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COLLEGE-EDUCATED, AFRICAN AMERICAN
WOMEN'S MARITAL CHOICES

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in Family Sciences in
the College of Agriculture, Food, and Environment
at the University of Kentucky

By

Katherine Oliver

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Claudia J. Heath, Ph.D., Professor of Family Sciences

Lexington, Kentucky

2016

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

COLLEGE-EDUCATED, AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S MARITAL CHOICES

This study explores the desire to marry, *marriageable* mate criteria, and marital choices/options as they pertain to college-educated, African American women within today's society. A purposive, nationally based sample ($N = 95$) of never married, college-educated, African American women (i.e., 18 to 40 years of age) was gathered via an online survey accessed by an emailed link. A mixed methods approach was utilized within the survey design, followed by data analyses (i.e., frequencies, two-way analyses) interpreted through a theoretical framework of social exchange. Areas discussed include life goals of marriage, cohabitation, and career; romantic barriers; the perceived availability of marriageable men; and desired traits for a marriageable mate. Partner traits assessed ranged from being character based (e.g., respectful, spiritual, swag, never incarcerated), and were broadened to include educational, financial, and ethnic preferences for a potential partner. Findings showed that respondents possessed a strong desire to marry, the greatest hindrance to entering a relationship was the lack of mates, and many were interested in looking for a potential partner outside of their own ethnicity. Findings were not statistically significant; however, the insight gained further informs this understudied area of research while having broad socio-cultural implications for families and communities.

KEYWORDS: African American Relationships, Black Marriage Market, Marriage, College Educated, African American Women

Katherine Oliver

July 28, 2016

COLLEGE-EDUCATED, AFRICAN AMERICAN
WOMEN'S MARITAL CHOICES

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

During an era of liberation and professed equality, minorities, specifically African Americans, are typically depicted in lower income and impoverished socioeconomic strata. This is a noticeable trend in the professional literature when researching marriage choice among African Americans, which focuses primarily on low income samples. Regardless of socioeconomic status (SES), however, African Americans are entering marital unions at a consistently lower rate in comparison to Caucasians. Low income SES is only applicable to one-fourth of African Americans (Trask & Hamon, 2007). So what factors can help explain the lower rate of marriage for African American females who are more economically stable and independent? This study will look at the perspectives of college-educated, African American women (i.e., between the ages of 18 and 40) regarding the impact of the “marriage [market] squeeze” on their marital aspirations (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000, p. 792).

The marriage market is exhibiting a *marriage squeeze* for African American women due to the limited numbers of available, “marriageable”, African American men (e.g., defined by employment and earnings) to choose from to form a relationship or marriage (Lichter, McLaughlin, Kephart, & Landry, 1992, p. 784). The *marriage squeeze* has developed due to a profound sex ratio imbalance where women outnumber *marriageable* men, three to one. Why are there so few African American men and so many African American women? First, high numbers of African American men are incarcerated at some point during their lifetime (Banks, 2011a). In fact, one in three African American men will potentially be incarcerated at some point (Hattery & Smith,

2007; King & Allen, 2009; Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993). Secondly, low college attainment by African American men and occupational/financial hindrances negatively affect African American men's marriageability status (Banks, 2011a). African American men face substantial unemployment in the job market, especially when reintegrating back into society with a felony record (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000; Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993; King 1999). A mortality gap also exists with a large cohort of marrying age men (i.e., between 20 and 30 years old) dying prematurely, being coupled with the disproportionately high number of African American men being incarcerated, which together are substantially depleting the numbers of available African American men in the marriage market. Lastly, *marriageable* African American men with higher academic learning, income, and status tend to remove themselves from the "marriageable pool of men" (Lichter et al., 1992, p. 784) by either enjoying bachelorhood or by marrying non-black women (Dyson, 2007). Additionally, many African American men are inadvertently removed from this *marriageable pool* due to not being employed or making insufficient income (Lichter et al., 1992). All of these causes have produced the effect of a *marriage squeeze* for African American women.

Historically, since the 1960s, a trend for African American women to remain unmarried has existed. This is especially true for women 30 and younger, where there is a 50% likelihood of being unmarried (Gordon, 2006). Cohabitation rather than marriage is more prevalent for African American women. Hattery and Smith (2007) posited that cohabitation could be replacing marriage. Gordon (2006) stated in an interview on NPR that African American women who were unable to find a marriage partner tended to decide to either climb the corporate ladder, no longer felt the need for a man, felt resigned

to dating for the rest of their lives, or had decided to no longer look for “the one” but rather the one for right now. Clarke (2011) concluded after studying the relationship styles and dynamics of college-educated African American women, that “black women’s low likelihood of marriage is conditioned by the low value of their romantic options rather than the low prioritization that they give to romance” (p.157). African American women do desire to marry (Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993), but the lack of marriages still continue due to the intense competition for *marriageable* men within the African American marriage market. Thus, what are the options for well-educated, African American women when there seem to be no men to marry?

This study addresses the perspectives of marital choice for African American women with college degrees by exploring their desire to marry and the traits deemed necessary for a man to be considered *marriageable*. The guiding research question for this study is, “What are the considerations regarding mate choice and marriage for single/never married, college-educated, African American women in contemporary society?” Existing literature has mainly focused on poorer African American populations and the barriers that prevent marriage within that population (i.e., economic stability and marriage market availability) (Edin & Reed, 2005; Lichter et al., 1992; King, 1999). However, for the sample used in the study reported here, economic stability is defined as the ability to be economically independent based on one’s own means. Economic independence is not the objective of this report since it is not a factor in the lack of marriage entry for self-sustaining, college-educated, African American women. Rather, the limited marriage market is the leading concern for the sample and will, therefore, be

the foundation for understanding the lack of marriage entry for this subpopulation of African American women.

An initial step in exploring marital choice is to define a *marriageable mate*. Secondly, whether or not one desires to marry or pursue other life goals must be taken into consideration. This research addresses these elements, along with whether mate availability seems to increase or decrease as educational achievements increase. The claim that African American women lower their standards for a *marriageable mate* as they age will also be discussed. These and other research questions to be addressed are as follows:

Among never married, college-educated, African American women from 18 – 40 years of age:

#1: What are the criteria for a marriageable mate?

#2: Does a man's educational level influence his marriageability in the eyes of women?

#3: What is the level of importance of marriage, cohabitation, and a career?

#4: Is cohabitation a desirable alternative to marriage?

#5: Does being raised in a married versus single-parent home influence these women's personal desires to marry as adults?

#6: Does attending an HBCU improve a woman's opportunity to meet marriageable African American men?

#7: Is ethnicity a strong basis for choosing a marriageable mate?

#8: Do college-educated, African American women perceive that they decrease their standards for a marriageable mate as they age?

At points throughout the study, comparisons are drawn between subgroups within the sample. These subgroups include respondents in their *twenties* and *thirties*, undergraduate and graduate degree holders, and women who grew up in married and single-parent homes.

A mixed method approach allows this study to embrace both a quantitative/statistical perspective along with distinctly qualitative/personalized insight. This manuscript thesis presents the research query, process, and findings in a detailed, three chapter format. Chapter one presents an introduction to the study. Chapter two is the manuscript in this manuscript style thesis. Chapter three summarizes the study with an emphasis on findings.

Data were gathered via an emailed invitation and subsequent completion of an online survey specifically designed for this study. Four prerequisites were given to participate in the survey: being female, African American, between the ages of 18 to 40, and possessing a college degree (i.e., associate's degree or higher). Only respondents meeting all four criteria were allowed to proceed to the survey. Participants self-identified as being of "African American" heritage, other black cultures were not specified. Several professional and academic organizations chose to allow/participate in dispersing the email invitation to their listservs. A purposive sample of 95 never married, college-educated, African American women was gathered. No identifying information was used for survey responses. Participant involvement was voluntary and responses were anonymous. IRB approval was provided for this study, with subsequent data collection being completed in 2014.

It is the intention of this study to explore and describe the topic of the *marriage squeeze* and its effects on marital choices for this understudied subpopulation of African American women. This study approaches the topic of marriage choice within a cultural paradigm, and thus, looks at ethnic specific relationship and partner preferences. This is not a race study (i.e., based on physical phenotypes/characteristics); rather, this is a descriptive, culturally specific study regarding marital choices of today's African American woman. Thus, social and cultural elements are discussed when looking at the marital choices of this specific ethnic group of women. This research will hopefully improve the understanding of the African American marriage crisis and will inform researchers and the public alike of potential solutions and research implications.

Chapter 2:

College-educated, African American Women's Marital Choices

During an era of liberation and professed equality, minorities, specifically African Americans, are typically depicted in lower income and impoverished socioeconomic strata. This is a noticeable trend in the professional literature when researching marriage choice among African Americans, which focuses primarily on low income samples. Regardless of socioeconomic status (SES), however, African Americans are entering marital unions at a consistently lower rate in comparison to Caucasians. Low income SES is only applicable to one-fourth of African Americans (Trask & Hamon, 2007). So what factors can help explain the lower rate of marriage for African American females who are more economically stable and independent? This study will look at the perspectives of college-educated, African American women (i.e., between the ages of 18 and 40) regarding the impact of the “marriage [market] squeeze” on their marital aspirations (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000, p. 792).

The marriage market is exhibiting a *marriage squeeze* for African American women due to the limited numbers of available, “marriageable” African American men (e.g., defined by employment and earnings) to choose from to form a relationship or marriage (Lichter, McLaughlin, Kephart, & Landry, 1992, p. 784). The *marriage squeeze* has developed due to a profound sex ratio imbalance where women outnumber *marriageable* men, three to one. Why are there so few African American men and so many African American women? First, high numbers of African American men are incarcerated at some point during their lifetime (Banks, 2011a). In fact, one in three African American men will potentially be incarcerated at some point (Hattery & Smith,

2007; King & Allen, 2009; Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993). Secondly, low college attainment by African American men and occupational/financial hindrances negatively affect African American men's marriageability status (Banks, 2011a). African American men face substantial unemployment in the job market, especially when reintegrating back into society with a felony record (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000; Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993; King 1999). A mortality gap also exists with a large cohort of marrying age men (i.e., between 20 and 30 years old) dying prematurely, being coupled with the disproportionately high number of African American men being incarcerated, which together are substantially depleting the numbers of available African American men in the marriage market.

Lastly, *marriageable* African American men with higher academic learning, income, and status tend to remove themselves from the "marriageable pool of men" (Lichter et al., 1992, p. 784) by either enjoying bachelorhood or by marrying non-black women (Dyson, 2007). For instance, African American men earning more than \$100,000/yr. marry less often than men earning around \$50-60,000/yr. (Banks, 2011a). Not only are African American men, in general, a highly desired group in the marriage market, but often bachelorhood can become a way of life for many otherwise *marriageable* men. Banks posits that if a man can have an endless choice of partners, unless he has a desire to marry, he will go on enjoying playing the field of the single life... possibly for the rest of his life (2011a). Additionally, many African American men are inadvertently removed from this *marriageable pool* due to not being employed or making insufficient income (Lichter et al., 1992). All of these causes have produced the effect of a *marriage squeeze* for African American women.

Historically, since the 1960s, a trend for African American women to remain unmarried has existed. This is especially true for women 30 and younger, where there is a 50% likelihood of being unmarried (Gordon, 2006). Cohabitation rather than marriage is more prevalent for African American women. Hattery and Smith (2007) posited that cohabitation could be replacing marriage. Gordon (2006) stated in an interview on NPR that African American women who were unable to find a marriage partner tended to decide to either climb the corporate ladder, no longer felt the need for a man, felt resigned to dating for the rest of their lives, or had decided to no longer look for “the one” but rather the one for right now. Clarke (2011) concluded after studying the relationship styles and dynamics of college-educated, African American women, that “black women’s low likelihood of marriage is conditioned by the low value of their romantic options rather than the low prioritization that they give to romance” (p.157). African American women do desire to marry (Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993), but the lack of marriages still continues due to the intense competition for *marriageable* men within the African American marriage market. Thus, what are the options for well-educated, African American women when there seem to be no men to marry?

This study addresses the perspectives of marital choice for African American women with college degrees by exploring their desire to marry and the traits deemed necessary for a man to be considered *marriageable*. The guiding research question for this study is, “What are the considerations regarding mate choice and marriage for single/never married, college-educated, African American women in contemporary society?” Existing literature has mainly focused on poorer African American populations and the barriers that prevent marriage within that population (i.e., economic stability and

marriage market availability) (Edin & Reed, 2005; Lichter et al., 1992; King, 1999).

However, for the sample used in the study reported here, economic stability is defined as the ability to be economically independent based on one's own means. Economic independence is not the objective of this report since it is not a factor in the lack of marriage entry for self-sustaining, college-educated, African American women. Rather, the limited marriage market is the leading concern for the sample and will, therefore, be the foundation for understanding the lack of marriage entry for this subpopulation of African American women.

An initial step in exploring marital choice is to define a *marriageable mate*. Secondly, whether or not one desires to marry or pursue other life goals must be taken into consideration. This research addresses these elements, along with whether mate availability seems to increase or decrease as educational achievements increase. The claim that African American women lower their standards for a *marriageable mate* as they age will also be discussed. Alternatives to marriage (i.e., cohabitation, career, lowering personal standards, etc.) are researched within this study. These and other research questions to be addressed are as follows:

Among never married, college-educated, African American women from 18 – 40 years of age:

#1: What are the criteria for a marriageable mate?

#2: Does a man's educational level influence his marriageability in the eyes of women?

#3: What is the level of importance of marriage, cohabitation, and a career?

#4: Is cohabitation a desirable alternative to marriage?

#5: Does being raised in a married versus single-parent home influence these women's personal desires to marry as adults?

#6: Does attending an HBCU improve a woman's opportunity to meet marriageable African American men?

#7: Is ethnicity a strong basis for choosing a marriageable mate?

#8: Do college-educated, African American women perceive that they decrease their standards for a marriageable mate as they age?

At points throughout the study, comparisons are drawn between subgroups within the sample. These subgroups include respondents in their *twenties* and *thirties*, undergraduate and graduate degree holders, and women who grew up in married and single-parent homes.

Data were gathered via an emailed invitation and subsequent completion of an online survey specifically designed for this study. Several professional and academic organizations chose to allow/participate in dispersing the email invitation to their listservs. A purposive sample of 95 never married, college-educated, African American women was gathered. No identifying information was used for survey responses. Participant involvement was voluntary and responses were anonymous. IRB approval was provided for this study, with subsequent data collection being completed in 2014.

A mixed method approach allows this study to embrace both a quantitative/statistical perspective along with distinctly qualitative/personalized insight. According to King (1999), coping strategies of never married, African American women, and especially single-mothers, have not had much discussion within research. It is the intention of this study to explore and describe the topic of the *marriage squeeze* and its

effects for the understudied subpopulation of well-educated, never married, African American women. This will hopefully improve the understanding of the African American marriage crisis and will inform researchers and the public alike of potential solutions and research implications.

Literature Review

Where have all the African American men gone?

African American children (i.e., especially boys), African American men, and poorer populations are largely targeted by systematic forms of racism within today's society. The *Cradle to Prison Pipeline* (Edelman, 2007, p. 219) targets African American men, minorities, and poorer groups for crime and incarceration starting from birth/childhood. Edelman (2007) states that "America's *Cradle to Prison Pipeline* (is a) crisis that funnels tens of thousands of poor children every year down life paths that lead to arrest, conviction, incarceration, and death" (p. 219). African American boys are targeted by corrections within the school/juvenile justice system at early ages, are over diagnosed with learning disabilities, and are often confronted with a harsh environment that promotes aggression/fighting (Hanson, McArdle, & Wilson, 2007). These are just several examples of how the *Cradle to Prison Pipeline* directs African American men towards incarceration due to discriminatory targeting of a population by systematic powers of influence and control.

This becomes exceedingly evident when taking into account that the United States boasts the highest incarceration rate of any developed country in the world (Hattery & Smith, 2007; Hanson et al., 2007). The US imprisons 737/100,000 of its citizens, with Russia seconding the US in incarceration rates at 611/100,000 citizens. Since the *War on*

Drugs in 1972, the Nixon and Reagan administrations incorporated numerous changes to drug and incarceration laws which drastically increased incarceration rates. Examples of these legal changes include:

- Harsher penalties for drug offenses by turning previous misdemeanor charges into felony charges.
- Increased mandatory minimums for time required to serve out conviction sentences.
- Harsher sentences on drugs targeting/circulating within poorer populations (i.e., crack cocaine) while not doing the same for more expensive drugs that circulate in high society/wealthy demographics (i.e., cocaine).
- Creating the “three strikes law” (Hanson et al., 2007, p. 214) where with a third felony conviction, one is imprisoned for life. (Hanson et al., 2007; Hattery & Smith, 2007)

By 2007, 45% of all state and federal inmates were imprisoned for non-violent crimes, with African Americans being disproportionately and highly represented among non-violent drug offenders.

African American men are disproportionately imprisoned within the US, especially younger men of marrying age between 20 and 30 (Banks, 2011a). According to 2002 and 2005 US Census data (as presented by King & Allen, 2009), African Americans comprise between 12 to 14% of the entire US population, with African American males accounting for six percent of this subpopulation at most. Within this six percent, there is a one in three chance of being incarcerated at any point during one’s lifetime (King & Allen, 2009). To look at racial comparisons, only four percent

(44/1000 men) of white men will be incarcerated at some point during their lifetimes, while 28.5% (285/1000 men) of African American men will be incarcerated (Hattery & Smith, 2007). Although African American men, women, and children represent only 12 to 14% of the US population (Hattery & Smith, 2007; Hanson et al., 2007), yet they comprise 60% of all those who are incarcerated (Edin & Reed, 2005; King, 1999). Two-thirds of the entire incarcerated male population within the US prison system are African American men (Hattery & Smith, 2007; Hanson et al., 2007). Repercussions of incarceration include poor employment opportunities, loss in financial earning potential, restricted financial and housing assistance, etc. With limited options for survival, recidivism/repeat arrests of re-entering felons is likely, which perpetuates the cycle of legal turmoil for these individuals and their loved ones/families.

This high level of incarceration directly hinders the availability of and the future income making potential of African American men (Dyson, 2007). According to 2005 Census information, more than half (55%) of all African American men make less than \$20,000 annually, with 20% of those incomes being below the official poverty line (Dyson, 2007). Although these explanations are directly linked with the decreased marriage opportunities for African American men and women, these factors may be more suited for lower income populations (King & Allen, 2009) rather than highly educated groups. This study will look at whether college-educated, African American women consider incarceration and legal convictions as undesirable in a potential mate.

Marriage Rates

A “retreat from marriage” has been evident within the US since the 1980s (Lichter, Anderson, & Hayward, 1995, p.412). For decades, African American women

have consistently married at lower rates than Caucasian women. According to Crowder and Tolnay's (2000) review of the US Census, marriage among African American females has decreased by 19% between the decades of 1970 and 1990. By the 1990s, Caucasian women had a 60% likelihood of being married while African American women had a 40% likelihood of being married. (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000; Lichter et al., 1992). By 1994, over one-third of African American women were classified as never married (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000). Alexander (2009) states that 22% of college-educated white and African American women between the ages of 20 and 45 were single in the 1970s. While this rate has remained consistent for white women, 38% of African American women within this age group are single as of 2009 (Alexander, 2009).

The trend of decreasing marriage rates became evident during the 1960s and 1970s, with Welfare Reform and the law change regarding intermarriage of whites and African Americans. First, a "marriage tax" impedes marriage entry for poorer couples due to the intensive minimum restrictions on income (Edin & Reed, 2005, p. 118) (Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993; Bell, Bouie, & Baldwin, 1990; Edin & Reed, 2005). According to Hattery and Smith (2012), since the Welfare Reform of the 1960s and 70s, households receiving public assistance/Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) have become limited to only being allowed to have one parent reside in the home. Thus, if two parents were to marry, their eligibility for assistance could drastically change, even though they are still in a state of financial need. New norms of cohabitation and nonresidential parenting developed as consequences to this "man in the house rule" (Hattery & Smith, 2012, p. 18). Children who grew up under this regulation change were found to be less likely to marry as adults. Personal expectations to marry decreased also,

especially for poorer populations (Hattery & Smith, 2012). Approximately, only 50% of poor, African American men and 55% of poor, African American women are married by the age of 35 (Hattery & Smith, 2012). However, regardless of this “marriage tax”, women who receive public assistance were not found to have a negative view of marriage (Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993). Secondly, the case of *Loving v. Virginia* (1967) determined that it was no longer illegal to ban white and African American individuals from marrying. After this decision, African American marriages began to decrease after being at a comparable marriage rate with white couples for nearly 100 years (Hattery & Smith, 2012).

The desire to marry has consistently been relatively high for both African American and white adults (Blackman, Clayton, Glenn, Malone-Colon, & Roberts, 2005). In 1988, according to national survey information on adults aged 19 to 35, 77.35% of African American adults and 83.36% of white adults desired to marry. However, according to Banks’ research (2011a), African American women are the least married group of people in the United States. Almost 70% of African American women are unmarried, regardless of financial status. Banks states by age 40, only three in 10 African American, college-educated women are married, while white, college-educated women are twice as likely to have married by age 40 relative to their African American peers. In response, African American women are reported as attempting to beat the “40 year dash” by quickly marrying and divorcing so it can be said that at least they were once married (Gordon, 2006). Divorce is likely considering that 50% of all African American marriages end in divorce (Banks, 2011a). Nearly a decade ago, only 40% of

African American women expected to marry, when less than a century ago 89% of African American women expected to marry (Dyson, 2007).

Barr and Simons (2012) mentioned that lower expectations to marry were found among younger African Americans when compared to white adults of the same age cohort. Regardless of low marriage rates, Bulcroft and Bulcroft's research (1993) shows that African American women still have positive views of marriage, consider marriage to be economically viable, have high expectations to marry, and consider marriage to be emotionally and socially positive. Young, African American women, more than any other sample of women within the US, desire to marry and expect to improve their economic, social, or emotional standing with marriage. This expectation endures throughout adulthood, but does appear to lessen quickly with age (Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993). The likelihood of entering marriage increases for African American women as their age increases, but a decline is noted in marriage entry for older, African American women (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000).

Timing for first marriage entry is being delayed, according to census statistics spanning from 1980 to 1992. Women are marrying nearly two and a half years later, at the median age of 24.4, and men almost two years later, at the median age of 26.5, for their first marriage (Lichter et al., 1995). By age 28, 80% of white women expect to enter their first marriage, while only 50% of African American women expect to marry (Lichter et al., 1992). A shortage of *marriageable men* results in less women transitioning to marriage (Lichter et al., 1992, p. 784). This is the most influential factor for the disparity in marriage rates across ethnic groups, beyond family background, welfare status, etc. With decreased marriage rates, a growth in female headed homes,

increased out-of-wedlock births, and greater racial and gender inequality for impoverished families increases. Children from single-parented homes may continue the cycle of not marrying, which is often the case during young adulthood (Lichter et al., 1992). Children from divorced families also show a greater likelihood of delaying marriage as adults, even to the point of never marrying (Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993).

Influence of Education

Education improves one's own status and marriage options (e.g., marry, delay marriage, pursue career, etc.), while also serving as a criterion used to rate potential partner eligibility. Education directly affects the income level and marriageability of men, both of which are criteria used by educated, African American women when choosing a *marriageable* mate (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000; Lichter et al., 1992).

According to Dyson's (2007) summation of an interview led by Ebony magazine in 1981, college-educated, African American women at Spelman College considered the status of a man to be important when considering marriage. In fact, these women reasoned that they could afford to wait for the "right one", the partner who possessed comparable achievements in comparison to their own. Dyson discussed African American men's views of African American women in the dating scene. Many women were thought to prioritize a man's personal achievements, status, degrees, profession, income, and physical looks/appeal rather than valuing who he was as an entire person (Dyson, 2007). Bulcroft and Bulcroft's research (1993) supports that women who are attending college are less likely to form a relationship with a man for marriage if he has fewer financial resources in comparison to their own.

Women who have obtained higher status careers tend to invest more in pursuing a career instead of forming a relationship for marriage. Dyson's (2007) research supports the assertion that African American women with high status tend to place higher priority on building a career rather than finding a mate/partner. Qualitative research led by King (1999) with African American women revealed that both increased education and financial status among these women accompanied a more positive view of marriage. However, never married women were found to place higher priority on a career rather than marriage (King, 1999). By obtaining college degrees, African American women are creating the economic freedom to choose a pursuit of other life goals besides marriage.

In the marriage market, high "market value", *marriageable* men are depicted by making adequate earnings, holding stable employment, and obtaining higher education (Lichter et al., 1995, p.416). Increased participation of African American females in the labor force and higher education institutions have created a larger cohort of educated, economically sufficient, African American females in comparison to African American males. Crowder and Tolnay (2000) found that within 380 labor market pools from metropolitan areas across the U.S., African American women outnumber *marriageable*, African American men (with earnings above poverty level) at a staggering ratio of three to one. When considering employment and availability, African American women outnumber African American men two to one. Within the labor force, African American women outnumber African American men at 100 women/66 men. Similarly, Lichter et al. (1992) reported that there is an equivalence of three-tenths unmarried African American men (with sufficient income) for every one unmarried African American woman at the age of 25. The sex ratio of African American men to African American

women ages 25 to 55 is 85 men/100 women, but a large percentage of these men are not employed, sporadically employed, incarcerated, use drugs, or are mentally unstable (King, 1999). If the marriage market for African Americans had an equal sex ratio to that of Caucasians with adequate earnings, the likelihood of marriage would increase 24% for African American women (Lichter et al., 1992). Undoubtedly, these inequalities within the marriage market have negatively influenced the probability of entering marriage for African American women of all socioeconomic strata across the life span.

Barr and Simons (2012) studied the variables of school enrollment, earnings, and recent employment on younger, African American couples and their expectations to marry one another. All three variables were found to increase couples' expectations of marriage. African American women were found to improve their marriageability with being economically independent. Among the couples studied by Barr and Simons, women tended to possess more education than their partner and were more likely to be currently enrolled in college. Both men and women were as likely to be employed, but men more often had experienced recent unemployment. Women reported being paid lower wages than men, and women tended to look less favorably on married life than men. Young, African American women placed a greater emphasis on personal income for marital readiness when compared to young, African American men. Overall, it appeared that a partner's future earning potential and acquisition of a career increased marital expectations among couples, but not necessarily their entry into marriage (Barr & Simons, 2012).

College enrollment was found to be negatively associated with both marriage and cohabitation among young African American couples (Barr & Simons, 2012). College

life has been found to delay marriage entry since the time required to complete college and to secure a career has increased. However, once an individual has obtained consistent employment with sufficient pay to support a family, marriage entry tends to accelerate. This is especially true for men (Barr & Simons, 2012). For women, a college education does increase an African American woman's likelihood of entering marriage; however, marriage is usually delayed because school enrollment is a direct hindrance for marriage entry (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000). Nevertheless, a college education does provide leverage for African American women to desire more from a partner and the economic independence to choose to delay marriage.

Education inequities among African American men and women have existed for decades, with African American women largely outnumbering African American men in college enrollment and degree attainment. According to Dyson (2007), 400,000 more African American women are enrolled in colleges and universities than African American men. When looking at college degree attainment, only 60 comparably educated African American men exist for every 100 African American women. Gordon (2006) states that 70% of African American, college students are women, both at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and other universities. Dyson (2007) mentions that more than 60% of the degrees awarded to African American students are earned by women. For married, college-educated, African American women, more than 25% have husbands who do not possess a college degree; four-tenths percent of these women are married to men without a high school diploma. Married couples with both partners possessing a college degree were found in less than half (45.9%) of African American marriages, as compared to almost three-quarters (70%) of

white marriages. Dyson went on further to state that within a sample of four million married, African American couples, only 10% of the couples had both partners possessing college degrees; a mere one percent of couples had both partners possessing graduate degrees. Regarding the spectrum of African American male academic achievement, six percent of African American men are without a high school diploma and only 13% attend graduate school. Within this small faction of graduate level, African American men, a 30% greater likelihood exists to marry outside of their ethnicity when compared to college degreed, African American women (Dyson, 2007). Thus, many high achieving African American men are not circulating within the African American marriage market, which is further increasing the marriage gap between high achieving African American men and high achieving African American women.

Half of all African American individuals marry, and this is usually from within the African American community (Hattery & Smith, 2012). However, with the sex ratio imbalance being compounded by the financial prerequisites for a *marriageable* mate, African American women are experiencing a tremendous *marriage squeeze* (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000; Schoen, 1995). This then is compounded even more by African American men intermarrying with women from other ethnicities. African American men have been found to be three times more likely than African American women to intermarry. In 1990, eight percent of African American men between the ages of 25 to 34 were married to non-black women. By the late 2000s, approximately 200,000 African American men had chosen to marry outside of their ethnic group (Dyson, 2007). It was estimated during the early 1990s, that four and a half percent of married, African American men were intermarried, usually to white women. A large number of these men were highly

educated, possessing a higher income, and were of a professional status. However, less than two percent of married, African American women had married a spouse of a different ethnicity. In spite of the cultural trend for African American men to intermarry, “racial endogamy” (i.e., marrying within the same race/ethnicity) is still prominent within African American marriages (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000, p. 794).

Interracial marriages among African American women are less frequent and have been considered somewhat taboo, according to Banks (2011b). It was estimated that one in 20 African American married women are married to men from a different ethnicity. Banks suggested that African American women have internalized a need to not abandon African American men, in order to strengthen the African American community by building up African American men and families, not retreating from them. It may be thought that intermarrying would serve as a retreat from the African American community, but the degree of community involvement and cultural pride/awareness for interracial couples is dependent upon the personal commitment level of each couple. According to Banks’ informative and exhaustive mixed methods research brought forth in the 2011 publication, *Is Marriage for White People? How the African American marriage decline affects everyone*, African American women have expressed apprehension in entering relationships/marriages with non-black men for various reasons. Women from his sample mentioned a fear of rejection and an uneasiness with being asked questions about their culture/hair/jargon, etc. When having children, African American women were concerned by being mistaken as a nanny instead of naturally being seen as the mother of light complexioned children. Some women also preferred having darker toned children rather than lighter toned children. The desire for children

and family to have a strong, African American, cultural heritage also influenced African American women's desire to marry within their ethnic group/community (Banks, 2011b).

Desired Marriageable Traits

Desirable traits for potential partners/mates have been a focus of marital research for decades. Mate selection criteria studied longitudinally from samples beginning in 1939 through 1996 showed that *mutual attraction* and *love* have increased in importance for both men and women, race not withholding (Buss, Shackelford, Kirkpatrick, & Larsen, 2001). This served as the greatest valued characteristic for mate preference, followed by *dependable character* ranking at number two for both men and women. Female mate preferences showed a decrease in importance concerning a partner's *ambition/industriousness* (seventh), *chastity* (17th), and *refinement/neatness* (12th). By the late 1990s, both men and women showed an increase in preference for a partner with a *similar education* background (12th for men; 10th for women) and *education/intelligence* was fifth in importance for both groups. For women, *good looks* (13th) and *financial potential* (11th) of a mate rose in importance, while the *desire* for a home with *children* (sixth) remained relatively constant. The desire for a man to have a *similar religious background* (14th) and favorable *social status* (15th) remained consistent, as well (Buss et al., 2001). This current study measures the importance levels of multiple traits presented within both past and contemporary marital research literature.

Parmer's research summarized historical studies that laid the foundation for marriage trait analysis. Parmer (1998) looked at historical, social science literature of preferred marriageable mate traits. He noted the importance of Hill and Himes research in the literature from the 1940s. The first of these historic studies was led by Hill and

looked at male and female preferences in a mate. It was found that women preferred a man with *dependable character, emotional stability, maturity, and a pleasing disposition*. It was not until several years later when the first research on mate selection for African American men and women was presented by Himes. He found that *mutual compatibility and attraction* is of great importance. African American women desired a man with *refinement and good health*. The least valued factors from Himes' 1949 study on African American, marriageable mate traits included *ambition for social status, desire for children, similar education, religion, politics, hair texture, skin color, height, weight, economic status, age, etc.* (Parmer, 1998). According to Dyson's (2007) research, African American women prefer mates who are *similar in age, possess a stable career, higher status, education, who have never been married, do not have any children, and who are physically attractive*. Obviously, tremendous changes in mate preference have occurred since the 1950s, and it is a hope of this study to further current research on desirable partner traits. Many of the aforementioned traits are discussed within this descriptive/exploratory study.

Desired traits for a *marriageable* mate have not been studied at length nor in depth for African American men and women, especially for those who are highly educated. According to Clarke (2011), "unmarriageable men" are considered *unmarriageable* when they possess less education, unstable employment, and are/have experienced incarceration (p. 116). College-educated, African American women seem to choose men for economically based characteristics, such as income and education, while African American men appear to choose women for social characteristics, such as ethnicity and religion. Porter, Bronzaft, & Arline (1995) measured marriageable mate

traits according to highly educated, African American individuals, including *trustworthiness*, *monogamy*, and *ethnic importance*. African American men were perceived to be less likely to commit to a lasting relationship. Very few African American women (20%) reported having felt social and/or familial pressure to marry within their own ethnicity. However, African American women did prefer to date African American men, finding it easier to communicate with a partner of the same ethnicity. The women in the study also tended to date African American men with more than a high school equivalent education. Most (i.e., four-fifths) of the sampled women in Porter et al.'s study planned to pursue their college education beyond the bachelor's level. These women did not intend to be homemakers. Lastly, the researchers postulated that women will tolerate certain characteristics from a man who is a dating partner but will have less tolerance for a husband to exhibit the same trait (Porter et al., 1995). These elements are researched within the data of this study, as well as whether mate characteristics become more important with increasing commitment levels of relationships.

Ross (1997) researched African American, college students' mate preferences in both a historical and current context. He acknowledged that homogamy is the US norm, thus individuals typically marry a mate with equal/similar social and personal characteristics. Ross found that African American students tended to focus on a "success ethic" through marrying someone with status and income, which is considered hegemony (p. 567). Enjoyment of one's time with their partner and compatibility/getting along with one's partner were both considered more important to women than the relative attractiveness of their mate. African American women preferred men with upward

mobility, higher social status, and greater wealth (i.e., hypergamy/marry up), while African American men preferred women with light skin. Lighter skin has historically been a trait associated with higher status, education, income, etc. This was based on house slaves having lighter skin than field slaves. House slaves were often mulatto/mixed race and had better clothes, higher status, and brought higher revenue when sold. Throughout the 1940s to 1960s, lighter skinned, African Americans typically received better pay and had more job opportunities. Variables such as education, occupational status, and income were all found to be positively associated with being lighter skinned. Regarding lighter skin and mate preference, African American men tend to prefer lighter skinned women for dating and marriage (i.e., approximately 30%) at twice the rate of African American women preferring lighter skinned men (i.e., approximately 15%) (Ross, 1997). Future studies should focus on African American women who intermarry. It would be intriguing to see whether that subgroup of African American women perceive their marital unions as a means of increasing status and income, or whether it is more of an even exchange. Ethnic group preferences of African American, intermarried women should also be researched.

King and Allen (2009) took a contemporary look at the personal characteristics desired by African American men and women in an ideal marriage partner. Findings showed that both African American men and women desired “well-educated, financially stable, monogamous, and affluent partners, who are spiritual, religious, self-confident, and reliable... Most significant is that respondents want ideal marriage partners who earn significantly more than they do, (so) that (it) will move them squarely into the middle class” (King & Allen, 2009, p. 570). Crowder and Tolnay (2000) stated that

employment is a minimum prerequisite for marriage, regardless of race. African American women were found to be less likely to marry a man with fewer assets, children, and who had previously been married (Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993; Dyson, 2007). However, men and women from disrupted/divorced families were more willing to marry a mate who had been previously married and/or had children. Single-mothers also were more apt to marry previously married men who either have or do not have children from a previous relationship(s) (Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993). African American women were more willing to marry younger men than women of other ethnic groups (Gordon, 2006), but preferred a man similar in age (Dyson, 2007). Other desirable traits in a *marriageable* man included a stable career, higher status, education, and physical attraction (Dyson, 2007). Banks' book (2011b) spoke in depth about African American relationships, including partner traits such as *swag* and *thug*. Some women did prefer thuggish or street minded men rather than gentlemen. Dyson (2007) also noted that many African American men perceive African American women as desiring a thug, bad boy, or player type rather than a gentlemanlike approach. In general, younger, African American woman had higher expectations of finding their desired mate specifications in a partner when compared to older, African American women (Dyson, 2007).

To date, minimal research has been done according to college-educated, African American women's perspectives concerning the effects of criminal history on the marriageability of an African American partner (King & Allen, 2009). This study addresses the perceived desirability of a man with a criminal history, as well as, less common traits, such as *swag* and *thug*. More traditional mate traits are also researched according to this sample of highly educated, unmarried, African American women. King

and Allen (2009) mentioned that research has neglected to directly measure and define a “well-educated” mate, “well-paying job”, and “financial stability” according to African American women (p. 574). Many of these ideals are explored within this study.

Theory

Social exchange theory. Social exchange theory claims that humans are more likely to participate in behaviors, relationships, and activities that present more rewards than costs (Ingoldsby, Smith, & Miller, 2004). For poorer populations, marriage represents a cost based on the loss of assistance and/or the need to accrue assets and funds before marriage. Therefore, cohabitation is more prevalent since it meets the needs of poorer families. But for educated populations with less economic constraint, marriage may represent a reward, or it may be viewed as a cost that hinders one’s career and independence when compared to cohabitation. Furthermore, the high personal cost of waiting for a financially comparable, African American man (i.e., indicated by earnings, employment, and education) could justify the responses made by African American women. African American women may choose to temporarily delay marriage, marry down, marry a man outside of their own ethnicity, or choose not to pursue marriage.

Ingoldsby, Smith and Miller (2004) suggest that humans are motivated to obtain what is needed and wanted in life by exchanging resources with others. Social exchanges are made at the lowest personal cost and highest personal gain. Core concepts include the rewards and costs for personal relationships and the need for reciprocity within those relationships. When making decisions, people generally desire to make profitable decisions that will yield the greatest return on personal investments of time, emotions, money, etc. Reciprocity is necessary within relationships. If needs or expectations are

not adequately met, a person is likely to look for other alternatives to their current situation. If a relationship does not produce the profit that one deems appropriate for their involvement, then a person can feel cheated by not receiving what they feel they deserve and search for a better alternative (Ingoldsby et al., 2004).

Social exchange theory posits that the person who is scarcer within the marriage market is in greater demand, and therefore, holds the power/control in a relationship. When men and women are in a *marriage squeeze*, such as what exists in the African American community, numerous effects can be seen in marriage rates and expectations, divorce rates, single-parenting via unwed births, sexual behavior, expectations for the other gender, and assumed gender roles. The sex ratio effects the terms of exchange for men and women in relationships and marriages. In this case, African American men, due to their scarcity/low availability, hold more bargaining power in the marriage market than African American women (King & Allen, 2009; Kiecolt & Fossett, 1995). The majority of adults first enter marriage between the ages of 20 and 44, which is also the age group of African American adults with the largest sex ratio imbalance (King & Allen, 2009). African American men, therefore, have increased power due to being the partner in highest demand by being the least in number/availability. They have the ability to make demands or have higher expectations for a partner and reserve the back-up option of finding another woman if desired. This often stops the development of long term relationships and marriage. Tucker and Mitchell-Kernan (1995) found that African American men are less likely to settle down due to being in high demand in the marriage market, and therefore, remain bachelors. These dynamics exemplify how relationship

and marriage options are highly shaped by the availability of partners, and social exchange provides a lens to look at this phenomenon.

Job search theory. Job search theory emphasizes the social exchange concepts of cost, reward, and profit. When job search theory is applied to marriage, individuals determine the minimum requirements needed for a “reservation quality” partner (Lichter et al., 1992, p. 782). If a quality partner cannot be found, marriage is delayed. When this occurs, women have been found to increase their educational achievements while awaiting marriage opportunities. Educational achievement, economic independence, and current employment all increase a woman’s marriageability, as well as, provide her with the option of delaying marriage in the hope of finding her *reservation quality* partner (Lichter et al., 1992).

Assortative mating patterns. Homogamy is marriage between similar partners, based on culture, SES, class, religion, ethnicity, gender, education, etc. Homogamy is the cultural norm for mate choice across all races in the US (Lichter et al., 1992). Women typically follow a homogamous or positive assortative mating style, marrying men with equal assets and education. However, with the constraint on the marriage market *pool of mates*, hypogamy and heterogamy are increasing. Women over 30 years of age tend to marry heterogamously, by marrying men with different ethnic, educational, age, and marital status backgrounds. The same is true of African American women, however, ethnicity is not listed as a difference that African American women pursue when finding a *marriageable* partner. Job search theory posits that women will marry down, heterogamously, when they choose to “lower the reservation wage”/expectations for a “reservation-quality” spouse/marriageable mate (Lichter et al., 1995, p.414). Women in

the marriage market also tend to assess their own attractiveness/“market value”, and employment has been found to improve female attractiveness to men. More employed than unemployed women are likely to marry in any given year (Lichter et al., 1995). In this study, finances, status, ethnicity, and educational attainment are looked at for importance when choosing a mate. This will help indicate the type of assortative mating patterns that are being used by highly educated, African American women from within the sample group.

Educational homogamy is when educated individuals tend to marry other educated people. Blossfeld (2009) considers education to be a “central variable for marriage because education is the most important determinant of occupational success in industrialized societies, and it reflects cultural resources influencing individuals’ preferences for specific partners” (p. 514). According to the “status attainment hypothesis”, individuals will rarely be in a relationship with someone possessing less education (Blossfeld, 2009, p.515). Conversely, they will also be limited in entering a relationship with someone with a greater amount of education. Landis and Day (1945) researched the importance of education in mate selection in the late 1940s, and found that men tend to marry women with less education while women prefer men with more education. Kalmijn (2010) looked at the role of education as a characteristic for exchange in relationships, according to social exchange precepts. In black-white intermarried couples, educational homogamy appears to be of higher priority than status homogamy. While homogamy is the coupling of partners with equal status of a characteristic, educational homogamy/educational assortative mating is equal status via educational attainment (Kalmijn, 2010).

Current Mating Patterns

Banks (2011b) surmised three trends that have developed within African American relationships due to the *marriage squeeze*. First, he found that college-educated, African American men have a decreased likelihood of settling down and marrying. Two trends have developed for African American women: many are remaining unmarried, and those who do marry, often partner with a less educated man and assume the breadwinning role in the relationship. It is noted that tension could result between white collar wives and blue collar husbands (Banks, 2011b). There is a trend within African American relationships and marriages for white collar women to be with blue collar men (Banks, 2011a), as indicated by status and profession (Secord & Ghee, 1986). This is not surprising when taking into account that from 1981 to the present time, more African American men are blue collar workers than white collar workers (Dyson, 2007). Marriages between African American men and women generally have the dynamic of a higher earning wife and less accomplished husband. This is true regarding educational attainment as well, with over half of all married, African American women possessing more education than their husbands (Banks, 2011a). Thus, African American women marrying African American men (i.e., intraracially) often marry down/hypogamy. It begs to be further researched whether African American women who marry interracially, marry down (i.e., hypogamy), marry up (i.e., hypergamy), or equally (i.e., homogamy), and by what variables.

Purpose of Study

Objectives

This study addresses the perspectives of marital choice for African American women with college degrees by exploring their desire to marry and the traits deemed necessary for a man to be considered *marriageable*. The guiding research question for this study is, “What are the considerations regarding mate choice and marriage for single/never married, college-educated, African American women in contemporary society?” Existing literature has mainly focused on poorer African American populations and the barriers that prevent marriage within that population (i.e., economic stability and marriage market availability) (Edin & Reed, 2005; Lichter et al., 1992; King, 1999). However, for the sample used in the study reported here, economic stability is defined as the ability to be economically independent based on one’s own means. Therefore, economic independence is not the objective of this report since it is not a factor in the lack of marriage entry for self-sustaining, college-educated, African American women. Rather, the limited marriage market is the leading concern for the sample and will, therefore, be the foundation for understanding the lack of marriage entry for this subpopulation of African American women.

This study addresses the barrier of a limited marriage market for the under researched population of college-educated, African American women by defining who is a *marriageable mate*. “Mate” was used within the survey question wording due to the strong focus on mate and marriage theories in the research concept. However, throughout the study, the terms mate and partner will be used interchangeably. The research addresses the perspective of whether the limited pool of African American men

narrows even further as college-educated, African American women consider a mate's educational level as a criterion for marriage. Dyson's (2003) claim that African American women lower their standards for a marriageable mate as their age increases is looked at by seeing if this claim pertains to women with college degrees. These and other research questions to be addressed by this report are as follows:

Among never married, college-educated, African American women from 18 – 40 years of age:

#1: What are the criteria for a marriageable mate?

#2: Does a man's educational level influence his marriageability in the eyes of women?

#3: What is the level of importance of marriage, cohabitation, and a career?

#4: Is cohabitation a desirable alternative to marriage?

#5: Does being raised in a married versus single-parent home influence these women's personal desires to marry as adults?

#6: Does attending an HBCU improve a woman's opportunity to meet marriageable African American men?

#7: Is ethnicity a strong basis for choosing a marriageable mate?

#8: Do college-educated, African American women perceive that they decrease their standards for a marriageable mate as they age?

Methodology

This report focuses on describing and exploring the perspectives of never married, well-educated, African American women concerning marriageable mates and marriage choice within the current *marriage market squeeze*. When designing the survey, a wide

array of information was gathered from this under researched population concerning marital perspectives. All responses to the survey were gathered in 2014. The initial step regarding marital choice for women facing a limited marriage market of men is to define “marriageable mates”. Secondly, whether or not one even desires to marry must be asked. These objectives define the study. At times, comparisons are drawn between subgroups within the sample: respondents in their *twenties* and *thirties*, undergraduate and graduate degree holders, and women who grew up in married and single-parent homes. When subgroup tables state “dual-parent, married home” this is referring to women who were raised by both biological parents (married) or one biological parent with a step-parent (married). Participating women raised in a single-parent home only refers to single-mother homes; no single-father families of origin were present in the sample. Additionally, the analyses involve current marital choice options across subsamples of the women studied according to age, educational attainment, and family of origin. A mixed methods approach is used in interpreting the data by utilizing open-ended responses for further clarification of quantitative responses. Statistics provide a general overview while open responses broaden understanding for ascertaining the multi-faceted concern of low marriage rates for well-educated, African American women.

A purposive sample of college-educated, African American women between the ages of 18 and 40 was gathered via a letter of invitation to participate in taking the survey. The survey was created by the researcher and was informed by both historical and contemporary academic literature, as well as, experiential knowledge. The invitation to participate in the study was dispersed as an email to the listservs of the following institutions and organizations: Kentucky State University Alumni (HBCU), the National

Council on Family Relations, the Delta Epsilon Iota Academic Society, the American Sociological Association, and the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences. Participants in this study were not based within a specific geographic location, but rather were recruited nationally. No marketing or financial incentives were utilized for recruitment of participants.

Upon a participant's interest in the study, a link provided within the invitation then directed her to the cover letter and survey. Once she accepted the terms in the cover letter, the participant consented, electronically, to participate in the study. The survey was then made available to her. The survey was administered using an online format through Qualtrics. All participants remained anonymous by removing all identifiers, including email and IP addresses, from the data before it was sent by Qualtrics to the researcher. Once the responses were received from Qualtrics, they were then entered into SPSS and analyzed to describe the influence of educational achievement on marriageable mate criteria and marital choice among never married, 18 to 40 year old, African American women with college degrees.

The Sample

The sample consists of African American women, ages 18 to 40, who possess a college degree (i.e., associate's degree to doctorate/PhD). Participants stated either "yes" or "no" to the following four criteria: being female, African American, between the ages of 18 to 40, and having at least an associate's level college degree. If any of these criteria were not met, the participant was thanked for their interest but could not proceed on to the survey. Only completed surveys were included in the sample. Originally, several options for marital status were given, but in this analysis, only the "single, never married"

participants were utilized. This improves cohesion among the sample by removing the few outliers who were either married or divorced. The final number of participants is 95 ($N = 95$).

The age perimeter of 18 to 40 was assigned to ensure the inclusion of women who graduated from college within two years after potentially graduating from high school at an accelerated pace, and includes women of an age affected by current cultural influences for entering a first marriage. This study specifically discusses the perspective of *African American* women and was not all inclusive of black cultural heritages (i.e., African, African American, Islander, etc.). Respondents self-identified as *African American* when agreeing to the four prerequisites to participate in the study. This study approaches the topic of marriage choice within a cultural paradigm, and thus, looks at ethnic specific relationship and partner preferences. This is not a race study (i.e., based on physical phenotypes/characteristics such as skin color, hair texture, bone structure, etc.); rather, this is a descriptive, culturally specific study regarding marital choices of today's African American woman. Thus, social and cultural elements are discussed when looking at the marital choices of this specific ethnic group of women.

Sample Demographics

The demographic characteristics of interest are age, education, employment, economic status, relationship status, and family of origin composition. Each characteristic will be discussed in detail below. For a complete list of all sample demographics, see Table 1.

Table 1: Sample Demographics ($N = 95$)

Characteristics	%
Age	
Under 20	1.1
20 through 24	18.9
25 through 29	36.8
30 through 34	26.4
35 through 39	15.7
40	1.1
Education	
Associates	4.2
Bachelors	36.8
Masters	44.2
Doctorate/Professional degree	14.7
College/University Type	
Public	48.4
Private	51.6
Historically Black College or University (HBCU)	15.8
Online program	3.2
First generation college learner ($n = 94$)	28.7
Family supported decision to enter college	98.9
Employment	
Employed	90.5
If unemployed, how many months? ($n = 8$)	
3 months	1.1
6 months	3.2
7 months	1.1
9 months	1.1
10 months	1.1
11 months	1.1
Current Income ($n = 93$)	
\$15,000 or less	21.5
\$15,001 to \$30,000	23.7
\$30,001 to \$45,000	17.2
\$45,001 to \$60,000	17.2
\$60,001 to \$75,000	9.7
\$75,001 to \$90,000	5.4
\$90,001 to \$105,000	1.1
\$105,001 or greater	4.3

Table 1: Sample Demographics Continued ($N = 95$)

Characteristics	%
Socioeconomic Status ($n = 94$)	
Low income	7.4
Lower-middle income	28.7
Middle income	38.3
Upper-middle income	24.5
Upper income	1.1
Lowest annual pay to qualify as a “good paying job”	
\$15,001 to \$30,000	2.1
\$30,001 to \$45,000	14.7
\$45,001 to \$60,000	37.9
\$60,001 to \$75,000	28.4
\$75,001 to \$90,000	13.7
\$90,001 to \$105,000	2.1
\$105,001 or greater	1.1
Relationship Status	
Dating, non-committed relationship	34.7
Dating, committed relationship	22.1
Cohabiting, no intention to marry	0
Cohabiting, intention to marry	7.4
Engaged	7.4
Open-ended response:	
Single, no elaboration	10.5
Single, not dating	21
Single, casually dating	3.1
Family of Origin Composition	
Biological Family ($n = 92$)	
Biological parents, married	67.4
Biological parents, unmarried	0
Biological parent & step-parent, married	6.5
Biological parent & step-parent, unmarried	0
Single biological mother	26.1
Single biological father	0
Other biological family member, married	0
Other biological family member, unmarried	0

Table 1: Sample Demographics Continued ($N = 95$)

Characteristics	%
Non-biological Family ($n = 3$)	
Family friend/kinfolk, married	66.7
Family friend/kinfolk, unmarried	33.3
Adoptive parents, married	0
Adoptive parents, unmarried	0
Foster care	0
Motherhood of participant ($n = 9$)	9.8

Age.

The age range for the sample included one individual under 20, 53 women between the ages of 20 to 29, 40 women ranging from 30 to 39 years of age, and one individual age 40. Only two individuals are not included in the two-way analysis comparison for women in their *twenties* or *thirties*. Within the analysis, information presented will be based on the entire group of respondents ($N = 95$) unless the researcher specifies between the two age based groups of *twenties* (57%) and *thirties* (43%). The modal age for all participants was 25.

Education.

Regarding education, 71.3% of the sample was *not* first generation college learners, with nearly all respondents, except one, experiencing high levels of familial support for their decision to attend college. Every level of collegiate degree was represented by the sample, ranging from associates to PhD/professional degree. Most participants possessed a master's degree (44.2%), followed by bachelor's degree (36.8%). When asked whether one's alma mater was a public or private college/university, nearly

an equal dispersion was found. Only three more women had graduated from a private college/university than public college/university. Furthermore, less than 16% of the sample had attended either a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) or a college/university predominantly attended by African Americans students. Only three percent of the women had graduated from an online program/institution.

Employment and economic status.

Employment and economic status were measured as a means of understanding one's perceived financial stability and level of economic independence. These factors provide a financial snapshot/overview of respondents' current financial situations. Results pertinent to this report include employment, current income, immediate family's perceived socioeconomic status (SES), and monetary definition of a "good paying job". First, 90.5% of respondents were employed; those who were unemployed had all been without a job for less than a year. Current income levels showed that 45% earned \$30,000 or less/year, compared to only five percent who earned \$90,001 or higher/year. Perspectives of one's immediate family's SES indicated that 36% were low/lower-middle income, 38% middle income, and 25.6% upper-middle/upper income. It is important to note both extremes of this continuum: seven percent were low income and only one percent was within the upper income bracket. Both current income and SES provide insight for the last economic factor to be mentioned: one's perspective of the lowest annual pay needed to qualify as a "good paying job". Only two percent considered a job providing up to \$30,000/year to be a "good paying job"; 37.9%, the majority, considered \$45,001 to \$60,000/year qualified as "good paying"; and only three percent needed at least \$90,001/year or higher to consider a job "good paying".

Relationship status.

The current relationship status of the single, never married participants was reported as dating, cohabiting, engaged, and open-ended response. Participants could choose more than one option. The responses were as follows: 34.7% dating, in a non-committed relationship; 22.1% dating, in a committed relationship; zero participants cohabiting, with no intention to marry; approximately seven percent cohabiting, with the intention to marry; approximately seven percent engaged; and 34.7% chose open-ended responses. Within these open-ended responses, 33 women considered themselves to be single. Specifically, 10.5% of the sample were single, no elaboration; 21% single, not dating; and three percent single, casually dating. Same sex relationship was not provided as an option; however, participants had the opportunity to write this in as an open-ended response. No participants shared that they were in a same sex relationship.

Family of origin.

The women in the sample had the opportunity to share the composition of their family of origin: married or unmarried biological family, single-parent, married or unmarried non-biological/kinfolk family, or foster care. All but three respondents were raised by at least one biological parent. When analysis is discussed concerning family of origin type, only respondents from a biological family are included ($n = 92$). Participant breakdown of being raised in a married or unmarried home is as follows: 67.4% were raised by two married, biological parents; approximately seven percent were raised by one biological parent and a step-parent (married), and 26.1% by a single, biological mother. Within the portion of the sample raised by at least one biological family

member, nearly 10% of the respondents were never married, single-mothers. No history of cohabitating biological parents was found.

Demographic Based Subsamples

Subsamples of the women were created according to age, education level, and family of origin for two-way analyses (i.e., Chi-square) of variables. The subsample group by education level ($n = 95$) was divided among undergraduate (41.1%) and graduate degree earners (58.9%). When the sample was divided between women in their *twenties* and *thirties* ($n = 93$), the *twenties* subgroup represented 56.9% of respondents and the *thirties* subgroup contained 43% of respondents. The last subgrouping, family of origin ($n = 92$), divided participants between households consisting of two parents (73.9%) and a single parent (26.1%). Only biological parents were included in the subsample. Dual-parented homes included homes with either two biological parents or one biological parent along with a step-parent. All dual-parented families of origin were married couples. Concerning single-parented homes, only single-mothered homes were represented by the sample of participants. Therefore, no respondents were from unmarried, dual-parented homes or single-father households. See Table 2 for study subsample percentages.

Table 2: Study Subsamples by Percentage

Subsample Groups	%
<hr/>	
Education ($n = 95$)	
Undergraduate	41.1
Graduate	58.9
Twenties & Thirties ($n = 93$)	
Twenties	56.9
Thirties	43
Family of Origin, biological parent(s) ($n = 92$)	
Dual-parent, married home	73.9
Single-mother home	26.1

Data Analysis

The majority of data analysis conducted for this exploratory study consists of frequencies and two-way analyses. Missing responses were removed from calculations. In the event of the sample number ($N = 95$) being altered due to removal of missing responses, small n totals will be displayed by the corresponding questions within the data tables.

Chi-square was used for two-way analyses of subsample groups. When two-way analysis is used throughout the data analysis, it is critical to note that answers based on a continuum of “agreement/extremely important” = 6 and “disagreement/not at all important” = 0 were collapsed from a Likert scale (i.e., range 0 to 6) to two possible responses of “agree/important” = 1 or “disagree/unimportant” = 0. Each time two-way analyses were calculated, middle responses were understood as being “neither” agree nor disagree. All *neither* and missing responses were not included in the two-way analyses

tabulations. Small *n* totals will be displayed by the corresponding questions within the data tables.

Life Roles

Respondents were given several categories to choose from to identify the numerous life roles in which they participate (see Table 3). The option to choose all applicable roles was provided along with an open-ended response. Of these college-educated women, 62.1% were current students, 43.2% volunteered their time in some capacity, approximately eight percent were entrepreneurs, slightly more than eight percent were homemakers, nearly 10% were single-mothers, and five percent were caregivers. The high level of respondents currently participating as a student in college indicates the priority which will be seen in one's education and career later in the research. Caregivers did not indicate in what capacity they were caregivers. Within open responses, employee or worker was mentioned most. Friend was the second most written in response.

Table 3: Life Roles (*N* = 95)

Role Type	%
Student	62.1
Volunteer	43.2
Entrepreneur	8.4
Homemaker	8.4
Single-mother	9.5
Caregiver	5.3

Romantic Barriers

Participants were asked whether they had ever encountered any of several listed barriers when trying to pursue a relationship. In Table 4, “barriers to acquiring romantic relationships” were assessed as a means of addressing some potential reasons for African American women not entering romantic relationships. Respondents answered “yes” or “no” to listed barriers and had the opportunity to elaborate within an open-ended response. After analyzing response frequencies, a list of most prominent to least prominent barriers was developed. The most prominent barrier to acquiring a romantic relationship was a lack of mates (78.7%). This further exemplifies the importance of describing the expressed requirements of a marriageable mate by the sample. The second most prominent barrier was a lack of time (67.4%), followed by long distance relationships (58.9%), being focused on one’s career (57.9%), being considered too educated by mates (47.4%), and motherhood (approximately six percent). It is important to note that although motherhood was the least prominent barrier, it served as a romantic barrier for two-thirds of the single-mothers in the sample.

Table 4: Romantic Barriers for Acquiring a Relationship ($N = 95$)

Barrier	Yes %	No %
Lack of mates	78.7	21.3
Lack of time	67.4	32.6
Long distance relationship	58.9	41.1
Focused on career	57.9	42.1
Considered too educated by mates	47.4	52.6
Motherhood	6.3	93.7

Open-ended responses further enlightened this research by presenting pressing barriers to romantic relationships as recollected by this sample of women. Highlighted are several of these barriers, while a complete list is available in Table 5. Racism on numerous levels was mentioned, specifically racism by men of other races and racism by African American men. Feelings of not being attractive to African American men offered a further understanding of this intraracial discrimination some African American men show towards African American women. Discrimination was broadened by one respondent to include racism, sexism, and classism. Regarding compatibility, cultural and religious differences were noted, as well as, a lack of physical attraction while all other desired qualities were present. Several other deal breakers for relationships were provided, including homosexuality/bisexuality, cheating partners, and mental illness. The most detailed response was a term coined by a respondent as the “Imposter Syndrome”. She considered an African American man to be an “imposter” in a relationship when he ascribes to the following mentality:

Who I (i.e., the man) present myself to be (in a relationship) is not really who I am. (Respondent’s view) An educated Black man is much more than a degree. An

educated Black man is utilizing the possible trajectory a degree can provide. You can present yourself as having a MA degree but be quite content with entry level work and not necessarily want for more (in life).

This level of detail expresses the need for honesty and a striving for success in an educated, African American man, but this could be said of any mate, regardless of ethnicity. Lastly, having too many standards has proven to be a barrier for romantic relationships. The following sections will further delve into respondents' standards for a marriageable mate and whether one's standards lessen over time.

Table 5: Romantic Barriers, Open-Ended Responses

Listing of Summarized Responses

Racism, by African American men and other races
Not attractive to African American men
Sexism
Classism
Age
Religious differences
Cultural differences
Lack of compatibility
Lack of chemistry with all other desired qualities present
Lack of similar interests
Having too many standards
Cheating partner
Homosexuality/Bisexuality
Mental illness of mate
Social disease/Introverted
Not interested in a relationship
"Imposter Syndrome" (term coined by respondent)

Life Goals: Marriage, Cohabitation, and Career

When given the choices of marriage, cohabitation, and/or a career (i.e., research question #3), responses overwhelmingly were in favor of marriage and career (see

Table 6). Participants answered “yes” or “no” to the following options. Nearly 90% of the sample desired marriage along with a career, while only slightly more than four percent desired to marry and be a homemaker. However, more than one in five women (21.3%) desired a career rather than marriage; therefore, almost 10% of the women who wanted marriage and a career were also willing to choose a career over marriage. This appears to be a viable and logical option chosen by college-educated, African American women who are single in a very limited marriage market of potential mates. In regards to cohabitation and marriage (i.e., research question #4), 51.6% of the sample desired to cohabit with their mate before entering marriage. When given the choice to cohabit as a permanent alternative to marriage, 16.8% favorably agreed. Thus, one in six women preferred cohabitation in lieu of marriage, one in two desired cohabitation while pursuing marriage, nearly nine in 10 desired marriage along with a personal career, and one in five were comfortable with a career focused life.

Table 6: Life Goals of Marriage, Cohabitation, and Education (*N* = 95)

Type of Desired Goal	Yes %	No %
Desire marriage & a career	89	11
Desire marriage & homemaker, no career	4.3	95.7
Desire to cohabit before marriage	51.6	48.4
Desire cohabitation, alternative to marriage	16.8	83.2
Desire career instead of marriage	21.3	78.7

When participants were presented with choosing the level of personal importance in furthering their own career, increasing their educational achievement, and finding a mate, the responses were as follows. Greatest to least important life goals for participants

ranked career first, education second, and finding a mate as third. Responses were ranked on an importance level using a Likert scale ranging from “not at all important” to “extremely important”, 0 – 6, respectively; middle responses were denoted as *neither*. Furthering one’s career was important, to some degree, by 96.8%; followed by achieving a bachelor’s degree (94.7%); having adequate social time to date (88.3%); finding a mate with the mutual intent to marry, as well as, achieving a master’s or doctorate degree had equal importance (86.2%); and finding a long term companion with marriage not being the end goal was deemed least in importance (46.2%). See Table 7 for extended/Likert category responses.

Table 7: Life Goals: Marriage, Cohabitation, Career, and Education ($N = 95$)

	Not at all Important %	Very Unimportant %	Somewhat Unimportant %	Neither %	Somewhat Important %	Very Important %	Extremely Important %
Furthering career	0	1.1	0	2.1	13.8	19.1	63.8
Achieving Bachelor's degree	1.1	0	1.1	3.2	7.4	17	70.2
Achieving Master's/PhD degree	3.2	2.1	1.1	7.4	8.5	16	61.7
Having adequate social time to date	1.1	1.1	9.6	0	38.3	41.5	8.5
Find a mate, mutual intent to marry	4.3	3.2	6.4	0	16	38.3	31.9
Find a mate for a long term companion, not marriage	21.5	11.8	20.4	0	25.8	14	6.5

Two-way analyses by age, educational achievement, and family of origin were conducted to further explore the desire to marry, cohabit, or to find a long term companion with marriage not being the end goal (see Tables 8 and 9). A Likert scale ranging from “not at all important” to “extremely important” (i.e., scored 0 – 6 respectively) was collapsed into two categories (i.e., “unimportant” = 0, “important” = 1); missing and middle/*neither* responses were removed from tabulations. When comparing respondents in their *twenties* and *thirties*, a slightly stronger desire to find a mate with the mutual intent to marry was discovered among the *thirties* subgroup. Thus, 85.3% of women in their *thirties*, as compared to 81.4% of women in their *twenties*, desired to find a mate with the mutual intent of marriage ($n = 77$). However, finding a long term companion, with marriage not being the end goal, had a stronger level of personal importance for women in their twenties. Only 20.7% of the *thirties* subgroup considered long term companionship without marriage to be important at some level, while 34.2% of the *twenties* subgroup agreed to some extent. Younger women appeared to show more favor toward long term companionship without marriage; overall, it was still only important to less than one in three participants (28.4%) of those in the entire sample group who were between 20 to 39 years of age ($n = 67$).

Table 8: Two-way Analysis Percentages for Career, Education, and Partnership

Type of Desired Goal	Yes %	No %
Desire marriage & a career		
Family of Origin (<i>n</i> = 91)	89	11
Dual-parent, married	89.5	10.5
Single-mother	87.5	12.5
Desire marriage & homemaker, no career		
Family of Origin (<i>n</i> = 91)	4.3	95.7
Dual-parent, married	4.4	95.6
Single-mother	0	100
Desire to cohabit before marriage		
Family of Origin (<i>n</i> = 92)	51.1	48.9
Dual-parent, married	52.9	47.1
Single-mother	45.8	54.2
Desire cohabitation, alternative to marriage		
Family of Origin (<i>n</i> = 92)	16.3	83.7
Dual-parent, married	16	84
Single-mother	16	84
Desire career instead of marriage		
Family of Origin (<i>n</i> = 91)	20.9	79.1
Dual-parent, married	19.4	80.6
Single-mother	25	75

Table 9: Two-way Analysis for Career, Education, and Partnership

Type of Desired Goal	Important %	Unimportant %
Finding a mate, mutual intent to marry		
Twenties & Thirties (<i>n</i> = 77)	83.1	16.9
Twenties	81.4	18.6
Thirties	85.3	14.7
Education (<i>n</i> = 79)	83.5	16.5
Undergraduate degree holder	79.4	20.6
Graduate degree holder	86.6	13.4
Family of Origin (<i>n</i> = 77)	83	17
Dual-parent, married	81.4	18.6
Single-mother	87	13
Finding a mate, long term companion, not marriage		
Twenties & Thirties (<i>n</i> = 67)	28.4	71.6
Twenties	34.2	65.8
Thirties	20.7	79.3
Education (<i>n</i> = 69)	27.4	72.6
Undergraduate degree holder	28.5	71.5
Graduate degree holder	26.8	73.2
Family of Origin (<i>n</i> = 68)	28	72
Dual-parent, married	26.5	73.5
Single-mother	31.6	68.4

Looking at the educational attainment of participants, more graduate than undergraduate degree holders in the study considered finding a mate with the mutual intent to marry as important. Answers were collapsed from a Likert scale of “not at all important” = 0 through “extremely important” = 6, to a two-by-two table for “unimportant” = 0 and “important” = 1 (refer to Tables 8 and 9). After removing *neither* and missing responses (*n* = 79), 86.6% of graduate level participants found this to be

important, in comparison to 79.4% of undergraduate participants. Still, at least four in five participants from each subgroup found the mutual intent to marry as a life goal of personal importance to them. Conversely, when measuring participants' level of personal importance for finding a long term companion with marriage not being the end goal, agreement levels from both the undergraduate and graduate educated subgroups were nearly the same. Less than a two percent differential was found with undergraduates being the subgroup with a higher level of agreement. Overall, slightly more than one in four women (27.4%) desired to find a long term companion without the pursuit of marriage ($n = 69$) (refer to Tables 8 and 9).

Lastly, family of origin was used for two-way analysis in connection with a participant's desire to marry, find a long term companion, cohabitate, and pursue career (i.e., research question #5). The same protocol of removing missing and middle/*neither* responses from calculations was used. Answers were collapsed from a Likert scale of "not at all important" = 0 through "extremely important" = 6, to a two-by-two table for "unimportant" = 0 and "important" = 1 (refer to Tables 8 and 9). A larger percentage of women from single-mother homes (87%) found it important to find a mate with the mutual intent to marry when compared to women from married, dual-parent homes (81.4%). Also, it was important to a larger percentage of women from single-mother homes (31.6%) than married, dual-parent homes (26.5%) to find a mate for long term companionship, marriage not being the end goal. When looking at the preference to cohabitate, 16% of women, both from single and married families of origin, confirmed that they wanted to cohabit as a permanent alternative to marriage. More women from married, dual-parent homes (52.9%) than women from single-mother homes (45.8%)

indicated that they wanted to cohabit with their partner before entering marriage.

Regarding marriage and career, both subgroups of participants had nearly a nine in 10 ratio of women who desired to marry and have a career. Only a two percent differential was found, with women from married, dual-parent homes having greater agreement with desiring marriage and a career. To marry and be a homemaker without a career was found to be desirable by only a small portion of respondents (approximately four percent), all of which were from married, dual-parent homes. One in five women from the entire sample preferred career to marriage. This desire was found more among women from single-mother homes (25%) than women from married, dual-parent homes (19.4%).

Desired Traits of a Mate

A plethora of mate traits were provided and participants were asked to choose the level of personal importance for each trait in a man they desired to marry (i.e., research question #1). Scores were based on a Likert scale ranging from “not at all important” to “extremely important”, scored 0 - 6, respectively. The middle category was understood to be *neither* important nor unimportant. Table 10 provides the specific breakdown of scores and percentages for each trait. For a marriageable mate, the two most important traits, both equaling 100% agreement among participants, were *respectful* and *trustworthy*. A *monogamous* mate and *hard worker* tied for the second most important trait (96.8%), followed by *faithful* (94.7%), and *honor* (92.6%). Traits with levels of importance in the 80 to 90th percentile range were *family oriented* mate and *social acuity/tact*, which both showed equal importance at 90.5%, being a *gentleman* (86.3%), and *physical appearance* (81.1%). Within the 50 to 75th percentile range of importance,

never incarcerated (74.7%) was followed closely by a *clean background check* (73.7%), being *spiritual* (72.6%), and *street smarts* (67.4%). The remaining traits were important to less than 50% of the sample: *no children* (46.3%), *swag appeal* (36.8%), *never married* (30.5%), and *thug mentality/behavior* bottomed out with only two percent agreement.

Table 10: Desired Traits in a Marriageable Partner ($N = 95$)

Trait	Not At All Important %	Very Unimportant %	Somewhat Unimportant %	Neither %	Somewhat Important %	Very Important %	Extremely Important %
Spiritual	9.5	5.3	4.2	8.4	18.9	21.1	32.6
Faithful	0	0	0	5.3	8.4	17.9	68.4
Monogamous	0	1.1	0	2.1	7.4	20	69.5
Respectful	0	0	0	0	5.3	13.7	81.1
Physical Appearance	0	1.1	2.1	15.8	49.5	26.3	5.3
Social Acuity/Tact	0	0	1.1	8.4	28.4	42.1	20
Trustworthy	0	0	0	0	4.2	14.7	81.1
Honor	0	0	1.1	6.3	13.7	24.2	54.7
Gentleman	0	0	4.2	9.5	17.9	30.5	37.9
Swag	11.6	12.6	12.6	26.3	25.3	7.4	4.2
Street Smart	5.3	0	5.3	22.1	44.2	17.9	5.3
Thug	62.1	25.3	8.4	2.1	2.1	0	0
Hard Worker	0	0	0	3.2	10.5	26.3	60
Family Oriented	0	2.1	0	7.4	10.5	26.3	53.7
Never Married	14.7	17.9	12.6	24.2	20	6.3	4.2
No Children	8.4	10.5	7.4	27.4	22.1	20	4.2
Never Incarcerated	5.3	6.3	3.2	10.5	24.2	20	30.5
Clean Background Check	1.1	5.3	2.1	17.9	20	22.1	31.6

Age of Mate

When respondents were asked their age preference for a mate in comparison to their own age (i.e., research question #1), three options were provided (see Table 11). Participants were directed to check all options that applied. The greatest preference was to have a mate similar in age (88.4%), 69.5% preferred an older mate, while only 12.6% preferred a younger mate. This same preferential order remained consistent when comparing respondents in their *twenties* and *thirties* (see Table 12). This supports the assertion that women tend to marry men of equal or older ages. This holds consistent for this sample of women, regardless of personal age, even while being faced with a limited marriage market.

Table 11: Preferred Age of Partner ($N = 95$)

Age Comparison	%
Similar in age to me	88.4
Older in age	69.5
Younger in age	12.6

Table 12: Subgroup by Age for Preferred Age of Partner ($N = 95$)

Age Comparison	%
Similar in age to me	
Twenties & Thirties	88.4
Twenties	47.3
Thirties	38.9
Older in age	
Twenties & Thirties	69.5
Twenties	45.2
Thirties	22.1
Younger in age	
Twenties & Thirties	12.6
Twenties	7.3
Thirties	5.2

Educational Requirements of a Partner

Educational homogamy asserts that higher educated women tend to marry higher educated men. However, considering the lower educational achievement by men, in general, coupled with the African American marriage *market squeeze*, what is the current view of highly educated, African American women regarding a potential mate's educational level (i.e., research question #2)? Participants in this study were asked two questions: whether it was necessary for a mate to have as much education as they currently possessed, and/or was it necessary for a mate to have more education? Answers were graded on a Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", 0- 6 respectively; middle responses were designated as *neither* (See Table 13). One in four women disagreed to some extent (25.5%), that a partner should have at least as much

education; however, the majority of participants agreed to some extent (43.6%) that a partner must have at least as much education as they possess. Regarding the necessity of a mate to acquire more education than the respondent, 68.4% disagreed to some extent and only slightly more than eight percent agreed to some extent. It is important to note that approximately four percent strongly agreed that a mate should have equal levels of education, while no respondents strongly agreed that a mate should have more education. Rather, 22.1% strongly disagreed that a partner must have more education.

Table 13: Education Requirements of a Partner ($N = 95$)

Question	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Somewhat Disagree %	Neither %	Somewhat Agree %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
When choosing a mate, it is necessary for him to have <i>at least</i> as much education as I do. ($n = 94$)	3.2	7.4	14.9	30.9	24.5	14.9	4.3
When choosing a mate, it is necessary for him to have <i>more</i> education than I have. ($n = 94$)	22.1	23.2	23.2	23.2	7.4	1.1	0
63 When choosing a partner for a <i>short term</i> relationship (i.e., less than a year), I am likely to place emphasis on my partner's educational level.	1.1	12.6	10.5	-	30.5	37.9	7.4
When choosing a partner for a <i>long term</i> relationship (i.e., more than one year), I am likely to place emphasis on my partner's educational level.	0	2.1	4.2	12.6	21.1	36.8	23.2
When choosing a husband for <i>marriage</i> , I am likely to place emphasis on my mate's educational level.	1.1	2.1	2.1	8.4	23.2	37.9	25.3
The following is an important consideration when choosing a marriageable mate, College education. ($n = 94$)	0	1.1	2.1	12.8	22.3	37.2	24.5

When looking at the aforementioned questions by subgroups of participants (see Table 14), the Likert scale responses ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” were collapsed into two categories (i.e., disagree = 0, agree = 1) for two-way analyses. Missing and middle/*neither* responses were removed from tabulations. For women in their *twenties* and *thirties* ($n = 63$), stronger agreement for a partner to possess at least as much education as the respondent was found in the *twenties* subgroup. Nearly three out of four women (73.5%) in their *twenties* agreed to some extent, while only slightly more than one in two (51.7%) agreed to some extent in the *thirties* group. Likewise, when looking at participant responses according to her level of educational achievement ($n = 65$), the levels of agreement for a partner to have at least as much education as the participant were nearly the same, (i.e., 33.8% of undergraduate degree holders and 29.2% of graduate degree holders). The difference was in the percentage of disagreement. More than twice as many graduate degree holders (26.1%) disagreed with the necessity of a partner having an equal level of education, compared to undergraduate level participants (10.7%).

Participants were asked about placing emphasis on a partner’s educational level when considering a partner for a short term relationship (i.e., less than one year), long term relationship (i.e., longer than one year), and marriage (see Table 13). Participant answers were graded on a Likert scale of “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”, 0- 6 respectively; middle responses were labeled as *neither*. Education was an important factor for a partner, at any level of a relationship, for over 75% of the sample. This importance increased to 81.1% for a long term relationship and was at its highest for marriage (86.3%). Even though an increase in agreement is evident, there was no

statistically significant correlation. Specifically, a college education was an important characteristic for a marriageable mate to 84% of the sample, with 24.5% strongly agreeing. Interestingly though, employment status was most important, while income level nearly tied for importance with a college education for a marriageable mate. These are the topics of the following section.

Table 14: Education Requirements of a Partner by Subsamples

Question	Disagree %	Agree %
When choosing a mate, it is necessary for him to have <i>at least</i> as much education as I do.		
Twenties & Thirties (<i>n</i> = 63)		
Twenties	26.5	73.5
Thirties	48.3	51.7
Education (<i>n</i> = 65)		
Undergraduate degree holder	66.2	33.8
Graduate degree holder	70.8	29.2

Money Making Abilities of a Mate

In order to sustain a way of life, one must make money; to make money, one must be employed in some fashion. Hence, it is not surprising that employment status was the most highly agreed upon consideration for a marriageable mate by the sample (i.e., research question #1). No respondents disagreed, while 97.9% agreed to some extent, with 48.9% strongly agreeing. Answers were graded on a Likert scale of “strongly disagree” = 0 to “strongly agree” = 1; middle responses were denoted as *neither* (see Table 16). Income level was an important consideration for a marriageable mate according to 83% of the sample, with only a few (approximately three percent)

disagreeing. When considering a partner for a short term relationship, long term relationship, or marriage, his money making ability was the second most important consideration across all relationship levels to that of education. For a short term relationship, 65.3% agreed to some extent that one's money making abilities served as a factor to judge a man as a potential partner. This increased to 75.8% in importance for a long term partner with a slight increase in importance for a marriageable partner (77.9%). This increase in agreement was not statistically significant (i.e., Pearson correlation).

Even though a potential mate must have employment, it was not necessary for his income to be higher than that of the woman's in a relationship. This was indicated by 71.6% of the sample not disagreeing with the statement, "I am satisfied with being the primary wage earner in a relationship". Responses were graded on a Likert scale of "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", 0- 6 respectively; middle responses were labeled as *neither* disagree nor agree (see Table 15). For further examination of this data by subgroups (i.e., family of origin), Likert response categories were collapsed for two-way analyses (i.e., "disagree" = 0; "agree" = 1) with all missing and *neither* responses not being used for calculations. When agreement to be the primary wage earner was broken down between respondents raised in married, dual-parent homes ($n = 48$) and single-parent homes ($n = 16$), more women raised by single-mothers disagreed with being the primary wage earner (50%) in comparison to women raised by two married parents/step-parent (35.4%) (see Table 15).

Table 15: Subgroup by Family of Origin for Satisfaction with Being Primary Wage Earner ($N = 64$)

Satisfied as Primary Wage Earner	Disagree %	Agree %
Family of Origin		
Dual-parented, married ($n = 48$)	35.4	64.6
Single-mother ($n = 16$)	50	50

Table 16: Money Making Abilities of a Partner ($N = 95$)

Question	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Somewhat Disagree %	Neither %	Somewhat Agree %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
The following is an important consideration when choosing a marriageable mate- Employment status. ($n = 94$)	0	0	0	2.1	14.9	34	48.9
The following is an important consideration when choosing a marriageable mate- Income level. ($n = 94$)	1.1	1.1	1.1	13.8	36.2	38.3	8.5
∞ When choosing a partner for a <i>short term</i> relationship (i.e., less than a year), I am likely to judge a potential partner for his money making abilities.	4.2	17.9	12.6	-	33.7	27.4	4.2
When choosing a partner for a <i>long term</i> relationship (i.e., more than one year), I am likely to judge a potential partner for his money making abilities.	2.1	3.2	5.3	13.7	25.3	36.8	13.7
When choosing a husband for <i>marriage</i> , I am likely to judge a potential mate for his money making abilities.	2.1	4.2	7.4	8.4	24.2	31.6	22.1
I am satisfied with being the primary wage earner in a relationship.	8.4	9.5	10.5	29.5	14.7	17.9	9.5
I am concerned about conflict if I am the primary wage earner.	6.3	10.5	13.7	10.5	30.5	21.1	7.4

The concern of conflict within relationships where women are the primary wage earners was also addressed. Within the sample, 59% of women agreed to some extent, that they had concern of conflict in a relationship if they were the primary wage earner (see Table 15). Only 26.3% had actually experienced conflict in a relationship due to making more money than their partner. This specific question of having experienced conflict was answered with either a “yes” or “no” (see Table 17). It is intriguing to note that while only one in four women in the sample had experienced conflict, nearly three in five women were concerned of the potential for conflict in their relationship if they were to be the primary wage earner. Could this be due to seeing conflict in others’ relationships? Or is it possible that more women have experienced conflict than they would like to admit? If so, this could serve as a protective mechanism both for their partner and for themselves. This would be a topic to further pursue in qualitative interviews.

Table 17: Money Making Abilities of a Partner ($N = 95$)

Question	No %	Yes %
I have experienced conflict in a relationship due to being the primary wage earner.	73.7	26.3

Lastly, the financial security of participants is discussed in regards to marriage entry. Participants were provided with several options to choose from to indicate their own personal view of financial security and marriage. Participants could only check one option that best suited their perspective. The majority of women in this study indicated that they were not personally concerned about financial security for entering marriage,

and for many, they were already financially secure on their own. Analysis of the data shows that 95.7% of the sample is not concerned about financial security for marriage by either being financially secure on their own as unmarried women (60.6%), being financially secure before entering a marriage (24.5%), or by not being concerned about financial security to enter a marriage (10.6%). The remaining 4.3% stated that marriage would make them financially secure (see Table 18). It is obvious that while finances are a concern for lower income groups to enter marriage, this is not a pressing concern for this sample of college-educated women. Rather, the low availability of marriageable mates was the most noted romantic barrier to marriage entry.

Table 18: Financial Security and Marriage Entry ($N = 95$)

Personal Standpoint	%
Financially secure by own means	60.6
Financially secure before entering marriage	24.5
Not concerned about financial security for entering marriage	10.6
Marry to become financially secure	4.3

Shortage of Marriageable, African American Men

Considering the importance of education, employment, and income for a marriageable mate, what is the availability of African American men possessing these factors? Participants were asked whether they “strongly disagreed” or “strongly agreed” on a Likert scale continuum of 0- 6; middle responses were labeled as *neither* (see Table 20). Participants were presented with the following statement: There is a shortage of marriageable mates among African American males who possess a college education, job, and income greater than poverty level. The majority of respondents agreed that there

is a lack of marriageable men in the African American community (62.8%), with 16% strongly agreeing. Only 14.9% of the women sampled disagreed, with two percent strongly disagreeing. Education, employment, and income are all deemed important factors for a marriageable mate, and yet the marriage market for African American men is very much in want according to the sex ratio, and even more so when specifying *marriageable* men. This market becomes even more diminished as African American women increase their level of college education. Nearly three out of four women (72.3%) agreed to some extent, with 31.9% strongly agreeing, that it is difficult to find equally educated, African American men as one's own educational level increases. When further examining these responses by subgroups, answer categories were collapsed for two-way analysis into "disagree" = 0 and "agree" = 1; *neither* and missing responses were not used for calculations. This perception did not differ between undergraduate and graduate subgroups. However, 10% more of women in their *twenties* than *thirties* agreed that the availability of educated, African American men decreases as a woman increases her educational attainment/degree holdings (see Table 19).

Table 19: Subgroups Regarding the Shortage of Marriageable, African American Men

Question	Disagree %	Agree %
It is difficult to find equally educated African American males as my educational level increases.		
Twenties & Thirties (<i>n</i> = 79)	15.2	84.8
Twenties	10.9	89.1
Thirties	21.2	78.8
Education (<i>n</i> = 80)	15	85
Undergraduate degree holder	14.3	85.7
Graduate degree holder	15.6	84.4
There is a large number of African American men in universities. (<i>n</i> = 73)	72.6	27.4
HBCU attendee	18	82
Non-HBCU attendee	82	18
Attending a college/university increased my opportunities to meet single, educated African American men. (<i>n</i> = 82)	37.8	62.2
HBCU attendee	7	93
Non-HBCU attendee	44	56

The perceived availability of college-educated, African American men was also assessed. Once again, according to 84% of the sample, a college education is of utmost importance when considering a man to be a marriageable mate. Participants were asked whether they perceived a large number of African American men to be in attendance at universities. Responses were divided into subgroups consisting of women who attended HBCUs and those who attended other universities/colleges (i.e., research question #6).

Calculations were made after collapsing Likert response categories into “disagree” = 0 and “agree” = 1 responses. Missing and *neither* responses were not included in the calculations (see Table 19). Overall, only one in four participants (27.4%) agreed to some extent with the statement that there is a large number of African American men in colleges ($n = 73$). However, when comparing HBCU and Non-HBCU attendee responses, 82% of participants who had attended an HBCU agreed while only 18% of Non-HBCU women agreed with the statement. When participants were asked whether attending college had increased their opportunities to meet single, educated, African American men, 62.2% agreed to some extent ($n=82$). When looking at the subgroup, women with an HBCU background agreed much stronger (93%) than women from other universities/colleges (56%). Thus, attending a Historically Black College or University positively influenced the perceived availability of African American men within the college setting and increased the opportunity level to meet single, educated, African American men.

Table 20: Shortage of Marriageable, African American Men ($N = 95$)

Question	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Somewhat Disagree %	Neither %	Somewhat Agree %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
There is a shortage of marriageable mates among African American males who possess a college education, job and income greater than poverty level.	2.1	5.3	7.4	22.3	23.4	23.4	16
It is difficult to find equally educated African American males as my educational level increases.	1.1	2.1	9.6	14.9	19.1	21.3	31.9
There is a large number of African American men in colleges/universities.	19.1	27.3	26	0	13.6	8.2	5.4
Attending a college/university increased my opportunities to meet single, educated African American men.	9.7	18.2	9.7	0	30.4	14.6	17

Ethnicity of a Mate

For college-educated, African American women, is ethnicity (i.e., an African American man) a necessity (i.e., research question #7)? For this sample of African American women, the freedom to choose a mate outside of their own ethnicity seemed to be more prevalent than in the past. This means that marriage rates could potentially be on the rise for African American women. Answers were based on a Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”, 0- 6 respectively, with middle responses designated as *neither*. Participants were asked whether they have or have had interest in forming a relationship with a man from another race or ethnic background. Only 17% disagreed to some extent, with 5.3% strongly disagreeing. Seventy-eight participants agreed to some extent (71.3%) with having interests in men from other ethnic backgrounds, while thirty participants strongly agreed (31.9%) (see Table 21). Only those women who did not disagree at any level ($N = 78$) were asked the following questions concerning the ethnicity of a mate. Answers were either “yes” or “no”. Attraction to men of other ethnicities was confirmed by 81.8%. Nearly 80% of this subgroup felt that their potential to find a marriageable mate increased by looking for a mate among other ethnicities. Lastly, 60.3% confirmed that ethnicity was not a deciding factor for a mate (see Table 22).

Table 21: Ethnicity of a Partner (*N* = 95)

Question	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Somewhat Disagree %	Neither %	Somewhat Agree %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
The following is an important consideration when choosing a marriageable mate- Ethnicity	1.1	1.1	1.1	13.8	36.2	38.3	8.5
I have/have had interest in forming a relationship with a man from another race or ethnic background.	5.3	3.2	8.5	11.7	20.2	19.1	31.9

Table 22: Perspectives of Participants Interested in Men of Other Ethnicities ($n = 78$)

Question	No %	Yes %
I have/have had interest in a mate from another race or ethnicity because I am attracted to other races and ethnicities.	18.2	81.8
My potential to find a marriageable mate is increased by looking among other races and ethnic groups.	20.5	79.5
Ethnicity/race is not a deciding factor for me when I choose a mate.	39.7	60.3

Two-way analyses by age and educational achievement of participants (see Table 23) were used to assess responses of agreement with the following statement: I have/have had interest in men of other ethnicities. Likert scale responses of “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” (i.e., scored 0 – 6 respectively) were collapsed into a two-by-two table of “disagree” = 0 and “agree” = 1; missing and middle/*neither* responses were not included in the calculations. Age wise, agreement was close for women in their *twenties* and *thirties* ($n = 81$). Nearly five percent more of women in their *twenties* (82%) agreed in comparison to women in their *thirties* (77.4%). Overall, 80.2% of women in their *twenties* and *thirties* agreed to having/having had an interest in men of other ethnicities. The next subgrouping was by level of educational achievement. Overall, 80.7% of women agreed ($n = 83$) to some extent. Specifically, a higher percentage of graduate level women (83%) than undergraduate level women (77.8%) agreed to having/having had an interest in men of other ethnic backgrounds.

Table 23: Subgroup by Age and Education Regarding Desired Ethnicity of a Partner

Question	Disagree %	Agree %
I have/have had interest in forming a relationship with a man from another race or ethnic background.		
Twenties & Thirties (<i>n</i> = 81)	19.8	80.2
Twenties	18	82
Thirties	22.6	77.4
Education (<i>n</i> = 83)		
Undergraduate degree holder	22.2	77.8
Graduate degree holder	17	83

When comparing college education, employment, income, and ethnicity for marriageable mate criterion, ethnicity was the least agreed upon factor by all women in the sample (*N* = 95). Answers were based on a Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”, 0- 6 respectively; middle values were labeled as *neither* (see Table 21). Less than half of the women considered ethnicity to be an important factor to consider for a marriageable mate (45.7% agreed to some extent). Thus, it appears that ethnicity is no longer serving as a leading indicator for mate preference among highly educated, African American women. African American women from the sample appeared to consider employment, education, and income all of greater importance than ethnicity when choosing a marriageable mate.

Standards Changing Over Time

It is possible that part of the delay for entering marriage for college-educated women is that college completion and establishing a career detract from personal time in

the dating scene/marriage market. It seems that as a woman's educational level increases, so does her expectation for a mate's educational level (i.e., educational homogamy). If standards for a marriageable mate increase with collegiate experience, do these standards remain consistent or do they decrease over time (i.e., research question #8)? As the delay in marriage continues, does this make a woman reconsider her "reservation quality" for a marriageable mate? According to the sample, 60% of the women disagreed to some extent, with 21.1% strongly disagreeing, that their standards have decreased over time. Yet, 30.5% agreed to some extent that their standards for a mate have decreased over the years. Responses were based on a Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", 0- 6 respectively; middle values were labeled as *neither* (see Table 25).

Subgroupings according to age and education were used in two-way analyses. Likert scale answers were collapsed to two responses, "disagree" = 0 and "agree" = 1, with missing and *neither* responses not included in the calculations. When comparing women from the sample within their *twenties* and *thirties* (n=85), a greater percentage of women in their *twenties* (74%) disagreed as to having lowered their standards for a mate over time in comparison to women in their *thirties* (57.1%). Regardless of age bracket, more than one in two women disagreed with personally having lowered their standards for a mate over time. The degree level of participants and their perceived decrease in personal standards for a mate over time was most informative. Disagreement with having lowered one's standards became more resonant as one's educational achievement increased. First, 61.1% of undergraduate degree holders disagreed with having decreased their standards for a mate over time. At the Master's level, 63.2% disagreed, while

91.7% of PhD degree recipients disagreed with having lowered personal standards for a mate over time. Even though this result is not statistically significant, it is quite insightful to see less wavering of personal standards for a mate, in lieu of aging, as college-educated, African American women increase their level of college degree attainment (see Table 24).

Table 24: Subgroup by Age and Education Regarding Lowering Personal Standards

Question	Disagree %	Agree %
My standards for a marriageable mate have decreased over the years.		
Twenties & Thirties (<i>n</i> = 85)		
Twenties	74	26
Thirties	57.1	42.9
Education (<i>n</i> = 86)		
Undergraduate degree holder		
Associates level	50	50
Bachelor's level	61.8	38.2
Graduate degree holder		
Master's level	58.1	41.9
PhD/Doctorate level	63.2	36.8
	91.7	8.3

Table 25: Standards for a Mate Have Decreased Over Time ($N = 95$)

Question	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Somewhat Disagree %	Neither %	Somewhat Agree %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
My standards for a marriageable mate have decreased over the years.	21.1	24.2	14.7	9.5	16.8	10.5	3.2

Discussion by Research Question

Each research question is discussed by number and is accompanied by a summation of the data from the analysis. The sample was limited by selection bias and is not representative of the population. Thus, responses are not generalizable to the general population nor to a specific subpopulation (i.e., college-educated, African American women). This sample consists of never married, African American women with college degrees between 18 – 40 years of age. Given small cell size limitations, there were no statistically significant results to report by using Chi-square or Pearson correlations. However, the patterns of the women in this study serve both exploratory and descriptive functions that advance research and theory.

#1: What are the criteria for a marriageable mate?

Referring back to the list of desired traits for a partner, *respectfulness* and *trustworthiness* were of importance to 100% of the women in this study's sample. Next, was a partner who practices *monogamy*, a man who is a *hard worker*, is *faithful*, and is *honorable*. Hill's original social science research on mate traits documented the importance of trustworthiness, or "dependable character" as a highly desired mate trait for couples since 1939 (Parmer, 1998; Buss et al., 2001). Porter et al. (1995) researched desired mate traits according to highly educated, African American individuals, and suggested that in today's era, "trustworthiness", "monogamy", and "ethnicity" are important when choosing a mate. For nine out of 10 women in this study's sample, a man who is *family oriented* and tactful in social situations (i.e., *social acuity*) is desired. Being a *gentleman* with an attractive *physical appearance* was important for four out of five women. The need for a man to have *never been incarcerated* and have a *clean*

background check is considered necessary by nearly 75% of the women. According to Dyson (2007), African American women prefer mates who are “similar in age”, possess a “stable career”, “higher status”, “education”, who have “never been married”, do “not have any children”, and who are “physically attractive”. Clarke’s (2011) study further documented the importance of a man having a “similar education”, a stable “career”, and “no involvement with past or current incarceration”. In general, “similar education”, “social status”, “financial potential”, and “industriousness” are all qualities that have remained important to women when choosing a mate for nearly a century (Buss et al, 2001). These attributes are important to women in this sample also.

Other traits measured by this study were found to be important to less than three out of four women from the sample: *spirituality*, *street smarts*, *no children*, *swag* appeal, and *never married*. The least desired trait, only one participant agreed, was *thug* appeal. It is interesting to note that while African American men perceive that African American women desire more thuggish men instead of gentlemen (Banks, 2011b; Dyson, 2007), actually the opposite is true for this group of highly educated, African American women. A “success ethic” does appear to shape the marital traits desired by African American women in this sample. Thus, the desire to marry someone with comparable education who will improve the financial and social standing of the couple is a consistent theme found throughout past and current research (Ross, 1997), and is further confirmed by this specific study.

It must be noted, that the need for a man to never have been involved with the legal system is somewhat surprising considering the disproportionately high incarceration rates of African American men. It was quite interesting that three out of four respondents

agreed that a marriageable mate would *never* have been *incarcerated* and would also have a *clean background check*. To never be incarcerated means that one would not marry a felon, which is feasible since misdemeanors tend to be dealt with as fines and/or through detour programs that do not require one to serve time. However, to say that a marriageable mate almost equally needs to have a clean background check, this seems somewhat impractical. Does this include no traffic tickets, past due child support, no drug convictions, no history of violence, etc.? Are certain violations understandable while others serve as deal breakers? Or ... is this simply the politically correct answer to give? More specific questioning is needed in additional research to understand this perspective.

Several other patterns were evident in this study. First, a large majority of women from the study preferred a partner either similar in age or older, which is consistent with the literature regarding mate preference (Dyson, 2007). Education was important for more than 75% of the sample, thereby supporting educational homogamy in mate choice for the given sample of women. This supports the “status attainment hypothesis” which states that individuals pursue relationships with partners of equal educational attainment, not less (Blossfeld, 2009). The financial position of a partner was important in relation to his ability to make money, but not his ability to be the primary breadwinner. This characteristic was second most important to that of education for this subsample of women. With the increase in relationship commitment level, the importance of a man’s ability to contribute to his livelihood and/or a combined household’s income also increased. Porter et al. (1995) had postulated that women require more from a partner

with an increase in commitment from dating to marriage, which was supported by this study.

Ethnicity did not appear as important to this group of women in comparison to other studies (Banks, 2011b; Lichter et al., 1992; Crowder & Tolnay, 2000; Porter et al., 1995). Only 45.7% thought ethnicity was important when choosing a partner; however, African American or other particular ethnicities were not specified. Having an interest in men of other ethnic backgrounds was acknowledged by 80% of the women agreeing that they were either interested or already had looked beyond their own ethnicity for a partner. Women in their *twenties*, as well as, those with a graduate degree, tended to be more inclined to look for a partner who is not African American. This is an encouraging shift that may increase the likelihood of African American women finding marriageable men.

#2: Does a man's educational level influence his marriageability in the eyes of women?

A man's educational attainment was important to three out of four participants. According to this sample of women, a man's education being equal to one's own level of educational attainment was considered important by half of all respondents. Education was important for more than 75% of the sample, and this importance increased with each level of increased relationship commitment (i.e., a short term relationship, long term relationship, and marriage). Less than half of the women needed a partner to have an equal level of education as they, while only one-fourth of respondents needed a partner with more education. Thus, educational homogamy in mate choice was not followed by a majority of the sampled women. More women in their *twenties* required a man to have

equal education than women in their *thirties*. Women with PhDs did not require, as often as the other women from the sample, for a man to have equal education to their own.

#3: What is the level of importance of marriage, cohabitation, and a career?

First, it is important to recognize that 90% of the women in this study desired to be married and have a personal career. Various literary sources have mentioned the ever-present desire for African American women to marry (Clarke, 2011; Dyson, 2007; Banks, 2011b). This desire was consistent for women from this sample, as well. Very few women wanted to be married as a homemaker without a career. This finding of not desiring to be a homemaker is consistent with Porter et al.'s (1995) findings, where African American, college-educated women desired to increase their own education level and not be homemakers.

In this study, cohabitation was less desired in comparison to marriage. One in two women desired to cohabit with a partner before entering marriage, while only slightly more than 15% of women considered it desirable to permanently cohabit instead of marrying a partner. Thus, cohabitation was not found to be a desired alternative to marriage for most women, and therefore, the findings from this study do not strongly support Hattery and Smith's (2007) postulation that cohabitation is becoming the alternative for marriage.

Approximately 20% of the women in this study found the option of pursuing a career and not a relationship as a desirable alternative to marriage. Dyson (2007) stated that African American women with high status do tend to place higher priority on building a career rather than finding a mate/partner. King's (1999) research also stated that never married women tend to place more importance on a career rather than

marriage. This was supported by this sample of women, who deemed education and career of higher priority than finding a man to marry. When comparing agreement levels of participants, women first desired to advance their career, then increase their degree attainment, which was followed by finding a partner for a relationship. Although a relationship was last in importance, it does not mean that marriage is not desired. Rather, nine out of 10 women in this study did express a desire to marry.

When comparing subsamples by age, more women in their *thirties* wanted to find a man with the mutual intent to marry, while more women in their *twenties* wanted to find a man for long term companionship and not marriage. On a broader scale, only one in three women considered finding a long term companion, with marriage not being the end goal, as a desirable choice.

In regards to educational achievement of participants, more graduate level women than undergraduate wanted to find a man with the mutual intent to marry. The responses were nearly even among these subgroups regarding the desire to find a long term companion without marriage. Overall, four in five women desired marriage, while only one in four desired long term companionship without marriage.

According to a participant's family of origin, more women raised by single-mothers desired to marry when compared to women raised in married, dual-parent homes. This remained true when looking at long term companions, as well. The same percentage of women (16%) from single-mother and dual-parent homes desired to cohabitate with a partner in lieu of marriage. More women from married families of origin wanted to cohabitate before marriage than women from single-mother homes. Nearly equal portions of women from each type of family of origin desired to have both a

career and marriage (i.e., nine in 10 women from each subgroup). More women from single-mother homes found it desirable to pursue a career rather than marriage, while only women from married homes desired to marry and be a homemaker without a career.

#4: Is cohabitation a desirable alternative to marriage?

Cohabitation as an alternative to marriage was found to be desirable for less than one in five women from the study. Cohabitation was considered desirable as a prelude to marriage for one in two women from the sample. One in two women desired to cohabit with a partner before entering marriage, while only slightly more than 15% of women considered it desirable to permanently cohabitate instead of marrying a partner. Therefore, cohabitation was not found to be a desired alternative to marriage for most women in the study.

Subsamples by age, educational attainment, and family of origin were also assessed. In regards to subsamples of respondents by age, more women in their *thirties* wanted to find a man with the mutual intent to marry, while more women in their *twenties* wanted to find a man for long term companionship and not marriage. On a broader scale, only one in three women considered finding a long term companion, with marriage not being the end goal, as a desirable choice. When looking at the educational achievement of participants (i.e., undergraduate and graduate), responses were nearly even regarding the desire to find a long term companion without marriage. Overall, four in five women desired marriage, while only one in four desired long term companionship without marriage. According to a participant's family of origin, more women raised by single-mothers desired to have a long term companion than women who were raised in married, dual-parent homes. The same percentage of women (16%) from single-mother

and dual-parent homes desired to cohabitate with a partner in lieu of marriage. More women from married families of origin wanted to cohabitate before marriage than women from single-mother homes.

#5: Does being raised in a married versus single-parent home influence these women's personal desires to marry as adults?

A majority of the women in the sample desired to marry, but this was greatest among women raised in single-mother households. According to a participant's family of origin, more women raised by single-mothers desired to marry when compared to women raised in married, dual-parent homes. More women from married families of origin wanted to cohabitate before marriage than women from single-mother homes. Nearly equal portions of women from each type of family of origin desired to have both a career and marriage (i.e., nine in 10 women from each subgroup). More women from single-mother homes found it desirable to pursue a career rather than marriage, while only women from married homes desired to marry and be a homemaker without a career.

#6: Does attending an HBCU improve a woman's opportunity to meet marriageable African American men?

Nationwide, African American women outnumber African American men on college campuses, regardless of a university being an HBCU or non-HBCU (Gordon, 2006). Furthermore, lower enrollment and graduation rates of African American men are found when compared to African American women (Dyson, 2007). However, in lieu of these facts, the majority of women from the sample who had attended an HBCU (93%) perceived that they had opportunities to meet single, marriageable, African American men on college campuses; only 56% of women who had attended non-predominantly

black universities and colleges agreed with this view. Also, agreement levels were four times greater among women with HBCU backgrounds (82%) concerning the perception of a large number of African American men being in attendance at colleges and universities. Only 18% of women from Non-HBCUs agreed with this statement.

#7: Is ethnicity a strong basis for choosing a marriageable mate?

Ethnicity was the least agreed upon consideration for a marriageable mate when compared to other requirements (i.e., possessing a college education, employment, and sufficient income). Over 60% of the sample confirmed that ethnicity was not a deciding factor for choosing a partner. More than 70% of the women in this study's sample expressed having interest in forming a relationship with men from other ethnic backgrounds. Out of this group of women who had interest in men of other ethnicities, almost 80% felt that their potential to find a mate increased when looking beyond the African American dating pool, and nearly 82% of these women went on further to state that they were attracted to men of other ethnicities. When looking at ethnic preference of a partner according to women in their *twenties* and *thirties*, results were nearly evenly dispersed. A five percent differential favored women in their *twenties* as being slightly more willing to look for a partner of a different ethnic background. In regards to education level, more graduate level women than undergraduate level women were interested in men of other ethnicities. Once again, this was a small variation of only five percent.

These findings indicate a shift in the perspective presented by Banks' (2011b) research, which stated that many African American women tend to feel that marrying a man outside of their own ethnicity is taboo. Why would intermarriage by African

American women be considered taboo when this is a common trend for African American men? The reasoning for this is multi-faceted, so only a few perspectives are mentioned. In general, African American women have felt a need to support African American men, especially since so many odds are stacked against African American men in society (i.e, judicial/legal, professional, familial, etc.). African American women have felt the need to promote strength and solidarity for African American men and African American families by not marrying outside of their own ethnicity. But there are not enough African American men to marry. For every African American man, there are three African American women, and this is not taking into account the requirements for a man to be marriageable. Thus, the decision to only marry within one's own ethnicity is impeding African American women from finding marriageable men, which in turn is delaying, either temporarily or permanently, marriage and potential motherhood for well-accomplished women who desire to have a career and family life. By looking beyond ethnicity, the potential for marriage increases (Banks, 2011b).

#8: Do college-educated, African American women perceive that they decrease their standards for a marriageable mate as they age?

Sixty percent of the women in the study did not perceive that they had changed their standards for a mate over time. More women in their *twenties* (74%) stated that their standards had not lowered with age when compared to women in their *thirties* (57%). Of course, this younger subgroup of women does not have as many years to reference for having changed standards with aging. Regardless of age, more than one out of two women disagreed with having lowered personal standards for a partner. The disagreement of lowering one's personal standards for a partner was most insightful when

looking at women's educational levels. With increased education, regardless of age, stronger disagreement was shown for lowering personal standards. Thus, it does appear that education provides leverage for African American women to continue to have higher standards for a preferred mate. This finding of consistently held personal standards for a mate regardless of aging is different from Dyson's (2007) comment that African American women may lower their standards with age.

Limitations of the Study

This study is not a truly quantitative study. Rather, a mixed methods approach allows for a strong qualitative component to be added to the study through open-ended elaborations/responses. A limitation of this study was that there were no statistically significant two-way analyses between variables when analyzed by using Chi-square, nor were there any statistically significant Pearson correlations. This was largely due to the limited sample size and, possibly, the non-random sampling of participants. Insights gained from this exploratory study are neither generalizable to an entire population of people in the United States nor to the specific subpopulation of all college-educated, African American women. Respondents were limited to a group of ethnically specific women participating in organizations within academia, such as Consumer and Family Sciences, a college alumnus association (i.e., Kentucky State University, HBCU), and an honors society. Thus, a purposive sample of college-educated, African American women were asked to discuss and explore themes regarding their perception of marriage and marriageable partners/mates. This approach can inform theory and further research on groups within today's society.

Future Directions

Marriage serves as an ultimate buffer from poverty for African American families, but marriages are being entered much less often. This creates very real repercussions for single-parents and fatherless children. Increased marriages would greatly build the African American family and community from within. Hattery and Smith (2012) noted that poverty rates of two parent households were half the rate of poverty for single parented homes. Interestingly, marriage and not education appear to be the most effective tool for breaking the cycle of poverty (Hattery & Smith, 2012). This claim should be further pursued in future research. On a societal level, social and family services should increase their focus on strengthening the African American community by investing in relationships/marriage, children, and families. Increased focus on healthy relationships and marriages could improve the status of both marriage entry and longevity for all couples. This is especially critical for single parents and poorer families.

In recognition of the growing numbers of single-parents, future studies should highlight information according to men and women experiencing this unique life role/stage. Qualitative research conducted by Holland (2009) showed that single African American women who attend college while having children have a significant change in their life-cycle stage of coupling and marriage. An additional life stage has been proposed for single-mothers, the eminent mothers' stage (EMS), which could be utilized to assist and screen for stressors within this population of women who balance career, education, family life, and relationships. It is highly urged for more research to focus on this subpopulation of women.

Future research needs to take into account the increasing rate of African American women interracial dating and marrying. The theoretical implications and practical effects this has on the lives of African American women should be assessed. Specifically, it should be asked whether African American intermarried women perceive their (ethnically heterogamous/different) partner as a means of improving (i.e., marrying up/hypergamy) and/or finding a comparable partner (i.e., homogamous) in educational attainment, status, financial standing, etc. According to Banks (2011b), many African American marriages generally have the dynamic of a higher earning wife and a less accomplished husband. Thus, African American women who do marry intraracially often marry down in status, income, and educational level (Banks, 2011b). Hence, the effects and dynamics of interracial marriages of African American women should be included for comparison within future marital research.

It would be beneficial to pursue a longitudinal study of African American women, both college-educated (e.g., subsample) and all inclusive, regarding marriage entry. Specifically, a deeper look at marriage and dating patterns should be explored, especially concerning interracial couples. Further research is needed to see whether large samples support the reported increase of the openness of African American women to look beyond ethnicity for a partner. This needs to be included in future study frameworks and dialogue.

Implications for Families and Communities

Renowned researcher and Professor of Law at Stanford Law School, Ralph Richard Banks, has spear headed a new wave in research on the marriage decline within the African American community. Banks presents the argument that African American

women could increase their influence/bargaining power in relationships with African American men by entering into relationships with men of other ethnicities. To relay this hypothesis, Dr. Banks describes this concept in his 2011 article from the Wall Street Journal (August 6, 2011):

By opening themselves (black women) to relationships with men of other races, black women would also lessen the power disparity that depresses the African-American marriage rate. As more black women expanded their options, black women as a group would have more leverage with black men. Even black women who remained unwilling to love across the color line would benefit from other black women's willingness to do so.

It is encouraging to see within this study that a majority of college-educated, African American women were looking beyond ethnicity for marriageable men. If more African American women are pursuing this marital choice, there is potential to improve the opportunities for all African American women in the marriage market to find a partner.

Bell et al. (1990) suggested a focus on Afro-centric relationship values rather than Euro-centric values for African American relationships and families. Euro-centric ideologies ascribe to "individualism, and gaining control over the environment or surroundings (people, ideas, objects-property). Mastery is achieved through competition, aggression, materialism, domination and power, oppression, independence, and the transformation and rearranging of objects in nature" (p. 163). In heterosexual relationships, men tend to be the dominant family member and women are subordinate/ascribe to a separate role. Socio-economic status, as indicated by personal income and education level, is considered an important indicator for marriage stability

within American culture. Bell et al. propose that African American men and women have been oppressed in their mental perspective of relationship values by assimilating to Euro-centric values. Thus, the development of African American relationships has been hindered. An Afro-centric perspective represents mutual respect in relationships, upholds strong moral character, sharing, and sacrifice. Spiritual awareness and balance within the home place greater value on “personal-human qualities rather than physical-material qualities” (p.168). An old African adage summing up this paradigm states: “I am because we are, and because we are, therefore, I am” (p.170). Thus, the strengthening and survival of the individual, family, and community are of utmost importance within the culture of the African American community. A more Afro-centric approach would be helpful in both research and social service/business sectors for the intent of supporting African American families through acknowledgement and respect of the African heritage. This would be a tremendous paradigm to utilize for marriage initiatives, family life education, etc.

Edin & Reed (2005) suggest that a promotion of family life and marriage should be targeted among poorer groups as well, with marriage campaigns centering on the benefits of children being raised with both biological parents in an environment of low parental conflict. Teaching objectives, such as relationship quality and building financial support/security/assets, should be taught for marital success rather than focusing on marriage initiatives which may be based on marriage entry rates and not marital longevity. It needs to become a priority within communities to teach individuals and couples how to have healthy relationships. The Hope Network and the African-

American Healthy Marriage Initiative are two community endeavors that are pursuing these goals.

Summary

African American women are confronted by a marriage market shortage of *marriageable* African American men, which significantly decreases their likelihood of entering marriage. However, the desire to marry remains prevalent among African American women. Marriage is highly desired by educated, African American women, yet the lack of marriageable men is the most common barrier for entering romantic relationships. Finding a mate with comparable education, financial status, and a career are all important factors when considering a partner, yet the preference for finding a man of the same ethnicity is no longer as prevalent. Mate traits, such as *respect*, *trustworthiness*, *monogamous*, *hard worker*, and *honorable*, were the most highly rated traits among this sample of women. Personal life goals of increasing one's education and establishing a career were considered more important than finding a man to marry. Some women did desire to cohabit rather than marry; however, more women desired to marry. Many were willing to cohabit as a prelude to marriage. Women who had attended an HBCU considered colleges to have a large number of African American men enrolled, as well as, viewed college life as a time of increased opportunity to meet single, educated, African American men. This is in lieu of lower enrollment rates of African American men in comparison to African American women, in both HBCUs and other colleges/universities nationwide (Gordon, 2006).

Theoretically, educational homogamy (i.e., finding a mate with equal education) rather than racial homogamy (i.e., finding a mate of the same ethnicity) seems to explain

the expressed preferences for a potential mate among these well-educated, African American women. It is encouraging that most of the never married women from this study are continuing to desire marriage and are holding true to their personal standards for a partner throughout the years. By broadening their *pool of marriageable men* to include men from other ethnic groups, this desire to marry has an increased potential of becoming a reality.

Conclusion

The lack of marriage is a growing topic of discussion within the African American community. It is a hope of this research to further the discussion that is already going on across dinner tables, within churches, and among community businesses throughout the nation. Thank you to every woman, you know who you are, for granting me the privilege of discussing the real and pressing concern of the lack of men, especially single, marriageable, African American men, in today's communities. It is a hope that by bringing this topic to academia, that more understanding will be given to African American women, couples, and families. May the discussion now further proliferate!

Chapter 3:

Summary

The three chapters of this manuscript style thesis have created an understanding of the African American marriage market, its constraints on African American women who desire to marry, and how educated, African American women are choosing to respond by pursuing life goals of education, career, and then marriage. This descriptive study focused on college-educated, African American women's marital choices. This purposive sample of women (N = 95) were never married and were of prime marrying age (i.e., 18 to 40). Themes regarding the perception of marriage and the desired traits of marriageable partners/mates were explored while using a mixed methods approach. No results were found to be statistically significant; however, the insight gained from this research was informative for descriptive and exploratory purposes.

African American women are confronted by a marriage market shortage of *marriageable*, African American men, which significantly decreases their likelihood of entering marriage. However, the desire to marry remains prevalent among African American women. What are the marital choices of today's educated, African American women? Various mate and marital preferences were discovered in this study. Marriage is highly desired by educated, African American women, yet the lack of marriageable men is the most common barrier for entering romantic relationships. Finding a mate with comparable education, financial status, and a career are all important factors when considering a partner, yet the preference for finding a man of the same ethnicity is no longer as prevalent. Mate traits, such as *respect*, *trustworthiness*, *monogamous*, *hard worker*, and *honorable*, were the most highly rated traits among this sample of women.

Personal life goals of increasing one's education and establishing a career were considered more important than finding a man to marry. Some women did desire to cohabit rather than marry; however, more women desired to marry. Many were willing to cohabit as a prelude to marriage. Women who had attended an HBCU considered colleges to have a large number of African American men enrolled, as well as, viewed college life as a time of increased opportunity to meet single, educated, African American men. This is in lieu of lower enrollment rates of African American men in comparison to African American women, in both HBCUs and other colleges/universities nationwide (Gordon, 2006).

Theoretically, educational homogamy (i.e., finding a mate with equal education) rather than racial homogamy (i.e., finding a mate of the same ethnicity) seems to explain the expressed preferences for a potential mate among these well-educated, African American women. It is encouraging that most of the never married women from this study are continuing to desire marriage and are holding true to their personal standards for a partner throughout the years. By broadening their *pool of marriageable men* to include men from other ethnic groups, this desire to marry has an increased potential of becoming a reality.

It is hoped that this study may enhance clarity concerning the marital preferences of educated, African American women. More importantly, that an understanding is provided that may further bridge the gap between men and women within communities. The aim of this research is to stimulate the dialogue of marriage within communities, while also bringing the topic of African American marriages more to the forefront of academic research. This study can inform theory, as well as, further research on marriage

aspirations and requirements for educated, African American women within today's society

Future Directions

Social and family services should increase their focus on strengthening the African American community by investing in children, families, and marriage. An increase in marriages would greatly build the African American family and community from within. In recognition of the growing numbers of single parents, future studies should highlight the unique perspective of these women and men.

Future research needs to take into account the increasing rate of African American women interracial dating and marrying. The theoretical implications and practical effects this has on the lives of African American women should be assessed.

Specifically, it should be asked whether African American intermarried women perceive their (ethnically heterogamous/different) partner as a means of improving (i.e., marrying up/hypergamy) and/or finding a comparable partner (i.e., homogamous) according to educational attainment, status, and financial standing. The effects and dynamics of interracial marriages of African American women should be included within future marital research.

It would be beneficial to pursue a longitudinal study of African American women, both college-educated (e.g., subsample) and all inclusive, regarding marriage entry. Further documentation of whether marriage and dating patterns support the reported increase of the openness of African American women to look beyond ethnicity for a partner should be included within future study frameworks and dialogue.

Implications for Families and Communities

Banks (2011) presents the argument that African American women could increase their influence/bargaining power in relationships with African American men by entering into relationships with men of other ethnicities. To relay this hypothesis, Dr. Banks describes this concept in his 2011 article from the Wall Street Journal (August 6, 2011):

By opening themselves (black women) to relationships with men of other races, black women would also lessen the power disparity that depresses the African-American marriage rate. As more black women expanded their options, black women as a group would have more leverage with black men. Even black women who remained unwilling to love across the color line would benefit from other black women's willingness to do so.

It is encouraging to see that more college-educated, African American women are looking beyond ethnicity for marriageable men, and are, thereby, improving the opportunities for their own marriage and potentially the opportunities to marry for other African American women also.

Bell et al. (1990) proposes that African American men and women have been oppressed in their mental perspective of relationship values by assimilating to Euro-centric values, which has hindered the development of African American relationships. An Afro-centric perspective represents mutual respect in relationships, upholds strong moral character, sharing, and sacrifice. Spiritual awareness and balance within the home place greater value on "personal-human qualities rather than physical-material qualities" (p.168). An old African adage summing up this paradigm states: "I am because we are, and because we are, therefore, I am" (p.170). Thus, the strengthening and survival of the

individual, family, and community are of utmost importance within the culture of the African American community. This needs to be understood and promoted within marriage initiatives, family life education, etc.

A priority must be made within communities to teach individuals and couples how to have healthy relationships. The Hope Network and the African-American Healthy Marriage Initiative are two community endeavors that are pursuing these goals.

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The lack of marriage is a growing topic of discussion within the African American community. It is a hope of this research to further the discussion that is already going on across dinner tables, within churches, and among community businesses throughout the nation. Thank you to every woman, you know who you are, for granting me the privilege of discussing the real and pressing concern of the lack of men, especially single, marriageable, African American men, in today's communities. It is a hope that by bringing this topic to academia, that more understanding will be given to African American women, couples, and families. May the discussion now further proliferate!

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