely learned what marriage was about from watching my parents. And uh, you know I got such an appreciation for my dad now just looking back. You know as you're growing up your dad is just, I mean your dad is your dad." Reggie also names his parents as his primary source of marriage lessons saying, "I learned in my household just watching my parents. They were together, still are together. Um, and I still, I learn even more even to this day."

Scott (27, single) adds to this saying:

like you say same household - my mother and father growing up with them and they, you know they was married. Then my brother also, he got like 21 and he got married and I was like probably 10 at the time. And so that was normal to me….it's like everything around me was, that's what it was. Like you be married and you had kids and that's what it is and that's what I always thought…I used to like being in 4th, 3rd, 2nd, 3rd, 4th grade see a girl and 'I'm gonna marry you when I get up.' You know what I'm saying? That's what it wasn't. It wasn't like I'm gonna date you, I'm gonna do this. I thought that's what it was - is just get to the point you find somebody, you get married and that's when they have kids. That's what it is. You know so that's how I learned. You know like I say my household, The Cosby Show, all the favorite shows that I used to watch was a married couple - a happy married couple at that. So that's what it is.

Content of Marriage Messages

Research Question 3

The third and final research question wanted to explore the messages that the men received about marriage. To do this, the following question was asked: What did you learn about marriage growing up?

This question inquiring about the exact messages they received about marriage growing up generated 62 codeable responses. Many of the responses reflect gender socialization messages about their role as a man. Traditional gender roles, maintenance of family, and predicating the marriage on spirituality emerged as messages that the men learned about marriage and emerged in all of the focus groups. Traditional gender roles refers to the idea that the men in this study learned that marriage is successful when men and women play their traditional gender roles where the man is the provider and the woman is the keeper of the home. Maintenance of the family is the idea that the family unit is extremely important and must be maintained at all costs and that the family remains together through good times and bad. Predicating the marriage on spirituality

refers to the idea that marriages that are predicated on spirituality and that abide by the

laws of God are successful, and mirrors cultural socialization messages on the importance

of spirituality for African Americans.

       Traditional gender roles – Eleven percent of the participants indicated the

endorsement of traditional gender roles. Kenny (29, single) commented:

> …the main thing I've learned about marriage is the only way it's gonna
> work is if both parties play they role - which is the man being the man, the
> woman being the woman. You're not, as a man it's a certain amount of
> respect that you're gonna want. If you're not being the man you're not
> gonna get that respect and the marriage will not work. And that doesn't
> necessarily, don't necessarily mean like ok she make more money than me
> so I'm not the man. That's not, I mean that means that as the man you're
> doing everything you can do to provide, you're making smart decisions for
> your family that's gonna be in the best interest for your family and that's
> that. And regardless of how much, it's not even really about the money,
> it's just the, it's more about the effort and the, taking like the personal
> responsibility of protecting that family. If you're not on that then you
> can't, you can't expect like, you can't come home and be like 'ok, where
> dinner at? ...You know what I'm saying? You can't come home with that
> if you're not being that type of person all the way around. So that's what I
> learned.

Jamison (28, single) also stated,

> …that's how I learned the roles of how things are supposed to go and how
> things work. Because I've seen, I've seen other people households where
> like the woman seem to be the dominating figure of the household. Well
> that's not the household I was raised in. Like and even now I have
> younger brothers at my dad's house it's a houseful of men and I grew up
> in a house where it's always a houseful of men… I've seen situations
> where the woman is the dominating force and it kinda, she's either not
> fulfilled or he's kinda miserable and I feel like that should never be the
> case…but growing up seeing how the roles are as a man, when this thing's
> broke the man fixes it. When the car is broke that's the man's
> responsibility. When the snow is on the car the man go out there and
> shovel it. When his lawn needs to be done that is the man's…I've never
> seen my momma mow the grass ever in her life. It will never happen in
> life because that's not, she's, that's not something she's supposed to do.

At all. Now, he also came home for dinner, he also came home to you know x, y, z; a whole other list of things. But that's just the way I feel like it goes so that's how I would run my household; the same way that I've seen it illustrated to me. And I've seen, it works. It just works.

Brad (26, single) stated that, "…you learned that certain things the man does, certain things the lady does."

Family maintenance – Ten percent were taught to maintain the family unit at all costs. Maurice (34, divorced) said:

My stepfather was like this is it right here; us three. I don't care what's out there, I don't care who…it's two part: it's us against the world, this is right here. If we gonna be in a Volkswagen bus with one toothbrush, we gonna be in a Volkswagen brush with one toothbrush. But we, in this house, this is what it is. I don't care about nothing else out there. I don't care about the next door neighbor momma, cousin, uncle, auntie. This is it. We ride or die together as a whole. This is the unit. And that's what I got. It's us against it. That's it.

Scott (27, single) said,

it was like 'ain't no divorces…' you know what I mean? And this, that and the other. So that's what it was. She just like you stick it out through thick and thin no matter what. You can be miserable but just, that's what you go do. If you're married you stayin' married. You know what I mean? That's what it was.

Brandon (28, single) stated:

I learned from really a lot of older couples I think about what marriage is really about. Mainly like my uncle, my uncle - my great uncle and my aunt. They, they been through thick and thin you know back and forth you know. They, they lived through a depression, you know world wars and all kinds of crazy things I could never imagine you know. But they still together you know. And I guess the bottom-line is that you know through all that they had each other; they had each other's backs. They never, they never questioned. No, I take that back…I'm sure they questioned each other's motives you know but in the end they were there for each other and that's really what counts in the end.

Spirituality in the marriage – Finally, 6% of the participants indicated that the importance of predicating the marriage on spirituality, a common cultural socialization theme. Clifford (32, committed relationship) comments:

> …then to have that family together and it's where you have the husband and the wife and the mother and the father raising the child in decency and order, in the laws of God… one of the awesome benefits you know of that family, of that structure- the way God originally instituted….Like you mentioned earlier about the family roles. When everybody's in that designed position, you know where it was originally instituted, everybody can flow functionally. Because that's the way it was originally designed.

Reggie (27, single) talked about abiding by God as well as a list of other things, saying:

> …and I learned that that is what marriage is about; it's about working as a team and basically working through any issues you have, understanding and compassion, love, faith in God. That's what marriage taught me or that's what I learned about marriage…

Summary of Findings

This section presented the themes that emerged and the verbatim responses of the participants answering the three research questions exploring African American men's attitudes toward marriage, how African American men learn about marriage, and the content of the messages African American men learn about marriage.

Attitudes Toward Marriage

The men in this study reported positive and ambivalent attitudes toward marriage. The positive attitudes were divided into two categories: personal desires to marry and belief that marriage is good and necessary for the advancement of the African American community. They also expressed that there were benefits to marriage that were both

general and unique to African American men. They reported that they anticipated the overall benefits of support from their wives and financial relief; they uniquely found the relationship with African American women to be a benefit of marriage.

Ambivalence was reported by the participants as something that they individually felt and something that they felt African American men in general perceived when thinking about marriage. Several categories emerged within the theme of ambivalence: fear/apprehension, lack of role models, female-male sex ratio, and general.

Fear/apprehension. They also stated that they felt the lack of role models left them and African American men in general at a loss when conceptualizing what marriage is supposed to be like and what their role is in marriage. The imbalance of women to men, where there are more available women than there are available men, also emerged as a factor that contributes to their ambivalence toward marriage. Finally, some of the men indicated a general ambivalence toward marriage for various reasons.

The men in this study did not directly or explicitly express any negative attitudes toward marriage, but they did perceive that there are negative aspects of marriage. The men stated that loss of freedom, managing the daily struggles of Black masculinity, expectations of kinship responsibility, the relationship with African American women, and romantic pressure from single African American women on married Black men were negative aspects of marriage with the loss of freedom being a general negative and the remaining themes being unique to African American men. They also reported that they felt as though Black men in general perceive marriage as a struggle and a chore that they will one day have to embark upon.

Socialization of Marriage Messages

The men were asked how they learned about marriage and they reported that they received a combination of implicit and explicit messages about marriage. They said that they received the messages from their primary caregivers, their kinship network, and from media outlets such as television. They reported that the transmission of marriage messages changed as they aged; whereby, they learned about marriage implicitly as children and middle adolescents and then learned via explicit messages in late adolescence and early adulthood.

Content of Marriage Messages

The men were asked about the content of the messages they received about marriage. They reported learning that marriages that are predicated on spirituality and marriages where traditional gender roles are maintained are successful unions. They also reported learning that it was their responsibility to ensure that the family unit remains intact in both good and turbulent times.

Self as the Researcher

It is appropriate that I again address myself as the researcher after the results of the study have been presented   In this section I will briefly discuss my reactions to the results as well as what I learned during the process. As a single, African American woman in her late twenties who one day hopes to marry I have a personal interest in the results of this study. At the outset of the planning of the study, I was mainly interested in dispelling the current tone in the research that shed a negative light on Black men and their attitudes toward marriage. I felt as though that the research was not balanced or

clear on how African American men experience or conceptualize marriage. I was

hoping to find that they had positive attitudes toward marriage. Most importantly

however, I wanted to allow the voice of African American to be heard as I felt that their

voices might not be properly represented in the literature. I was astutely aware of my bias

that I went into the research process with and I continually monitored myself and my

biases so that I would not interpret the data in a way that met my personal hopes. During

the coding process, I kept memos of my affective reaction to the data. Creswell (2009)

describes memos as notes a researcher keeps during the data collection and/or data

analysis process for the purpose of recording hunches, comments on new samples to be

checked out, explanation of modification to categories, emerging reflections, and links to

literature. Going through the data I often found myself experiencing a wide range of

emotions. A sentiment that I found myself repeating often in my memos was

"conflicted". This makes sense as it appears that ambivalence and feeling conflicted was

a consistent sentiment the participants felt. The congruence between me and the study

participants provides further evidence that the interpretation of the data is valid. With my

initial goal of allowing the voices of African American men to be heard regarding their

stance on marriage in mind, I would like to talk about what I learned from what I heard.

As a group, they were particularly concerned with how the manifestation of manhood by

individual Black men would subsequently affect the entire community through families. I

learned that there is so much more to be learned about how African American men

conceptualize manhood and how manhood relates to the way African American men

experience the world. I hope that this study can be a springboard for me and others to continue this work.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to explore African American men's attitudes toward marriage, to explore how they learned about marriage, and to understand what exactly they learned about marriage. Prior research in the area of African American men and marriage focuses mostly on marriage behaviors and not on the internal motivations, attitudes, or feelings about the institution of marriage. This study intended to begin to fill that gap in the literature. A series of eight questions were asked to elicit information about African American men's conceptualization of marriage. Each question will be discussed as they individually contribute to the three research questions. The section will conclude with implications of the study's findings, limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research.

Attitudes Toward Marriage

The first research question assessed participants' attitudes towards marriage and marriage for the African American community. A series of questions were asked to get insight on participants attitudes toward marriage individually and in regards to the African American community, how they think African American men feel about marriage overall, positive aspects and negative aspects about marriage, and positive and negative aspects about marriage unique to African American men. Generally, results suggest that the men have positive attitudes toward and about marriage, but external

factors create ambivalence toward their personal efficacy beliefs related to establishing and maintaining a successful marriage union. Results also suggest that the men acknowledge that there are negative aspects of marriage, yet still have an overall positive attitude toward the institution.

Positive Attitudes

Positive attitudes and ambivalent attitudes toward marriage were equally represented in this sample of African American men. It appears that many of the men have positive attitudes toward marriage as an institution in general, but have ambivalent attitudes toward their individual decision to commit to marriage. Most of the men in this study ideally would like to marry and perceive benefits from being married, both for themselves and for the African American community. However, external factors such as the abundance of available women in comparison to black men and lack of role models contributes to the doubt in the minds of these men's ability to maintain a successful marriage union. This is important as much of the literature on African American men and marriage cites external factors as major influences on their marriage behaviors (Dickson, 1993; Dixon, 2009; James, 1998; Pinderhughes, 2002; South, 1993). However, in the literature, the external factors such as the sex ratio are interpreted as African American men not desiring marriage or perceiving any benefits from marriage. In this study, the men stated very clearly that they think favorably of marriage and would ultimately like to marry.

Interestingly, their discussion of their individual attitudes toward marriage was done very briefly and they spent the majority of the time speaking about marriage in

relation to African Americans and how marriage is vital to the advancement of the community. Their motivation or positive attitude toward their own marriage behaviors was defined in relation to how their actions would benefit the overall group. This way of conceptualizing marriage is in line with previous literature that found that African American men define their masculinity and their male experience relationally (Hammond & Mattis, 2005; Hunter & Davis, 1994). The participants in this study were adamant about the necessity of marriage in the African American community if it is to thrive. As the men of the community, they feel it is their obligation to be providers of the community which Diemer (2002) found is most salient to African American men in defining their masculinity. The strong identification with the provider role likely plays a major part in their positive attitudes toward marriage and their desire to marry despite the external factors that weigh heavily on them and cause them to experience a great deal of fear, apprehension, and/or internal conflict over the decision of whether or not to marry.

When asked about benefits of being married the men talked about the unconditional support that they perceive receiving from a wife. White and Cones (1999) posited that the "continuing presence of racism creates powerful emotions and uncertainty in the lives of African American men. Over the long haul, prejudice and discrimination can generate rage, anger, frustration, bitterness, resentment, grief, despair, or any combination of these emotions" (p.141). The men in this study report anticipating reliance on the support of their wives to help them find peace from a world that does not support them. They look forward to going home to a place that will provide them refuge from the struggles of Black masculinity. Franklin (1999) proposes the invisibility

paradigm as a way to explain the intrapsychic struggle for personal identity by African American men as the individual confronts specific encounters with racism, particularly in cross racial circumstances, and how these experiences obscure genuine identity and promote inherent stress related to their management. There are seven elements to the invisibility paradigm that represent the intrapsychic process of feeling invisible of which (a) one feels lack of recognition or appropriate acknowledgement, (b) one feels disrespected, (c) one's sense of dignity is compromised and challenged are most salient to this question.

In the workplace, academic environments, daily interactions with others, etc., Black men may feel invisible and thus may expect that in their own homes they will be visible and seen as relevant. They have the expectation that their wife will be the one person in the world to uplift them and tell them that they are important. Alternately, their dependence on emotional support from their wives could be one that is the universal experience of men. James and colleagues (1996) state that the institution of marriage may be a more central source of emotional support for men than it is for women in that married men are more likely than women to cite spouses as exclusive confidants and husbands are more likely than wives to report being affirmed and understood by their partners. They go on to say that men may be more dependent on the more formal marital relationship for satisfaction of affective needs and benefit more when such needs are satisfied. It is likely that it is a combination of both. Men in general might tend to exclusively expect and receive emotional support from their wives, but African American men have to also negotiate the world as racial beings. They navigate an oppressive world

that stereotypes them as aggressive, hypersexual, uneducated, etc., which also leads to them being rendered invisible; making the emotional support from their spouse all the more paramount. In addition to emotional support, the men reported financial relief from an employed spouse as a positive of being married.

The men in this study expected that their spouse be gainfully employed and assist in the financial stability of the relationship. This is an interesting finding considering the concern that researchers indicate that African American men have about their economic viability as it relates to their ability to care for a family and how those concerns negatively impact African American men's willingness to marry (James, 1998; South, 1993). Economic viability is a real concern as 55% of African American men in 2005 made less than $20, 000 per year, and about 20% earned incomes below the official poverty threshold (King & Allen, 2009). These low wages would make it quite difficult to be the sole provider for a wife and children. King and Allen found that the African American men in their study whose mean incomes significantly exceeded the median income of most African American men seek partners whose incomes surpass their own. They found that the combined mean income of the male respondents and the mean income of their ideal partner would place them squarely into the middle class. The findings from this study support the idea that financial security and/or superiority is not the primary outlet by which African American men define the provider role and that they are more concerned with having a comfortable middle class standard of living. They desire a partner who can help them attain and maintain that lifestyle.

The positives about marriage cited by the participants could be argued to be universal to all men across races and cultures in America. To account for this the men were asked if there are positives about marriage unique to African American men. The men in this study exclusively cited the relationship with African American women as a positive to marriage that is unique to African American men. The unique positive aspects of marriage to African American women was twofold: historical reference to African American women being allowed into arenas that they as African American men are not and by association they are able to gain from her access, and strong emotional bonds with African American women, particularly as it relates to her ability to readily understand his experience and her ability to withstand struggle and thrive despite struggle.

Lawrence-Webb et al. (2004) posit that the marginalization of African Americans has had the effect of diminishing the provider function of African American men while simultaneously elevating the provider function of the African American woman. They go on to say that African American men face significant challenges to fulfilling their key gender role tasks, including limited access to educational opportunities and wealth, lack of access to other resources for advancement…as a result, the provider function of African American women has become critical to the viability of Black families and communities. The men in this study made reference to this and how important the African American woman has been to the survival of the African American family because she does not have the same stigma of aggressiveness and violence, attributed to African American men, that induces fear in majority culture.

Hill (2005) talks about African American men and women post slavery and says "…Black women often defied white authority in ways Black men would never have gotten away with" (p. 59). The fact that she is a woman makes her less intimidating and allows her access to arenas such as higher education, corporate America, and other opportunities for upward mobility. The men in this study are saying that a relationship with a Black woman, who is likely abreast of the institutionalized oppression directed at Black men, makes her more amenable to sharing her access to upward mobility with them. It is this shared struggle that when formed creates an "unbreakable bond," as passionately stated by Yannick, between African American men and African American women. Struggle plays an important role in the history of African American people. It is something that is passed on by both oral tradition and generational lived experience. The ability to thrive and persevere through struggle is a badge of honor worn by many African American persons. It appears that struggle also forms a basis for love between African American men and African American women. Unfortunately, there is not much literature on love and the way that it is expressed or experienced. Lawrence-Webb et al. (2004) point out that the lack of discussion illustrates the reluctance of scholars to examine the effect of this important concept. They posit that there is an awkwardness with trying to figure out where love fits in the larger context of the discussion, as it often gets lost in the shuffle of discourse on the sociopolitical and historical pieces of intergendered relationships of African Americans.

I posit that we are all lost in the shuffle on historical reference and sociopolitical status of African Americans. We are so concerned with contextual and systemic barriers

that basic human emotions such as love is ignored, by both researchers and lay people alike. It appears that for the African American men in this study struggle is a basic emotion shared uniquely with African American women, thereby producing an unbreakable bond between them. Additional data from the focus groups suggests that struggle also works against the "unbreakable bond" between African American men and African American women.

Ambivalent Attitudes

While many of the men that reported ambivalence toward marriage also reported positive attitudes toward marriage, it is important to discuss the ambivalence they experience toward marriage. They cited lack of role models, fear/apprehension, and sex ratio as reasons for their ambivalence. A few of them also reported general ambivalence toward marriage that was not necessarily as a result of any external factors. There were two participants that expressed general ambivalence toward marriage, but for different reasons. For example, one of the younger participants stated that he thought of marriage as an option, just one role in society that someone could take. His general ambivalence toward marriage is a normal developmental experience that many men in their 20's who are recent college graduates experience when thinking about the steps both personally and professionally that they want to take and whether they are ready to establish intimacy with another person (Arnett, 2010). An older participant talked about his questioning of the relevance and utility of marriage as he was not sure if he believed in the institution of marriage as it is defined as a monogamous legal union between man and woman.

The men talked about fear/apprehension. The fear of the unknown is a function of normal human anxiety related to embarking on new experiences, but amplified by the lack of role models and contextual factors such as the sex ratio and questioning of economic viability appeared to be the most salient reason for ambivalence toward marriage. Hunter and Davis (1994) provide insight about this in their article examining the meaning of manhood for African American males. They state that previously early researchers posited that as a result of history of slavery, oppression and disenfranchisement many Black males failed to learn what being a man is all about. In the absence of appropriate models, the cycle of inadequate male performance and poor family functioning would continue to produce ill prepared males. The men in this study are all well-educated and aware of the systemic barriers that have influenced their lives personally. They are attuned to the fact that the lack of role models affects the way that they and their peers perceive entry into a marriage. The level of fear and apprehension they personally experience was expounded upon when asked how they felt African American men in general feel about marriage. The fear and apprehension they stated they felt African American men had toward marriage was a direct consequence of the lack availability of positive role models. They stated that they believe that the lack of role models results in stunted emotional growth and immaturity in African American men. The lack of maturity is what prevents many African American men from marrying and contributes to the attitudes of struggle and impending doom.

This is an expansion of what they spoke about in regards to the role that lack of role models plays in their personal ambiguity toward marriage. African American men

may create their own view of what marriage entails based on other experiences as they often do not have models for marriage available. The "procrastination" or "impending doom" the participants speak of might partially be a result of this imaginary construction of what marriage entails without a reference point in the form of a role model.

Negative Attitudes

None of the men overtly or directly stated that they had negative attitudes toward marriage or that they did not desire to marry at all. The lack of negative attitudes toward marriage is important when thinking about intervention and prevention programming related to intimate relationships involving African American men. The absence of negative overall attitudes toward marriage does not mean that they men do not perceive negative aspects of marriage. In fact, the men named several aspects of marriage, such as loss of freedom, daily struggles of Black masculinity, relationships with Black women, pressure from single Black women, the expectation of kinship responsibility, and it being a struggle and a chore, that they personally find to be negative and that they feel African American men in general perceive as negative.

The men name loss of freedom as a general negative aspect of being married. They indicated that the need to have to compromise and consult with their wife on decisions they make infringes upon their personal space. Anderson (1989) states that Black male subculture proscribes domestic relations partly because of the suspected control by the female partner over the male's personal life. This could serve as a substantial curtailment of personal independence. Independence and autonomy are traits that men value. Hunter and Davis (1992) found that men rated attributes such as

independence and self esteem as most important to being a man. Therefore infringement on these attributes important to their manhood would make marriage an unfavorable option. While this may be a universal feeling for men across groups, there is a component in the loss of freedom that might be more salient for African American men as it relates to the decision to marry. In addition to the threat to personal space and autonomy, there was concern about threat to male camaraderie. Anderson (1989) emphasized Black male youth's strong attachment to their peer group. He theorized that Black males retreat from marriage because of its destructive influence on ties to friends and associates. Due to this retreat, young Black men will have few friends who are married. South (1993) studied racial and ethnic differences in the desire to marry and found that African American men did anticipate a negative change on their personal friendships and that accounted for differences in their desire to marry compared to Hispanic and White men.

The daily stress of Black masculinity is likely contributing to the perception that marriage is a struggle because marriage compounds the stress that they experience individually. Pieterse and Carter (2007) found that racism-related stress had a negative relationship with the psychological health of the African American men in their sample. The stress from Black masculinity is a deterrent to marriage because they then become not only responsible for themselves, but a wife and potential offspring. Ogin et al. (1993) provide support for the view that the racism and oppression experiences of Black men contribute to poor marital satisfaction. They indicate that African Americans greater exposure to extrafamilial pressures, such as racial discrimination and negative conditions

in the workplace significantly contribute to African American married couples reporting less marital happiness than White and Latino married couples. The stress of maintaining their personal survival is a burden that they feel will be compounded by the addition of a wife because they have to then protect themselves, their wife, and any children they may have. The protection was not so much in the physical sense as it was in the psychological and emotional sense. Black men move between majority and minority cultures and must negotiate the racism and discrimination that accompany caste-like minority status (Hunter & Davis, 1994). Existing and functioning in two worlds, managing the intent in cross-racial encounters can be demanding and burdensome (Franklin, 1999). In addition to their individual burden they would have to find a way to protect their families from the damage that racism, discrimination, and microaggressions will have on their identities. A strong psychological self is necessary to maintain a positive sense of self that generalizes to an overall general well-being that is necessary to sustain a family over time. Goodwin (2003) cited emotional and mental health as significant individual-level resources that impact marriage. The men in this study indicated that the lack of psychological strength makes it difficult for many African American men to enter into marriage unions.

The men reported that they viewed the relationship with African American women as a negative aspect of marriage that is unique to African American men. The view of the relationship with Black women appears to be in direct conflict with the passion with which they stated that the relationship with Black women was a positive aspect of marriage unique to Black men. Here the concept of struggle emerges again. The

men stated that they feel as though African American women are inherently able to deal with the present day struggles that he would face and because of their ability to persevere and thrive through adversity an unbreakable bond between African American men and African American women is formed.

Yet they double back in this question and say African American women's tenacity which allows her to thrive in times of struggle also makes her combative and difficult to deal with. Simms-Brown (1982) in her description of the role of the Black woman in the Black family states that many black men through the process of socialization have embraced the idea that the Black female is, indeed, a matriarch. She quotes Lincoln (1970) saying that individuals express the view that black womanhood is the downfall of the Black man in that she is 'evil,' 'hard to get along with,' 'domineering,' 'suspicious,' and 'narrowminded.' These adjectives reflect some of the sentiments of the men in this study's view of African American women 40 years later. The competing but complimentary views of the relationship with African American women is evidence that the relationship between African American men and African American women is complex and dynamic, possibly more so than relationships with women from other races and between men and women of different races. The relationship does not exist on a linear continuum. History and current systemic and contextual factors have changed the way African American men and African American women relate to one another because they have changed the way they feel and express basic emotions such as love and authenticity toward one another.

In the same vein, but still distinctly different, the men name pressure from single Black women on married Black men as a unique and negative aspect of marriage for Black men. They state that the married status of Black men puts them at risk of being pursued by single Black women who are attracted to the perception that the married Black man is responsible and willing to commit to marriage. Respondents suggest the pursuit places unsolicited temptation in the face of many married Black men and that it can make fidelity very difficult for men who are remaining faithful to their wives. The empirical literature does not explore this phenomenon nor does it appear to be something that has been talked about in pop culture literature.

In addition to navigating the dual reality and providing for their immediate families, the men in this study indicated that the kinship responsibility that is likely to come with being married is a negative aspect unique to African American men. Entering a marriage union indicates to family members and extended networks that they are responsible individuals. While this responsibility and commitment is admired in the African American community it also makes them more likely to be called upon to assist others, as they are more likely to be perceived as financially fit and stable enough to help others. Marks and colleagues (2006) term this "knocks of need." In their study on happy and enduring African American marriages, a potent challenge faced by the married couples was caring for and giving support to family, extended family, fictive kin, and acquaintances. The participants in this study likely witnessed or participated in the "knocks of need" firsthand in their own families as many of them were raised entirely by

or in conjunction with grandparents or other more stable relatives or were the children

of the "responsible" married father who cared for his network.

Lassiter's (1998) research indicates that Black children are often cared for by

other family members without legal adoption. The collective nature of African American

culture calls for such assistance to the kinship network, especially if one is able to do so.

The expectation that this role be undertaken can put stress on the Black man who is now

responsible for providing for multiple sets of people. Saying "no" to requests for help

from kin could potentially give the impression that they are not willing to be helpful

which is a stigma in the African American family or that they are not in the position to be

provider for additional people.

Diemer (2002) talks about how profound the role of the provider is in defining

masculinity for African American men. With all assaults on their masculinity in the

outside world, they are not likely to be willing to give the impression that they are not

able to be a provider, thus making them less of a man. The burden and stress of caring for

others if one is not readily able to do so, will certainly have implications for overall well

being and mental health over time.

<center>**Socialization Experiences and Messages**</center>

The last two questions in the focus group were meant to address the final two

research questions which seek to understand how African American men learn about

marriage and what exactly it is they learn about marriage. When thinking about the

socialization of marriage it is important to understand who and/or where the messages

come from, how the messages are transmitted and who the men might identify as the

most salient reference. The men in this study noted the family which is a combination of the kinship network and primary caregivers as important sources of socialization regarding marriage; noteworthy is the magnitude of the role that television also played in the socialization of cultural socialization and gender socialization messages regarding marriage in the African American community. Further the content of the messages is important in understanding how African American men come to believe what they believe regarding the marriage union.

Marriage Socialization

The men stated that they received both implicit and explicit messages about marriage. They cite television, primary caregivers, and the kinship network as sources for their marriage messages.

Media Images

The participants who grew up in a single parent household were very clear about the role that television played in their conceptualization of marriage. All of the participants were school aged children in the 1980's and early 1990's and recall the Cosby Show as their model for what the ideal Black family should look like. The show is important because the way that African American men and women have been presented in the media consistently lacks positive imagery, which is psychologically devastating to African Americans and their own female-male relationships (Jones, 2005). Jones questions how African Americans can love and cherish another African American if they have contempt for themselves because of their racial identity. The Cosby Show is the antithesis to the negative imagery of the African American man, woman, and family.

While the positive images were helpful in giving African Americans a healthy image to relate to, it also presented a false sense of the functioning of relationships and marriage, especially as related to marriage between African American men and women. As in all television shows, the problems that occurred in the episode were always solved by the end of the 30 minute time slot. There were no serious conflicts between Cliff and Claire as it relates to issues that Black couples face such as racism and discrimination and pressure that could put a strain on the marriage. While it is not the media's responsibility to socialize children regarding relationships, for the many African American children who were being raised in a single family home, this was their main reference point. It is important to note that the participants who were raised in two parent households also mentioned the Cosby Show as a place where they received messages about marriage. The difference between them and the participants who were raised in single parent households was that they had real life examples in their caregiver to provide perspective on the reality of relationships. They were able to witness conflict resolution in real time and the difficulties that occur in marriage that are not solved in 30 minutes.

There are several benefits to two-parent married families as was portrayed in the Cosby show. Studies on children and adolescents have found that those who are reared in a two-parent household tend have higher grade point averages in school and are better adjusted overall (Arnett, 2010). There is also evidence that adolescents from two parent households tend to have more positive attitudes toward marriage and expect that their future marriage unions will endure (Hall, 2006). Based on previous research, it would appear that coming from a functional two-parent household would predict career success,

psychological health, and positive attitudes toward marriage in adulthood. While

psychological health was not assessed, the men in this study who came from two-parent

married households had at the minimum attended some college and had more positive

attitudes toward marriage compared to those from single parent homes. They also

appeared to have more confidence that they understand what marriage entails and what it

takes to sustain a marriage. They shared some of the ambivalence that the men from

single parent households expressed, but despite the reasons and feelings of ambiguity that

exist they were still positive that they wanted to marry one day. Healthy role models of

marriage provide a buffer from the external factors that can cause ambivalence. It allows

young men to see that the external barriers can be overcome and that marital satisfaction

can be achieved in spite of.

Kinship Networks

The role of the kinship network was important for study participants. In African

American families, a variety of adults and older children participate in the rearing of any

one Black child (Boyd-Franklin, 2006). The variety of adults gave them several

perspectives from which to glean what marriage relationships should and/or should not be

like. For some of the participants who were raised in single parent households, the variety

caused confusion because it added to the ambiguity that they experience as a result of

other external factors. For others, extended family such as grandparents provided an

example of a lasting and successful relationship that their immediate family did not.

Those who were reared in a two-parent household were able to witness, via their kinship

network that included grandparents, neighbors, church family, etc, alternate forms of lasting relationships.

Socialization Messages

The third research question was designed to glean what messages African American men received about marriage growing up. The men received messages on the importance of spirituality and religion, adherence to traditional gender roles, and maintenance of the family structure are in line with the cultural norms of their ethnic group and typical cultural socialization messages (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; Franklin, 1999; Mattis & Watson, 2009).

Historically, religion and spirituality have been the center of African American community life and folk experience (Mattis & Jagers, 2001). It is not surprising then, that spirituality and religion were emphasized as keys to a successful marriage to these men. The overt segregation that existed in most of the South and the covert discrimination that existed in the North both functioned to make the Black church, the sole institution that belonged entirely to the Black community, a central force in the lives of many African Americans. It was and often still is one of the few places where African American men and women could feel that they were respected for their own talents (Boyd-Franklin, 2003). The centrality of the Black church in the African American family as well as its role in the liberation of African Americans is why the participants in this study have been taught and thus believe that marriage would bring the African American community closer to its religious and spiritual beginnings, thus restoring order in the community. Study participants recalled that from watching married primary caregivers and married

kin, they learned that those who predicated their marriage on Christian principles had lasting marriages. Research substantiates these messages with studies that found that enduring African American couples point to religion as both a source of meaning and a means of coping with life's challenges and that those African American adults who regularly attend religious services report fewer family, work, and financial stresses than their less involved counterparts (Ellison et al., 2001; Mattis, 2002; McAdoo, 1995). It is important to note that although women are more conventionally religious than men, African American men historically have experienced substantial direct and indirect benefits from organized religious life as religious institutions provide jobs, political position and support, and social supports (Mattis, 2009). In addition, African American men benefit from the traditional gender roles that are promoted in the church (Hill, 2002).

Adherence to traditional gender roles was emphasized by the participants as a message that they received about marriage. They learned that there are certain things that a woman does and certain things that a man does. Their report focused heavily on the role of the man and not so much on the woman. Being a provider is the primary role of the man of the house. A man's success and ultimately his definition of masculinity has been primarily judged by himself and many others by how well he provides for his family's needs and wants (Doyle, 1995). Inability to be the provider precludes the man from demanding or expecting nurturance from his wife. The literature discusses the contrast between the Eurocentric views of manhood and Africentric views of manhood and how the navigation between them and the futile attempt to adhere to both views causes distress in African American men (Diemer, 2002; Hammond & Mattis, 2005; Lawrence-Webb et

al., 2004). Despite this, many of the men in this study believed that the only way that a

marriage can work is to adhere to the traditional gender role of the man being the

provider.

What was very interesting is the way that the participants operationalized

provider. The term of the breadwinner has been used interchangeably with provider,

indicating that being a provider means that one is able to provide financially for one's

family. The participants who were raised in a two parent household spoke about being a

provider in a different way. They spoke of a man who is able to lead his family by being

a good example, making good decisions, and a man who is able and willing to show

affection to his family. They were possibly able to conceptualize the provider role in a

more dynamic way because they had a role model to show them that while financial

support is necessary to maintain the basic needs of the family; responsibility, love, and

nurturing are also important elements to being a provider essential to the optimal

functioning of the family. This definition of the provider is more in line with the

androgynous style of relating that is defined in the African centered view of the provider

role and masculinity (Hunter & Davis, 1994). The emasculation of African American

men throughout history and the significant challenges they currently face fulfilling key

gender role tasks, including limited access to educational opportunities and wealth, lack

of access to other resources for advancement, and dislocation from their families due to

large scale prosecution and incarceration rates (Lawrence-Webb et al., 2004) make it

difficult for them to fully engage in the Africentric perspective of being a provider. I

postulate that they may be more invested in making sure they feel and are perceived as

the primary provider and head of the household even though they expect their wives to work and are willing to share in household and nurturing duties. The assertion of masculinity is more important than daily functioning, i.e., who makes more, who does what chore.

The role of the head of the household goes beyond providing financial support according to participants in this study. It is about leading his family and making good decisions for his family. It is also about maintaining the family unit in the good times and the bad. Historically slavery precluded the African man's ability to protect his family from separation and estrangement. Any emotional ties the enslaved Africans sought to create were consistently undermined by dominant beliefs and social conditions (Pinderhughes, 2002). These conditions made it very difficult to adhere to the traditional West African traditions that held strong family ties (Wright & Fernander, 2005). Yet the African family persevered over time, organizing themselves into family structures and thus made their own adaptations to family life in America (Staples & Johnson, 1993). The role that the African American man played in the maintenance of the African American family is often overlooked. The enduring struggle of the last 150 years to attain basic human rights such as the fight for the right to vote and the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, Black men were at the forefront. They were actively advocating for change and receipt of basic human rights. They have sought to protect their families and be leaders of their communities while simultaneously trying to shape their own self-image against society's stereotypes (American Counseling Association, 1998; Wright & Fernander, 2005).

78

Being a provider for both the community and their families by means of being a leader is an important message that the men in this study learned about marriage. The message is no doubt connected to the role that spirituality and religiosity and traditional gender roles play in the African American community. The men reared in two-parent households indicated that love was rarely mentioned to them as a recipe for lasting marriage and "sticking it out." This is not to indicate that love is not a salient component in lasting marriages, rather the components of adherence of religious faith encompasses love in its tenets. Mattis and Watson (2009) address this saying that for African Americans, hope, love, humility, forgiveness, and the capacity to survive and thrive even in the face of overwhelming suffering and evil come from the tradition of linking their plight to the plight of prominent figures from the Bible and Q'uran. When facing turbulence in the marriage and family for various reasons, it is the values from these religions that must be upheld in order to sustain the marriage and maintain the family unit. As the head of the household it is the man's job to hold all family members accountable for the aforementioned values to ensure that the family unit remains intact.

There was also a distinct difference in the view of the maintenance the family between those who were reared in a two parent home and those from single parent homes. Those from two parent households strongly endorsed the idea of maintaining the marriage no matter what and thus maintaining the family. Those from single parent households endorsed the maintenance of the family structure, but stated that they learned that one should remain in the marriage only so long as the positives of the marriage outweigh the bad. They likely learned that family by way of fatherhood to the children

could be maintained even if he is not physically living in the home and the parents are not married. In the African American community, although a significant proportion of African American children do indeed come from single-parent homes, a father or father figure is present, even if he does not reside in the home on a full-time basis (McAdoo & Young, 2009).

Theoretical Summary of Findings

When looked at as a whole, the one overarching theme that recurred over and over again was that of "manhood." Manhood and the way it is defined, attained, maintained and expressed was a consistent vein that ran throughout each of the focus groups. Within the concept of manhood, the role of the provider who is responsible for leading the family by means of economic viability and psychological and emotional strength was paramount in the decision making process regarding their individual decisions to engage in a marriage union. External barriers such as the imbalance of the sex ratio, lack of role models, daily stress of Black masculinity influence how these men rate their ability to establish and maintain a stable, happy marriage union because they cause them to question their ability to be a provider, a role that has been shown to be the most important factor for Black men when defining masculinity (Diemer, 2002). O'Neil's (1981) Gender Role Conflict (GRC) is a fitting theoretical construct to frame how the experience of manhood for the African American men in this study influences their marriage attitudes. GRC is defined as psychological state in which socialized gender roles have negative consequences for the person or others. GRC occurs when rigid, sexist, or restrictive gender roles result in restriction, devaluation, or violation of others or

self (O'Neil et al., 1995). This construct is based on the premise that during early

gender role socialization, young boys internalize the Masculine Mystique and Value

System that results in a central theme of a fear of femininity, which results in patterns of

gender role conflict and strain (Walker, 2009).

Furthermore GRC, occurs in situational contexts when men (a) experience a

gender role transition or face difficult developmental tasks over the life span; (b) deviate

from or violate gender role norms of masculinity ideology; (c) try to meet or fail to meet

gender role norms of masculinity ideology; (d) experience discrepancies between their

real self-concepts and their ideal self-concepts based on gender role stereotypes and

masculinity ideology; (e) personally devalue, restrict, or violate themselves for failing to

meet masculinity ideology norms; (f) experience personal devaluations, restrictions, and

violations from others for conforming to or deviating from masculinity ideology; and (g)

personally devalue, restrict, or violate others because of their deviation from or

conformity to masculinity ideology norms (O'Neil, 2008). Based on these premises, there

is evidence from the men's responses in this study that when thinking about embarking

on marriage, Black men can often find themselves experiencing gender role conflict.

Masculinity is viewed as developing in a cultural context through the process of gender

role socialization, whereby men internalize the conceptions of masculinity held by their

culture (Wade, 1998). For African American men they exist in what W.E.B. DuBois

coined double consciousness. He posited that the process of double consciousness

involves the membership in two differing groups or communities, feeling pressured to

adhere to both sets of standards and or evaluating yourself on the basis of others'

perceptions (Walker, 2009). This experience of double consciousness creates a gender role conflict for African American men when determining their individual fit for marriage. It sets the stage for the situational contexts that would cause gender role conflict. The negotiation of the two sets of ideologies has been shown to have negative consequences for African American men that have only been mediated by a strong sense of self via racial identity. Wade (1996) found that for middle class African American men racial identity status was a significant predictor of gender role conflict when racial identity was externally defined, whereas when racial identity was internally defined there was no relationship. Brewer (1998) found that endorsement of traditional male role, inordinate investment in pursuit of success, and restrictions around gender role expression lead to depression and marital dissatisfaction among African American men. When forming identification with a group Tafjel (1978) asserted that people choose in-groups that maximize their positive social identity. As rewards from in group membership increase, the more likely it is that a person will use in-group goals as guides for their behavior. Thus, when in-groups provide many rewards (e.g., emotional security, status, income, and services) they tend to increase the person's commitment to the in-group (Wade, 1998). For Black men, who constantly are navigating pluralistic environments, the in-group they choose to identify with likely is dictated by the space they are functioning in at any given moment. Also while they might not experience the positives that White men enjoy as it relates to achieving the masculinity ideals outlined in hegemonic models, they witness daily the benefits gained by White men and continue to strive toward those same ideals with the goal of also being able to receive said benefits.

82

However, there are barriers in the form of overt and institutionalized racism that make the achievement of the hegemonic masculinity ideals very difficult for African American men; in turn causing internal conflict that they have been unable to achieve an important aspect of their masculine identity.

Pivotal in the underpinnings of Gender Role Conflict is the socialization of the masculine gender role; a socialization that largely includes a fear of femininity. While I believe that the theoretical underpinnings and situational contexts outlined in Gender Role Conflict as it relates to the way that African American men conceptualize marriage as a function of their manhood is valid in many ways, I believe that the depiction of the polarity of manhood and femininity may not be representative of how African American men are socialized to conceptualize gender roles. Historically, African American men have been depicted as infantile brutes that lacked intelligence. Thus, the major plight of African American men has been to assert themselves as "men." Images of Black men picketing and marching with signs that simply state "I am a man" are plentiful and remain as visual artifacts of their struggle toward recognition as men not boys. So it is likely that their gender role conflict does not occur as a measure of how far they deviate from femininity as much as it is how much they have deviated from "boyhood" and adhere to "manhood." Again, for African American men manhood is largely defined by their ability to be providers for their families. In marriage, that means being able to be economically stable while also being able to be a strong psychological and emotional pillar for one's wife and children. For African American men who are married to African American women this means breaking barriers to financial stability and having the

psychological and emotional competence to negotiate the stress of the double consciousness of Black masculinity for himself, the stress of Black femininity for his wife, as well as socializing his children to cope with the stress that they will encounter as gendered racial beings. This is a tall task that a "boy" would not be able to undertake. The question of how much they have deviated from boyhood in this particular domain is likely why the men in this study experience conflict and ambivalence about their ability to take on and be successful in this role; especially for those who report not having a real life reference point.

African American men's attitudes toward marriage are overall positive but their individual decision to marry is dictated by if and how they believe their masculinity will be established, affirmed, and/or maintained by the role of being a provider. Those who are able to manage the gender role conflict associated with provider role in marriage will likely choose to marry while those who are not may not marry.

Implications

The present findings suggest that there are systemic, family and individual issues related to the development of African American men that affect how they conceptualize and learn about the institution of marriage. With manhood at the crux of the belief in their self-efficacy to establish and maintain a stable and happy marriage union, intervention should be focused on how African American men define their masculine identity. Clinicians should work with African American men in helping them to affirm their identity as African American men as defined by them and cultural norms that promote adaptive functioning.

Despite the valid reasons to feel ambivalent or negatively about marriage, all the participants in this study were interested in marriage. This is important for counselors as much of the research and popular culture have given the impression that African American men are not interested in the institution of marriage. The results from this study indicate that perhaps the focus should shift from trying to figure out why Black men are not getting married to helping them cope and reframe the experiences that affect their self efficacy beliefs about their ability to establish and maintain intimate relationships. The dynamic relationship between African American men and women is also important for family and couple therapists to conceptualize their relationship from a holistic perspective. They must take into account history and present day struggles with racism and discrimination, which are unique for each party, when conceptualizing relationship or marital issues. The role of the kinship network is very important in the survival of African American families and as such it can be posited that it could play the same role in the maintenance of marriages. Clinicians should consider involving members of the kinship network in the treatment, especially to help with issues that include navigation of external factors that place strain on African American marriages; keeping in mind what these men named as barriers and negatives related to marriage unique to African American men.

Marriage is important for the upward mobility of the African American community. Dixon (2009) states, that both black men and women benefit financially from getting married. An increase in SES can have positive outcomes for overall well-being, marital satisfaction which would in turn have affects other outcomes such as parenting

style and coping which have effects on children outcomes. Because economics can have a significant impact on the maintenance of the marriage, therapists and policy makers should make this a priority when thinking about ways to help maintain marriage unions. Therapists should work with couples on ways to communicate and manage finances. Policy makers should consider extra tax breaks for married couples in the first five years of marriage. This would allow them to keep more of their income and help them to build assets.

All of the participants indicated that they learned about marriage in part or totally from media outlets. This calls for a challenge to networks to provide more programming on healthy African American families. Programming like The Cosby Show, Fresh Prince of Bel Air, and Family Matters had a great impact on children and adolescents growing up in that era, but those types have shows have long since left the air waves. Children growing up in this era have limited exposure to positive images of African American families and thus have no frame of reference if there is not a married unit in their homes. Media plays an important role in the perpetuation of stereotypes and should be held responsible for the messages they present to our society. In the meantime, clinicians and educators should be working to deconstruct the stereotypes that are perpetuated in the media and provide alternate outlets for African American children and adolescents to experience healthy African American families and marriage through mentorship programs, the arts, books, music, religious institutions etc.

Religion and spirituality are at the center of the African American community and should be explored and integrated into work with African American families. The church

serves multiple functions for the Black family. It is a place where they learn coping skills for dealing with "the world", a place where they can receive support in areas that are lacking or need extra support in the home, a network of adults for children to learn from, and a space where their experiences can be validated. Clinicians working in the African American community should work alongside the churches and/or mosques in their community as these organizations can give one access to people who otherwise would not seek services.

The results of this study provide some information about how marriage is conceptualized by African American men. There are many factors and relationships involved in the socialization of African American men as it relates to marriage so they should not be approached from a single perspective or single method of treatment. The dynamic nature of the issue requires a dynamic conceptualization and treatment plan.

Limitations

This study sought to explore how African American men conceptualize marriage, how they learn about marriage and what they learn about marriage. The nature of qualitative research allows for in depth exploration of phenomena by asking open ended questions, allowing participants to share the expertise of their experiences. The in depth exploration allows for a smaller sample size en route to achieving saturation. This study utilized focus group strategy with 17 men between the ages of 18-34 years, which is acceptable when conducting semi-structured focus group interviews (Creswell et al., 2007). Yet, 17 people within the restricted age range are not enough to allow for generalization to all African American men. However, it is important to note that by the

fourth focus group the same themes that had come up in the previous groups were repeated without the significant addition of new themes; indicating saturation. Another limitation is that all the men with the exception of one had attended some college. It is possible that attainment of higher education would have influence on the responses that were given as well as their overall life experiences. Also the fact that the researcher was a woman could have influenced the way the participants responded to the focus group questions. Some might have tried to present a more desirable self while others might have taken it as their opportunity to let African American women via the researcher know their experience without censor. In addition, there were no direct questions that explored the role of racial, cultural, or gendered racial socialization in the conceptualization of marriage. The conclusions made about these socialization processes were inferred based on the comments from the participants. While there are limitations to the study, great care was taken with the use of strategies such as interrater reliability checks and member checks were conducted to ensure reliability, rigor, and validity of the study results.

Further Directions for Research

This study presented data that suggests how African American men conceptualize marriage, how they learn about marriage, and what they learned about marriage. It appears that there is a gap between thoughts and feelings about marriage and marriage behaviors. The next step in research is to explore what makes African American men who are married actually move from the positive attitudes and despite the external barriers enter into a marriage union. Also it was clear that the kinship network played a part in the socialization of the men in this study on the topic of marriage both implicitly

and explicitly. It is important to explicitly assess how racial socialization, gendered

racial socialization, and cultural socialization contribute to the way that African

American men conceptualize marriage and their roles in marriage. In the same vein, it is

important to find out if a non-college educated sample would have similar results to the

college educated men in this study. Also, it would be valuable to explore the socialization

of marriage in an adolescent sample. An adolescent sample would illuminate the

messages and methods of transmission during the developmental period transitioning into

adulthood.

APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

Introduction-

Thanks for coming to participate in the focus group. As the letter and flyers explained, this is a study that is exploring African American men's attitudes toward marriage. **We will be meeting for about 2 hours today**. We have a series of questions that we would like to ask you. There are no right or wrong answers. We just want to know the thoughts that you have about each of the questions or topics. We hope to allow each of you the chance to answer the questions. But as this is voluntary, do not feel as if you have to answer each question. If you are not comfortable with a question, please let us know. Also, if you do not understand a question, let us know that as well.

There may be times when you have an answer for a question, but the person in front of you says what you wanted to say. It is fine if you repeat what was said before you if that is how you wanted to answer the question. We hope that as you listen to each other, that new ideas and responses will come to you. If that happens, feel free to answer each question more than one time. Also, feel free to respond to one another in the group. Although we would like for one person at a time to speak, you may address each other, ask questions of one another, or respond to comments. We would like this to be a group discussion guided by our questions.

Let's start with introductions (Facilitators introduce selves) (Participants will be given or can select fake names with nametags. Have them introduce themselves according to their fake names). Feel free to share something about yourself with the group if you wish. Do you have any questions for us before we begin?

Focus Group Questions
1. How do you feel about the idea of getting married?
    Prompt: In other words how do you think and feel about marriage as in institution in general and how do you feel about it in relation to African American people?
2. How do you think African American men feel about marriage overall?
3. What are some positive things about being married?
4. Are there positive things about marriage unique to African American men?
5. What are some negative things about being married?
6. Are there negative things about marriage unique to African American men?
7. How did you learn about marriage growing up?
    Prompt: In what manner and from who/whom/where were marriage messages presented to you when you were growing up?

8. What did you learn about marriage growing up?
    Prompt: Exactly what were the messages you received about marriage when you were growing up?

Standard facilitation prompts:

Thank you for sharing.

Does anyone want to respond to what he said?

Does anyone else want to respond? What were you thinking as he was sharing?

_____ do you want to answer this question?

Standard elaboration prompts:

What I heard you say is _____. (Simply summarize or paraphrase.) Do you want to add anything else?

End of section prompt:

Before we move on, does anyone else want to share anything else?

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHICS FORM

1. Age: _____

2. Marital Status: _____single _____married _____engaged
   _____committed relationship

3. Number of Children: ____0 _____1 ____2 _____3 ____4 _____>4

4. Highest Grade Level Completed: _____ Less than 8th grade, _____, Some High School _____,12th grade _____, Some College _____, Bachelor's Degree _____ Graduate/professional degree

5. Type of household you were reared: _____, two parent _____, single parent (mom) _____, single parent (dad) _____, grandparent _____, extended family _____ other

6. No. of member in household growing up:_____

7. Parents income: _____10,000-20,000 _____20,001-30,000 _____30,001-40,000 _____ 40,001-50,000 _____ 50,001-75,000 _____>75,000

8. Your current income: _____10,000-20,000 _____20,001-30,000 _____30,001-40,000 _____ 40,001-50,000 _____ 50,001-75,000 _____>75,000

9. Religion: _____Christian _____Catholic _____Muslim _____Jewish _____Other

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANTS

Name	Focus Group	Age	Relationship Status	Parent Marital Status Growing Up
Cliff	April 28	32	Committed Relationship	Single Parent
Maurice	April 28	34	Divorced/Currently Single	Married (Step-Father and Bio Mom)
Yannick	April 28	24	Single	Divorced/Single Parent
Thomas	April 28	29	Single	Married
Weezy	May 5	28	Single	Single Parent
DJ	May 5	29	Single	Single Parent
Brad	May 5	26	Single	Married
Anthony	May 5	30	Single	Single Parent
Marquis	May 5	29	Single	Single Parent
Duwuan	May 5	32	Single	Single Parent
Kenny	May 5	29	Single	Single Parent
Reggie	May 9	27	Single	Married
Scott	May 9	27	Single	Married
Brandon	May 9	28	Single	Married
Ryan	May 23	30	Single	Married
Randall	May 23	31	Single	Single
Jamison	May 23	28	Single	Divorced/Single Parent

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VITA

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As a doctoral student in the Counseling Psychology program at Loyola University Chicago, Rabiatu worked on many research projects and served as Doctoral Advisory Committee president. She also did volunteer work in different schools and community agencies throughout the Chicagoland area.

Rabiatu is currently completing her pre doctoral internship at Harvard Medical School/The Children's Hospital Boston. She plans to obtain her license to practice as a psychologist and obtain a full time faculty position. Her scholarly interests are centered on the identity development of African American boys and adolescents.