Marital Stability: a Qualitative Psychological Study of African-American Couples

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MARITAL STABILITY: A QUALITATIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN COUPLES

a dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated factors associated with stable marriages among twelve African-American, working-class couples who had been married for a minimum of twenty years, with children who were at least 18 years of age. The researcher conducted an in-depth interview with each spouse separately, and explored aspects of three different stages of their marriages: the early years, child rearing years, and post-child rearing years. Factors that were examined to determine their impact on marital stability included relationship variables, external factors and the influence of respondents' parents' marriages on their relationships.

All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Transcripts were then analyzed for salient themes and independently scored by a male and female; reliability was .89. The HyperRESEARCH software program was used to organize and analyze the data.

Sixteen marital themes emerged from the data. Four of these themes were pre-marital: initial attraction, family support for choice of partner, circumstances at time of marriage, and expectations about marriage. Three categories were tied to marital themes: marital roles, relatedness, and communication. Three more factors found to influence marriages were related to values and beliefs, including religion, attitudes towards divorce, and other values. External factors which impacted the marriage included finances, extended families, culture, and racism/discrimination. The influence of particpants' parents' marriages also emerged as having an impact on their own relationships. Marital satisfaction was a final factor which was related to marital stability among couples in this sample.

In examining the data generated by this study, gender differences were noted in marital roles and behavior, participants' ability to display sensitivity towards their spouses, assessment of the sexual relationship, perception of psychosocial intimacy in the marriage, overall reports of marital satisfaction, and alcoholism. Results are discussed in light of their contribution to existing theories and research on marital satisfaction and stability, and in terms of their usefulness for marital therapy, especially with minority couples.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Marriage as an institution is undergoing significant changes in our society. Factors contributing to trends that are seen in present-day marital relationships include changing roles for men and women brought about by the women's movement which advocates for role equality, as well as more demanding economic times which require that both partners contribute financially to the family (Altrocchi, 1988). In addition to societal influences which are affecting the structure of marriage relationships, people's expectations of marriage are changing. Partners are often sought out based on the desire for companionship and personal fulfillment rather than solely for purposes of procreation (Bjorksten & Stewart, 1984). A disturbing trend in marriage is seen in the rising divorce rate in the United States, with approximately 50% of all marriages today expected to see this fate (United States Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census, 1992).

Trends in marriages among African-Americans are shifting dramatically as well. Marriages among this group of people were characterized by a remarkable degree of stability from the years following slavery up until the 1960's (Billingsley, 1990). The typical family consisted of a married couple at the core, often joined by other relatives, and not uncommonly incorporating non-relatives as well. In the past several decades this traditional family system has seen phenomenal changes. In 1970, the percentage of all black families with children headed by married couples

dropped from 78% to 64%. This figure continued to decrease rapidly to 48% by 1980, and to 40% by 1985. Conversely, the number of single-parent families, particularly the female-headed family, have risen steadily from 22% in 1960 to 57% in 1985 (Billingsley, 1990). The increasing rate of divorce is disproportionate among black couples, with the ratio of divorces to black women rising 104% over the past decade (Chapman, 1988). Billingsley (1990) notes that: "both black men and women have been avoiding or abandoning the marital status in record numbers during recent years. This behavior constitutes the leading edge of the contemporary African-American family crisis" (p. 90).

Marital instability among African-Americans may be attributable to unrelenting societal pressures which these couples experience. Pinderhughes (1982) notes the pervasive effect throughout history of the victimization that blacks experience. This "victim system" of which they are a part "threatens self-esteem and reinforces problematic responses in communities, families, and individuals" (Pinderhughes, 1982, p. 109). In terms of the marriage relationship, barriers to educational and employment opportunities can lead to financial hardship and stress in relationships, which in turn, may make it difficult to fulfill family roles. This undermining of marital roles may ultimately lead to partners' disappointment in the relationship and eventual termination of the marriage. Black men are described as being especially susceptible to this cycle since their identity is often tied to their ability to provide for their families, yet their hard work typically goes unrewarded due to discriminatory practices (Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 1982).

It is important to note that most of the dramatic changes taking place

in marital patterns among black couples are occurring in lower-class groups. Marital relationships among working-class and middle-class couples are characteristically more stable. In fact, among the non-poor working-class, a 1983 survey showed that 60% of individuals in this group were married couples with families (Billingsley, 1990).

Despite the disturbing changes taking place in the African-American family structure, research is limited regarding marital stability among black couples, especially among couples in seasoned relationships. It is important that factors affecting stability in marriage among this group are identified in order to understand and cope with potentially damaging trends in African-American marital relationships. Exploration into factors contributing to the relative stability which exists among working-class blacks may provide important information to slow the trend of instability among lower income groups. Because little information exists with regards to characteristics of African-American marriages, a qualitative research design was used. This allowed for in-depth exploration of the phenomenon in question and served to generate theory based on the data collected.

Statement of the problem

Over the past 30 years there has been increasing interest in studying and understanding a variety of aspects of the marital relationship. Given that the nature of marriage in the United States is undergoing significant changes, especially regarding the longevity of the relationship, it is important to focus research efforts on developing an understanding of what holds marriages together, especially for culturally diverse groups.

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that are involved in keeping marriages together among African-American, working-class couples who have been married for twenty years or longer, and who have children no younger than 18 years of age. This study also explored the changing nature of marriages over time, as couples progressed through three stages: 1) Pre-child rearing, 2) Child rearing, and 3) Post-child rearing. Cultural factors were examined to determine the possible relationship between these factors and marital stability among blue-collar black couples.

A qualitative approach was used to generate data about couples' subjective experiences of their marriages over time. This methodology was selected because of the richness of information generated regarding each participant's perception of their marriage. This was an important consideration for this study because so little information currently exists about the nature of stability in African-American marriages.

The sample used in this study consisted of twelve couples who met the criteria described above. A semi-structured interview served as the means by which information was collected about these individuals' experiences in marriage. Husbands and wives were interviewed separately. The interview questions covered a wide range of topics including: initial attraction; role expectations in the marriage; perception of intimacy and communication in the relationship; decision making and problem solving styles; perceived degree of conflict; child rearing practices, and equity. The impact of each spouse's parents' marriage on their own relationship was explored. Information was also gathered about the influence of external factors on the marriage such as religion, finances, and extended families. A

significant number of questions addressed the couples' experiences with their African-American subculture and their perception of the impact of their heritage on their marriage relationship. Issues addressed in this area included: experiences with racism and discrimination and how the couple coped with these experiences; the perceived impact of race on economic opportunity and the subsequent influence of finances on the couples' relationship; and the role of African-American traditions in the marriage.

Because so little research has been done in this area, it was the intention of this study to contribute to the general understanding of the African-American experience in marriage, and to generate hypotheses about the influence of cultural variables on marital stability within black marriages. Once the data was collected, it was systematically analyzed for significant themes related to marital stability.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

Many of the strengths of this research were directly related to the qualitative nature of the study. One of the main strengths of this research design related to the rich data elicited. The interview format allowed respondents to expand in an in-depth manner on their experiences in marriage. Interview questions were aimed at understanding the relationship over time, thus highlighting the dynamic nature of the marital relationship. The ability of this interview format to capture details of each couple's evolving relationship contributes a unique and valuable component to research on marital stability; most quantitative paper and pencil instruments are restricted to highly structured information, with little ability to account for individual

differences. Little attention has been paid in the literature to the subtleties of black couples' marital interactions. Information gathered from these couples provides guidelines for the direction of future research, both quantitative and qualitative.

This study compliments the existing quantitative research on marital stability, including studies by Hicks and Platt (1970), Lewis and Spanier (1979), Thomas and Kleber (1981), and Green and Sporakowski (1983). The detailed nature of the data helps researchers understand the general themes and trends which studies like these have identified as being related to marital stability. Additionally, the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) facilitated further exploration of themes related to marital longevity and adjustment. By drawing conclusions based on themes that emerge from the interviews, one can begin to delineate differences between the two constructs of marital stability and marital satisfaction.

Although the methodology employed in this study has clear benefits, there are several drawbacks. A common argument against the value of this type of research points to the subjective nature of the methodology. While it is valuable to obtain information from the individual's unique perspective, the focus on the respondents' subjective experiences places a certain limitation on the scientific (i. e. objective and measurable) aspect of the work. However, Strauss and Corbin (1990) point out that it is the aim of qualitative research to explore new realms of as yet unquantifiable information.

Retrospective, self-report measures can be limited in their reliability and validity. Previous attempts to moderate the impact of the variability of

such data include obtaining independent ratings from husband and wife, or from outside raters, such as friends (Orden & Bradburn, 1968). Subjects in this study were interviewed separately to compensate somewhat for this limitation. However, the retrospective nature of the study may compromise the accuracy of the information shared in the interviews.

The small sample size and the homogeneous characteristics of the group makes it difficult to generalize the results of the study. Strauss & Corbin (1990) emphasize that the purpose of using the grounded theory methodology is to generate hypotheses rather than to generalize results. The outcome of this study does provide important information to clinicians who are treating working-class, African-American couples. Through the method of logical generalization (Barlow, Hayes & Nelson, 1984), therapists can compare their clients to the sample used in this study, and extract information which is relevant to a particular case. In addition, this research offers groundwork for future studies attempting to identify central themes and issues connected with stability in culturally diverse marriages.

There arises some degree of variability simply because the researcher is an integral part of the interview process. The personality of the researcher, and the fit between her and different respondents, may affect the amount and nature of disclosure in the interview. Thus, even interviews within the same study may produce varying amounts of data. This phenomenon also contributes to difficulties in future attempts to replicate the work, as no two interviewers are alike. Specifically with regard to this study, it is important to note that the interviewer was a Caucasian female from an upper-middle class background, with an advanced degree. The wide disparity between her

characteristics and those of the respondents, who were African-American, from working-class backgrounds, with no college education, may have significantly impacted the outcome of the interviews. Hines and Boyd-Franklin (1982) cite Grier and Cobb (1968) in pointing out that blacks have a "healthy cultural paranoia" or a "refusal to identify with and trust people who differ from themselves in color, lifestyle, values, and so on -- particularly White people" (p. 101). No evidence was found, however, that the gender, socioeconomic status, and race of the interviewer had a negative effect on respondents and the quality of data elicited from them.

Significance of the Study

This study's in-depth exploration of factors associated with marital stability was an attempt to clarify the nature of components that are associated with long-lasting marriages, without necessarily tying these features to aspects of satisfaction in marriage. There exists in the literature some confusion around the extent to which these two concepts are related. Some of the most significant early efforts to shed light on factors involved in marital stability were based on the assumption that there was a direct correlation between the degree of satisfaction in the marriage and the longevity of the relationship (Hicks & Platt, 1970; Lewis & Spanier, 1979). However, as theory and research have progressed in this area, it is becoming clear that the previously unquestioned connection between marital quality and marital stability is more complex and uncertain than previously determined. In fact many studies have indicated that couples end their marriages despite positive evaluations of their relationships, while others

who report minimal satisfaction in their marriages, make decisions to remain together (Albrecht & Kunz, 1980; Blood & Blood, 1979; Lenthall, 1977; Swensen & Moore, 1984). Thus, although marital quality is still identified as a major predictor of marital intactness, it does not account for all of the variability in marital longevity.

The need to identify elements of lasting relationships is important for several reasons. Divorce rates in the United States have been increasing over the past several decades. This is especially true for black couples (Chapman, 1988). Marital problems have a significant impact on the psychological and physical well-being of the individual (Segraves, 1982). In fact, marital difficulties are among the three most common reasons why people seek psychological help (Cowan, Cowan, Heming, Garrett, Coysh, Curtis-Boles, & Boles, 1985). Thus, it is important to assess the nature of marital relationships in order to identify factors which contribute to long-lasting and satisfying marriages.

Knowledge of the healthy family system can equip clinicians to assess and assist couples experiencing difficulties in their marriages (Bjorsken & Stewart, 1984; Wilcoxon, 1985). Wilcoxon (1985) cautioned that counselors tend to overemphasize their clients' pathology and suggests that a focus on wellness models of marriage may enable clinicians to increase their understanding of the normal changes that take place in a marriage, and assist in their ability to educate clients who are attempting to negotiate various stages of their relationships.

In treating marital problems, it is critical that clinicians be sensitive to differences that may exist in various subgroups, such as working-class

couples and couples from culturally diverse backgrounds. Factors which contribute to stability in marriage may differ for various subgroups. Within the black population, the lack of knowledge and the history of misinformation about family life, as well as the lack of attention to the dynamics of marriage, make it difficult to effectively address problems among this group. Billingsley (1990) notes that the limited information about black family life is dangerous and is likely to lead to false theories about, and inadequate solutions to, the challenges that these people face.

The results of this study are also important in developing a theory of marital stability among culturally diverse groups. Information obtained in this project will be useful in guiding future research, as well as in helping therapists to make sensitive and appropriate interventions with the couples they treat. The fact that this project looked at how marriages change over time also provides important guidelines and data for clinicians working with couples in different stages of marriage.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Marriage is a dynamic, continuously evolving relationship in which partners experience changing roles and circumstances throughout their life span (Zube, 1982). Married couples rely on each other for emotional and financial support as well as companionship. Intact families are viewed as the foundation for the healthy development of the individual. However, marital longevity is becoming more and more elusive to American couples. For these reasons, marriage has long been a focus of attention in research. The nature of the marriage relationship has been studied primarily through an examination of two constructs: marital quality and marital stability.

Marital quality is the subjective evaluation of the marital relationship; it is a fluid, multi-dimensional phenomenon which is best depicted by means of a continuum from low to high (Lewis & Spanier, 1979). Concepts in the literature which are synonymous and interchangeable with "marital quality" include marital satisfaction, happiness, success, adjustment, and integration (Fincham, 1988). The subjective nature of this construct has led to problems in clearly operationalizing and measuring this dimension of marriage (Hicks & Platt, 1970).

Marital stability is an objective dimension of the marital relationship which refers to whether or not the marriage is intact (Hicks & Platt, 1970; Lewis & Spanier, 1979). This construct is defined more easily than marital quality. Thus, it is not as prone to the methodological and conceptual

limitations associated with studies of marital quality. Factors in the literature which have commonly been associated with marital stability include age at marriage, occupational and education levels, race or ethnic background, and socioeconomic status (Hicks & Platt, 1970). Research efforts have not typically focused on exploring factors related to marital stability.

Marriage researchers historically have assumed that marital quality is a necessary and sufficient condition for predicting marital stability (Green & Sporakowski, 1983). Thus, in attempting to understand the longevity of marriage, many studies have focused on identifying correlates of marital quality. A multitude of variables have been associated with this construct. However, some controversy exists around the study of marital adjustment as a means of determining the stability of the relationship since many researchers point out that some high quality marriages end in divorce, while other couples who are disenchanted with their relationship remain together (Hicks & Platt, 1970; Landis, 1973; Lewis & Spanier, 1979; Udry, 1973). The present study focused on the intactness of the relationship. No assumptions were made about the connection between marital quality and stability, although aspects of marital satisfaction were explored.

Theories of Marital Quality and Stability

Despite the emphasis in the literature on variables related to marital quality (and their implicit impact on marital stability), little effort has focused on developing a comprehensive theory to explain these phenomena. Lewis & Spanier (1979) provide one of the few expansive efforts to unify the copious and diverse literature on marital quality and stability. Their theory

draws on both the social exchange theory of human interaction (Thibault & Kelley, 1959) and on Levinger's (1965; 1976) notion of barriers and attractions to marriage. The authors' work is grounded in the implicit assumption that the quality of the marriage relationship is the most powerful predictor of a marriage's longevity.

In building their theory, the researchers began by identifying all published and unpublished work on marital quality and marital stability. They then extracted all concepts used as dependent variables in the study of these constructs and identified a multitude of factors that influenced marital satisfaction and longevity. Ultimately, they organized all the findings into three meaningful categories: premarital factors, socio-economic influences, and interpersonal variables. Some subcategories within these factors include adequate parental models, homogamy, social and economic well-being, positive regard for one's spouse, communication, and role fit. They also identified seven major threshold variables which mediate between marital quality and stability. These include such things as religious doctrine, divorce law and legal aid, marital expectations, real and perceived alternatives, and external pressures and social stigma.

Lewis & Spanier's theory of marital quality and marital stability can be summarized by describing three central propositions which the authors identify as critical in predicting marital dissolution. Their overall belief is: "the greater the marital quality, the greater the marital stability" (Lewis & Spanier, 1979, p. 288). However, they feel that two external conditions are most influential in determining the strength of the relationship between marital quality and stability. These outside influences are termed "alternative

attractions" to the marriage and "external pressures" to remain married. As alternative attractions increase for either partner, the strength of the relationship between marital quality and stability decreases. Conversely, when external pressures to remain married are high, the strength of the relationship between marital quality and stability will increase (Lewis & Spanier, 1979).

Lewis & Spanier's theory appears to be constructed carefully. However, Thomas & Kleber (1981) challenge the validity of the authors' basic assumptions. They argue that, based on exchange theory, Lewis & Spanier should have reached the exact opposite conclusions. In other words, as alternatives outside the marriage increase, marital quality should become a better predictor of marital stability, because a high quality marriage would require alternatives of a highly attractive nature in order to lure one partner out of his or her relationship. Alternatively, external pressures to remain married would produce a high cost of separating. This would make marital quality a poor predictor of marital stability because the significance of the relationship's quality in determining the longevity of the marriage would be minimized under these conditions.

Little research evidence exists which challenges or supports the ideas put forth by Lewis & Spanier. Green & Sporakowski (1983) attempted to assess empirically the extent to which alternative attractions and external pressures to remain married influenced the strength of the relationship between marital quality and marital stability. The authors administered a social survey to 131 married, and 166 divorced, individuals. Their results provided overall support for Lewis & Spanier's notion that marital quality is

the most powerful predictor of marital stability. However, the data was not unequivocal. First, the amount of variation in marital stability explained by marital quality was less than 50 per cent. Second, alternative attractions were significantly more influential in determining the strength of the relationship between marital quality and stability than were external pressures to remain married. In fact, the latter variable was only significant for men in the study.

The results of other studies also call into question the assumed interdependency of the qualitative and stable dimensions of marriage. It has been documented repeatedly that some couples remain in their marriages despite acknowledgments of dissatisfaction with the relationship (Landis, 1973; Swensen & Moore, 1984; Udry, 1973). Cuber & Harroff (1963) studied upper middle-class couples who had been married for at least ten years and who had never considered divorce. A significant discovery that emerged from this research was the fact that some couples remained together despite high levels of dissatisfaction with their marriages. These results were corroborated in a later study of 224 couples married for twenty years or more (Swensen & Moore, 1984). Using a self report survey, the authors found that respondents who indicated that they had never been satisfied with major aspects of their marriage, such as communication and expression of affection, frequently described accepting that they would never be satisfied and reportedly coped with this fact by turning their attention to other areas of their lives. The results of this study suggest that factors which are essential in holding marriages together may vary for different couples.

In an attempt to illuminate inadequacies in current explanations of

marital satisfaction and stability, Hicks & Platt (1970) discuss two commonly delineated marital types, the instrumental and companionship marriages. Instrumental relationships are more traditional, with partners' roles being divided along gender lines. The husband's role is more instrumental, while the wife's role is more expressive. Among these couples, variables tied to marital happiness include income level, occupational status, age, and religion (Hicks & Platt, 1970). In companionship marriages more emphasis is placed on the affective components of the relationship. Variables affecting marital satisfaction in these relationships include couple interaction, esteem for the spouse, sexual enjoyment, and expression of feelings. The authors suggest that perhaps different types of marriages emphasize different aspects of relationships when spouses rate marital satisfaction and when they make decisions about whether or not to stay in the relationship. Clearly, there are factors other than satisfaction which contribute to marital stability.

Although some evidence suggests that marital stability is affected by marital quality, the extent of the relationship between these two constructs remains inconclusive. Little research has specifically addressed variables which affect marital stability. To date, no sound theory of marital stability exists. Additionally, almost no research has addressed the characteristics of culturally diverse marriages. For these reasons, further research is warranted regarding how couples experience a variety of factors identified as important in marriage relationships, especially among people of color. This study explored several of the variables most commonly associated with marital quality, focusing on African-American marriages, in order to clarify what helps these couples stay together. The variables include power

structure and decision-making, couples' role expectations in marriage, communication patterns, and socio-economic variables. A closer look at the existing literature on each factor is provided below, with special consideration given to the literature on black couples.

Marital Power & Decision-Making

A definition of marital power is provided by Gray-Little & Burk (1983). They state that power structure in marriage is a function of which partner makes most of the decisions in distinct areas such as where to live and what type of car to buy. Blood & Wolfe (1960) provide the most sensitive operational definition of marital power. They break the variable down into four types of marriages: wife-dominant, husband-dominant, "syncratic" (both couples have input into decisions), and "autonomic" (both couples make a number of decisions independently). Using these dimensions, Blood and Wolfe (1960) administered a self-report inventory to 900 Michigan housewives who were representative of the area population, asking them to identify which partner made the final decision in eight different problem areas, such as choice of husband's job and purchase of life insurance. Results indicated that the highest level of satisfaction was tied to syncratic relationships, with autonomic and husband-dominant couples reporting equivalent but slightly lower levels of happiness, and wife-dominant couples indicating the least satisfaction in their marriages. The generalizability of the results of this study are limited, however, since the researchers did not include husbands in their sample. The era in which the study was conducted also limits the generalizability of the findings, since marital roles change with

changing societal trends. Subsequent studies have been conducted, accounting for these limitations; results have replicated the findings reported by Blood & Wolfe (Centers, Raven, & Rodriguez, 1971; Corrales, 1975).

Most research has not distinguished between syncratic and autonomic relationships. Instead these dimensions are combined to form the egalitarian category. A review of this literature on marital power indicates findings that are relatively consistent with the previously cited studies. In this group of studies, wife-dominant couples are most likely to be unhappy, egalitarian couples report the highest levels of marital satisfaction, and husband-dominant couples fall in between these two extremes (Bean, Curtis & Marcum, 1977; Lu, 1952; Scanzoni, 1968; Sprenkle & Olson, 1978; Szinovacz, 1978).

The body of literature on marital power indicates consistent results; however, these studies have often been criticized for a number of reasons. Based on a review of existing studies on marital power, Gray-Little & Burk (1983) state that the major impediments to this research are: 1) a lack of valid and reliable measurement techniques; 2) an overly simplistic conceptualization of power structure, and 3) an insensitivity to the subtle dynamics that occur as couples make decisions.

A gap in the literature also exists regarding the relationship between marital power and satisfaction among black couples, particularly working-class black couples. Stereotypic notions about the black family as matriarchal are widespread in American society. Along with this assumption comes the belief that this type of family structure is deviant and harmful to the integrity of the family unit, and to the black male (Dietrich, 1975). Willie and

Greenblatt (1978) suggest that research, commonly done by white investigators, can perpetuate this and other misconceptions about black families. The authors caution that one of the major problems that may occur when white researchers conduct studies with minority groups is that researcher bias may enter into the study, jeopardizing the accuracy of the conclusions drawn. The Moynihan report (Moynihan, 1965 in Willie and Greenblatt, 1978) offers a classic example of this phenomenon. The report, entitled The Negro Family (The Case For National Action), concluded that black families are characterized by a matriarchal structure, and that this pattern is so divergent from main stream American society that it seriously interferes with the progress of the group as a whole.

In fact, data collected over the past thirty years assessing marital power structure among black couples suggests that no single family structure prevails among these families. Rather, patterns of dominance seem to fluctuate according to social class, as is the case among white couples (TenHouten, 1970). With regard to the theme of matriarchy, Willie (1985) reports that among working class couples, the egalitarian authority structure is the most frequently reported for both black and white couples. A number of studies reviewed below support this observation.

Middleton and Putney (1960) administered a 15 item questionnaire to 40 families (10 white and 10 black middle-class families, and 10 white and 10 black working-class families). Partners completed the questionnaire separately. The researchers controlled for social class. Results indicated that more of the black families (17 out of 20) made joint decisions than white families (13 out of 20). With specific regard to black working class families, 8

out of 10 described a mutual give and take style of decision-making. Two of the 10 families were characterized by matriarchal dominance. This study supports the contention that power structure among black families is typically not matriarchal in nature.

Mack (1978) used a methodology similar to the one described above to assess power structure in 80 couples (20 couples each from Caucasian and African-American middle-class and working-class backgrounds). Couples completed the questionnaire separately, and were then observed together by the researcher. All husbands consistently displayed more power in the joint exercise, with working-class husbands using significantly more power than middle-class husbands. Male partners in all groups tended to perceive themselves as only slightly more dominant than their wives. All wives shared similar perceptions of power differences, although black working-class women assigned themselves more power in their marriages than did other wives in the study. Mack concluded that social class differences outweigh racial differences in identifying who dominates in a marital relationship.

In a series of case studies of black families Willie (1976) found that couples' decision-making styles were predominantly egalitarian. According to Gray-Little (1982) this pattern may compromise marital satisfaction among blacks. She employed two self report, and four behavioral, power measures to identify patterns of dominance among 75 African-American couples in an urban area in the South, who were primarily from working-class backgrounds. She then compared various power structures with couples' reported degrees of happiness in their relationships. Preliminary results

suggest that among blacks, husband-dominant couples report the highest levels of satisfaction in their relationships. Egalitarian and wife-dominant couples reported similar lower levels of marital quality. The author speculates that couples who fall into the latter two categories may assign a negative value to their style of decision-making because it deviates from the societal norm of male-dominance. Another explanation for the relative dissatisfaction among egalitarian and wife-dominant couples may be due to the husband's inability, as a result of racial discrimination, to rise to the same level of power in society as his white counterpart. Consequently a more equal partnership develops out of necessity rather than choice. While these initial findings provide insight into marital quality among African-American couples, more analysis is necessary in order to understand the impact of power structure on marital satisfaction and stability among black Americans.

Role Expectations in Marriage

The relationship between role expectations and marital happiness has been well established (Lewis & Spanier, 1979). The authors note that marital satisfaction seems to be related to "the congruence between the role expectations of one spouse and the role performance of the other spouse" (p. 284). In a review of the literature on marital power, Gray-Little & Burk (1983) provide a similar explanation of how the roles that husbands and wives play could impact marital adjustment. Namely, reports of low marital satisfaction may be tied to the incongruencies between what each partner expects of the other and the capacity of each partner to effectively fulfill that

role.

A variation of this theory suggests that it is the departure from cultural norms that creates marital dissatisfaction (Gray-Little & Burk, 1983). Despite changing attitudes about men's and women's roles in society, modern marriages are still influenced by traditional expectations about role responsibilities (Hiller & Philliber, 1986). In their study of 489 married couples from a variety of backgrounds, both men and women expressed a desire to expand their roles to include more non-traditional activities. However, these subjects did not want to give up their traditional gender roles. Thus, spouses who find themselves carrying out primarily non-traditional role responsibilities may not be as happy in their relationships as more traditional couples. This contention is supported in a review of the literature on marital quality by Hicks & Platt (1970).

However, the findings reported in Hicks & Platt (1970) may not be replicated today because of the changing attitudes about marriage roles in our society. Chia, et. al. (1985) surveyed American college students in 1962 and again in 1984 about their attitudes towards marital roles. The results showed an overall shift toward a more egalitarian attitude among respondents, with women endorsing more equalitarian attitudes than their male counterparts. Current data needs to be provided in the area of role expectations before reliable conclusions can be drawn regarding its relationship to marital satisfaction and stability.

No data exists which specifically examines black couples' role expectations in marriage. Gray-Little (1982), in her study of power processes among African-American couples, proposed that social and

economic discrimination forces these couples to be more flexible in their roles in order to survive in an oppressive society. Willie and Greenblatt (1978) corroborate this observation, noting that: "cooperation for survival is so basic in black working-class families that the relationship between the husband and wife takes on an equalitarian character. Each knows that his or her destiny is dependent upon the actions of the other. Within the family, husbands and wives tend to have assigned roles, although in times of crisis, these may change" (p. 63).

Descriptive literature, summarizing characteristics of African-American families, offers conflicting reports of black couples' role expectations and behaviors. Some authors describe black men as rigidly adhering to traditional roles, refusing to contribute to domestic responsibilities, thus placing additional strain on the wife (Billingsley, 1990). Other experts state that role-flexibility exists between black men and women in child rearing and household tasks (Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 1982). No data exists to support or refute the validity of either claim especially as it relates to satisfaction or stability in marriage. However, empirical evidence does provide general support for the notion that non-white marriages are typically less satisfying and stable than white marriages (Lewis & Spanier, 1979; Hicks & Platt, 1970). Further investigation would be helpful in clarifying the impact that role expectations and limitations among blacks may have on marital adjustment and stability.

Communication

The connection between marital quality and communication patterns is

widely recognized in the literature. Partners who are able to convey
information to each other openly, and receive messages accurately, have
minimal conflict in areas such as religious beliefs, family responsibilities,
sexual relations, intimacy, and decision-making (Noller, 1984). Behaviors
which facilitate effective communication include self-disclosure, sensitivity to
partner's feelings, listening and responding, agreement on connotative
meanings, and accuracy of non-verbal communication (Noller, 1984).

Demmett (1991) conducted a qualitative study assessing marital
satisfaction among 12 Caucasian middle-class couples. Communication did
not emerge as a significant determining factor in marital adjustment.
However, 17 of the 24 respondents stated that improved communication
over time was one way in which relationships improved over the years.
Similar results were reported in Podbelski's (1992) qualitative study of
seasoned working-class marriages.

Communication patterns may impact how couples deal with conflict.
Snyder (1979) noted that marital adjustment was tied to a couple's ability to
express their feelings to each other and to discuss problems openly. An
alternative view is put forth by Noller (1984) who suggests that conflict
avoidance may contribute to marital harmony among some dyads. Two
longitudinal studies conducted by Gottman and Krokoff (1989) lend an
interesting perspective to the issue of marital conflict as it relates to
satisfaction in the relationship. The authors observed 25 couples'
interactions around the resolution of a high conflict issue. Participants were
selected from a larger sample of both blue-collar and white-collar dyads
which had been recruited from the Champaign-Urbana, Illinois community for

a previous study on marriage. In the present study, the authors examined the relationship between spouses' verbal behaviors and reported levels of marital adjustment. Results indicated that couples in which wives were compliant and positive in their verbal responses to their husbands reported high levels of marital satisfaction at the initial data collection. However, the "keeping the peace" behavior observed in these couples was correlated with deteriorating levels of happiness over time. In contrast, couples in which wives confronted disagreements reported concurrently lower levels of satisfaction. However, these same dyads described increased satisfaction over time.

In a study of 30 couples, about whom no further demographic information was provided, Gottman and Levinson (1986) assessed the role of emotion in marital interactions. The authors reported that men were more likely than women to avoid conversation that was perceived as stressful. These men were described as more conciliatory and less conflict-engaging than females, often withdrawing from negative encounters. When these findings are considered in light of their potential impact on marital satisfaction, women appear to play a key role in enhancing long-term marital adjustment by promoting open discussions of conflict areas.

Markman (1981) provides further evidence which supports the idea that unrewarding communication patterns contribute to dissatisfaction in relationships. He conducted a five and a half year longitudinal study of 26 white couples, whose social classes were not identified by the author. He initiated contact with them at the time they were planning to be married, collecting ratings of communication and marital satisfaction at four points

during the five and a half years. The final data collection involved 21 of the original 26 couples. Results produced a correlation of .59 between positive premarital ratings of communication and subsequent marital adjustment.

Communication may be more salient in determinations of marital adjustment in certain types of relationships. As noted earlier, instrumental and companionship marriages have been identified as two common and distinct types of marriages. Instrumental marriages are tradition-oriented. Success in these relationships is measured by each spouse's ability to fulfill traditional, sex-typed roles. The husband performs in an instrumental style, while the wife provides for expressive needs in the marriage (Hicks and Platt, 1970). Typically, this marital style is found in working-class couples, a trend which has been attributed to this group's more rigid sex-role distinctions in early childhood (Rubin, 1976).

Companionship marriages appear to be arising out of the shifting attitudes and expectations about marriage in today's society. People in these relationships place greater emphasis on personality interaction, and make intimacy in the relationship a focal point when assessing marital happiness. Hicks and Platt (1970) point out that "inherent in the concept of companionship marriages is the belief that to be successful, couples must have effective, open, rewarding communication" (p. 560). Based on the differentiation between these two types of marriages, one might expect that effective and open communication would have more of an impact on marital satisfaction among couples in companionship marriages than it would among couples in instrumental relationships.

There has been little research on the correlation between interaction

patterns and marital stability. Filsinger & Thoma (1988) carried out a five year longitudinal study of 31 white couples from a range of socio-economic levels, who had been married for an average of 2.3 years at the outset of the project. These authors assessed couples' interaction patterns over time and found that certain dyadic interaction patterns were predictive of marital instability. Specifically, the two factors that were identified by these researchers as most predictive of instability were high levels of female interruptions, and negative reciprocity (one spouse immediately follows the other's negative statement with a similar statement). This study is valuable in that the authors were able to compare interactional styles of couples whose marriages remained intact with those who separated.

The current literature is void of any attempts to understand the impact of communication on marital happiness and stability among black couples. Pinderhughes (1982) describes the impact of slavery on black Americans as causing them to adapt to powerlessness, a consequence that often leads to behavior which is characterized by a "dominance-submission complimentarity" (p. 112). Characteristics which are caused by the submissive side of this duality include withdrawal, isolation, passive and overt aggression, dependency, accommodation, and manipulation. No information is available regarding the potential impact that these characteristics may have on partner interactions. However, the style of passivity, withdrawal, and accommodation described by Pinderhughes may have significant implications for communication among African-American couples. Empirical work in this area needs to be conducted.

Socio-economic Variables

According to the bulk of the literature on socio-economic status as it relates to marital quality and stability, there is a positive correlation between a relationship's resiliency and the couple's income level, educational attainment, and occupational status.

Overall, blacks are reported to earn less money, achieve lower educational levels, and hold lower status jobs than whites (Renne, 1970). However, when comparing black and white working-class couples, many similarities are reported in educational and occupational status (Willie, 1985). Despite these reported similarities, researchers note that the impact of socio-economic variables on marital quality in these two groups is significantly more deleterious for black couples (Hicks & Platt, 1970; Renne, 1970; Scanzoni, 1977), as evidenced by higher divorce rates for blacks than whites at similar occupational and educational levels (Scanzoni, 1977).

Scanzoni (1977) surveyed 400 black families from a cross-section of socio-economic levels. He found that a sense of alienation from status attainment, and low satisfaction with one's lifestyle, especially among wives, were responsible for low ratings of marital satisfaction. These pervasive feelings of economic alienation, followed by husband's job status, were most often tied to considerations of marital dissolution for black couples.

The black individual's experience of social and economic discrimination in an oppressive society contributes to a feeling of hard work with no reward or recognition. This can place severe pressure on a couple's relationship (Pinderhughes, 1982). Renne (1970) conducted a survey of 5163 California adults who were married and living with their spouses.

Results were controlled for race, sex, and age. Her findings indicated that black couples reported much higher levels of dissatisfaction in marriage than white couples. She attributed this trend primarily to socioeconomic status, noting that people who are less well educated, and in low prestige, low-income jobs were more likely to express dissatisfaction with their marriage. She described black couples as fitting into this category more often than white couples.

Chapman (1982) also suggests that economic hardships account for the rapid increase in divorce rates among blacks and are seriously threatening the future stability of black relationships. However, Billingsley (1990) points to the resiliency of the black working-class, citing that 60 percent of the marriages in this social class remain intact. A closer examination of the factors that help these couples remain together may help us to understand the reported increase in instability that is being witnessed among black couples overall.

Summary

Little or no work has focused on marital stability in couples from culturally diverse groups. However, it has been stated in the literature that "non-whites have different and essentially less happy marriages" (Hicks & Platt, 1970). Among black Americans, economic factors have been cited as having a major impact on marital relations (Renee, 1970; Staples, 1988). Other variables such as the dual role that black women play in the family as worker and mother, and the discrimination that blacks experience in work and other areas of their lives, place additional and unique strains on marital

relations among this subgroup (Billingsley, 1990). A closer look at black relationships is needed in order to illuminate potentially important factors which impact marital stability in this group.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Choice of the Qualitative Research Methodology

Past research on marital quality and stability has been limited by methodological inadequacies (Filsinger & Thoma, 1988; Hicks & Platt, 1970). First, there is a lack of clarity and consistency regarding the definitions of the constructs being studied. Aspects of marital stability and marital quality are often intertwined in research regarding these constructs. Several factors have been related to marital satisfaction, including communication style, similar values, shared interests, interpersonal variables, and marital roles (Lewis & Spanier, 1979). An inherent assumption has existed that these variables account for differing degrees of stability within the marriage dyad. However, findings by researchers such as Cuber and Haroff (1963) and Swensen & Moore (1984), suggest that a significant number of couples remain in their marriage despite high levels of reported dissatisfaction with the relationship. More attention needs to be paid to what variables partners' believe are intrinsic to a lasting marriage, separate from what is satisfying about that relationship. It is important to note that, to date, very little research has addressed marital stability separately from marital satisfaction. One qualitative study which examined marital longevity focused on lasting marriages among working class Caucasian couples (Podbelski, 1992). No qualitative research exists on marital stability among African-American couples.

Another limitation in the existing literature on marriage is the

predominantly atheoretical nature of this research. The fact that no unified theory of marital quality or stability exists contributes to researchers' inability to establish a uniform set of concepts to study.

Research that does exist on marital quality and stability has typically relied on self-report measures and other quantitative techniques. These measurement tools have been described as value-laden and subjective (Hicks & Platt, 1970; Lewis & Spanier, 1979). While studies using these techniques have contributed to our understanding of marital quality and stability, the quantitative approach to studying marriages may not be sensitive to the subtleties of couples' interactions.

Because of the methodological and theoretical problems that currently exist in the literature on marital stability, there is a need to slow the pace of current investigations until the variables in question are more clearly delineated. A qualitative methodology was ideal for the type of exploration necessary at this point in the study of marital stability. It has been described as the method of choice when exploring a relatively understudied area, since it will help "...to uncover and understand what lies behind [this] phenomenon about which little is yet known" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 19). The qualitative methodology can also shed light on the intricate nature of marital intactness which has been difficult to assess with quantitative methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The goal of the qualitative approach is to provide an in-depth, detailed exploration and description of the phenomenon under study. The descriptive focus aids the researcher in capturing, as fully as possible, the complex facets of the area under study (Giorgi, 1985). This is a critical

aspect of the qualitative approach, since making meaning of a phenomenon is at the core of this type of research design (Bogden & Bilken, 1982).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed a systematic means of generating theory based on the data that is collected. They termed this methodology "grounded theory." Strauss and Corbin (1990) have expanded on this technique and describe its purpose as building theory "...that is faithful to and illuminates the area under study" (p. 24). Using grounded theory to analyze qualitative data involves an interplay between data and hypotheses. This method requires an ongoing revision of theory as themes emerge from the data. While the researcher may have certain hunches about the outcome, the theory is arrived at inductively; the data will lead the researcher to draw conclusions about what factors are salient in stable marriages. Thus, it is necessary for the researcher to revise the focus of his or her inquiries according to the concepts that become salient. The detailed nature of the data collection allows for a rich pool in which to ground theory.

The explanatory yet systematic approach taken in this study was an appropriate and necessary step in research on marital stability. It allowed for both a detailed and sensitive description of partners' experiences in their marriages, while enhancing and clarifying the definition of marital stability and generating theory-building data related to the construct.

Statement of Subjectivity

Qualitative research is an inductive process in which the researcher relies on her analytic skills to recognize and draw out significant trends in the data. Using a semi-structured interview as a means of gathering data

introduces an interpersonal element in which researcher and respondent may influence each other in a reciprocal manner, impacting the process of data collection. Kvale (1983) sees this as a strength of the semi-structured interview, since a good rapport may facilitate disclosure on the part of the subject. However, this process is somewhat subjective in that the researcher bases her judgment on her knowledge of the topic and the individuals being studied. For this reason, it is important that the researcher identify and be aware of any bias that she may bring into her work as a result of past experiences and personal beliefs.

Many authorities caution researchers about how personal biases can creep into research involving culturally diverse groups. A lack of awareness on the researcher's part about his or her cultural biases may introduce inaccuracies into the results of the study. A significant factor for this researcher to be aware of is the difference in racial, cultural, and economic backgrounds between herself and the population she is studying. This researcher was raised in an upper-middle class, intact home in a rural area of the northeast which was comprised of predominantly middle- to upper-middle class Caucasian families. The overwhelming religious orientations were Catholic and Protestant. This researcher was a member of the Protestant church; however, religion played a peripheral role in her family life. This researcher had minimal contact with people of diverse cultures and lived in an atmosphere of covert prejudicial beliefs and intolerance of differences.

In contrast, the cultural background of the population being studied was African-American. These couples were from working-class

backgrounds and lived in urban or suburban settings. It was an assumption of this researcher that religion played a central role in the lives of a number of these couples since many were recruited from local churches. The extent of the differences between the researcher's and respondents' backgrounds made it especially important that this researcher continuously examine her personal assumptions to ensure that they accurately reflected the characteristics and issues of the couples being interviewed.

An extensive review of the literature on black families led to certain assumptions about what factors would emerge as important in the stability of African-American marriages. This researcher believed that social and economic discrimination would impact black couples' relationships in several ways. First, the hardship of enduring life in an oppressive society might lead to increased dissatisfaction among black couples who cannot reap the same rewards as their white counterparts. This, in turn, might lead to low self-esteem in black males who are unable to adequately fulfill their roles as providers, while black women might suffer role strain, having to work outside the home as well as care for their families.

Anger towards society was considered to be a potentially significant issue for these couples, depending on the degree to which each partner identified with his or her cultural background and was sensitive to acts of discrimination. Each spouse's ability to communicate their feelings, and to support each other's expression of anger, might impact their level of marital satisfaction and stability.

This researcher expected to find that the couples interviewed would cope with economic oppression in several ways. First, each partner's role in

the marriage was expected to be more flexible and less traditional, with wives holding jobs and husbands helping with household and childrearing tasks. Also, it was expected that the way couples negotiated role responsibilities would spill over into how they handled decision-making. Couples who were flexible in their roles were expected to be more egalitarian in power structure as well. More traditional couples were expected to fall into the male-dominant decision-making pattern. Despite the widely held belief that black families are matriarchal, the lack of support for this phenomenon in the literature led this researcher to assume this pattern would be relatively rare.

It was anticipated that religious beliefs would provide an important means of coping with life in an oppressive society, as well as having a positive impact on marital stability. The religious doctrine of enduring suffering and eventual salvation was seen as helping black couples to withstand a difficult life and to display higher levels of tolerance for dissatisfying aspects of the marriage relationship.

This researcher paid close attention to differences in her own experience with family structure compared to the typical family structure found in the African-American culture. This researcher was raised, with three siblings, by two parents in a nuclear family structure. Contact with extended family was limited primarily to visits during holidays. The typical black working-class family structure consists of a nuclear core surrounded by extended relatives and is often supplemented by ties to non-relatives. Adoption is described as a common practice among African-American families (Billingsley, 1990).

African-American family traditions were expected to play an important role in the stability of the black couples interviewed. Marriage in the African system has been described as the union between two groups rather than two individuals. This reportedly remains as a strong tradition among African-Americans. Thus, it was expected that, among the couples interviewed, the sanction of both families would be an important variable in couples' decisions to marry. According to Billingsley (1990), when this does not occur an element of instability is introduced. This researcher expected that family acceptance of the relationship would be a salient feature of stable marriages, while lack of acceptance would lead to marital conflict and lower levels of satisfaction and stability.

This researcher was recently married, and this fact contributed to her interest in studying the nature of the marriage relationship as it evolves over time. In my own marriage, I value commitment, companionship, and communication. It is my belief that these factors contribute significantly to satisfaction and stability in marriage. I have a bias that women are typically more expressive than men, and that women often play a key role in facilitating men's ability to nurture. These beliefs evolved, in part, from observing my own parents' relationship. I play a non-traditional role in my marriage, focusing on a career, and expecting that my husband and I will share equally in all responsibilities related to our life together. I was constantly aware of the bias that my background and experiences brought to both collecting and interpreting the data. As will be discussed in the results section, some of my assumptions were borne out while others were not accurate.

Research Design and Procedures

Participants. The sample for this study was drawn from the general population and consisted of twelve African-American couples from a working class background who had been married for a minimum of twenty years and whose youngest child was at least 18 years of age. Participants were considered to be African-American if they had been born and raised in America and could trace their roots back to the slaves and to Africa. This definition was based on Pinderhughes (1982). The choice to distinguish African-Americans from descendants of Africans in other parts of the world was made in an attempt to limit the impact of cultural differences on variability among childrearing and other practices. Another criteria for inclusion/exclusion focused on the educational level of each spouse. Couples were included if both partners' educational levels did not extend beyond high school. The in-depth, exploratory nature of this study dictated the use of a small, non-representative sample (Bogden & Bilken, 1992). Thus, subjects were chosen on the basis of meeting the previously cited criteria. All participants were volunteers and were accessed through telephone contact or letters sent to leaders of local churches and African-American organizations, or via referrals from acquaintances of this researcher. Once prospective couples were identified, they were contacted initially through either a letter or a telephone call (depending on the recommendation of the referral source) describing the study and requesting their participation. Couples who were contacted via letter, and who did not respond within one week, were telephoned by the interviewer to request their participation.

Special attention needs to be drawn to the difficulty the researcher had in finding twelve couples willing to participate in this study. Recruitment efforts lasted over one year, including differing levels of involvement with 27 African-American organizations, and 23 churches in both Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Religious denominations included Black Baptist, African Methodist Episcopal, and Catholic. Most of the churches that were approached for assistance had primarily African-American congregations. In addition to ongoing contact with a variety of African-American groups, over 50 personal and professional acquaintances of this researcher extended a substantial effort in soliciting participation for this project by spreading the word to African-American friends, work associates, and acquaintances. Forty-four couples who met the criteria for inclusion were contacted and asked to participate. Of the 34 couples who declined, most cited busy schedules as their primary obstacle.

The 24 individuals who eventually participated in the study are described in Tables 1 and 2. To summarize their characteristics, the age range of respondents was 51 to 77, with a mean of 66. Females ranged in age from 51 to 77, with an average age of 66; males ages ranged from 56 to 74, with a mean of 67. Number of years married varied from 22 years to 55 years, with the average number of years married being 41. The number of biological children raised by each couple ranged from one to seven, with the average being 3.5 children. The mean income reported by couples was $35,000, and ranged from $22,000 to $58,000. At the time of these interviews a total of 14 participants were retired (9 men and five women), and 2 interviewees were unemployed (1 man and 1 woman). All but two of

the women had held full-time jobs for a significant part of their married life. Seven of the twelve women had completed high school. All women had attended school until at least the 8th grade and one woman completed a two year nursing degree. Of the male respondents, four had completed high school, one had earned his Bachelor's degree, and one had attended technical school. The range of educational level among male participants was wide, with one male subject completing his college degree, while another reported having had no formal education. Eight couples lived in the Greater Boston area. Four couples lived in Southern New Hampshire. Individuals grew up in various parts of the United States. Thirteen participants hailed from Southern States, including Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina and Virginia. Seven respondents grew up in Massachusetts; one person grew up in Illinois, and two came from New Jersey. Various religious denominations were represented as well. Seven of the interviewees identified themselves as Baptist; six reported belonging to the Catholic church; nine described themselves as Protestant; one person was Methodist, and one was Congregationalist.

Several characteristics of interest emerged among the couples participating in this study. Of the twelve couples interviewed, alcoholism was reported as a problem in six of the marriages. A total of five male participants were described as having drinking problems. Three of the five self-reported this behavior, and it was corroborated by their spouses. Two of these men had attended Alcoholics Anonymous on a regular basis. One male stopped drinking after being diagnosed with diabetes. The other two males did not speak of their problems but it was reported by their wives. One female self-

reported her alcoholism, a problem which her husband also spoke about. She had been hospitalized in a treatment program at one point for her problem. In no marriage did both partners have drinking problems. All but one male were apparently in remission at the time of the interviews.

Another characteristic of interest existed in the structure of the participants' families of origin, as well as in the couples' own family structures. Seven of the individuals interviewed had been raised by people other than their biological parents. Four respondents were raised by aunts and uncles; two participants identified their grandparents as their primary caretakers, and one person reported being raised by her siblings. Six participants were raised by their mother. (They did not have contact with their fathers). Within the households of the couples, it was not an uncommon circumstance that a grandchild, niece or nephew had been brought up, or was currently being reared, by the couples. This was true for five of the twelve couples. In addition to rearing relatives other than their own children, four of these couples had taken into their home a variety of children in need who were not blood-related. The most striking example of this was seen in one couple who raised 63 foster children.

The Interview Process. Members of each couple were interviewed separately by the researcher at a mutually agreed upon location. Interviewing was conducted separately in order to allow for each partner to freely express his or her own perceptions of the marriage. Eleven couples chose to be interviewed in their homes. One couple preferred to be interviewed at their church. All interviews were audiotaped in order that they could be transcribed at a later time.

Table 1

Age, Years Married, Offspring, & Income of Couples

COUPLE	AGE	YRS. MARRIED	# OF CHILDREN	JOINT INCOME
Art	64	45	7	$58K
Amy	66			
Bob	71	50	4	$35K
Beth	67			
Carl	70	45	3	$22K
Cathy	68			
Doug	63	37	4	$34K
Deb	57			
Ed	70	22	1	$23K
Edith	73			
Fred	72	51	4	$29K
Fay	73			
Guy	73	34	2	$28K
Gloria	77			
Henry	56	37	5	$48K
Heidi	52			
Ivan	71	48	4	$35K
Irene	72			
John	58	32	3	$50K
Judy	51			
Ken	74	55	1	$25K
Kate	72			
Larry	63	41	4	$37K
Laura	61			
	x=66	x=41	x=3.5	x=$35K
	Range=51-77			Range=$22K-$58K

Table 2

Individual Eduacational Level (Educ). Religion, Geographic (Geog)/Ethnic Origin, & Occupation

NAME	EDUC	RELIGION	GEOG/ETHNIC ORIG	OCCUPATION
Art	B. A.	Catholic	AR/African-American	Retired (USAF/Engineer)
Amy	Nrsng	Catholic	AL/ African American	Retired (Nurse)
Bob	5th	Baptist	AL/African-American	Retired (Tailor)
Beth	H. S.	Protestant	FL/African-American	Retired (Office Manager)
Carl	9th	Methodist	MA/African-American	Retired (Factory Maint.)
Cathy	9th	Baptist	MA/African-American	Retired (Clothng Inspctr)
Doug	None	Catholic	MI/African-American	Retired (Factory Worker)
Deb	H. S.	Catholic	MI/African-American	Unemployed (Counslr)
Ed	H. S.	Catholic	VA/African-American	Retired (US Army)
Edith	8th	Catholic	GA/African-American	Home Health Aid
Fred	2nd	Protestant	SC/African-American	Retired (Factory Tech)
Fay	8th	Baptist	SC/African-American	Homemaker
Guy	8th	Baptist	MA/African-American	Retired (Construction)
Gloria	H. S.	Baptist	SC/African-American	Retired (Nurse's Aid)
Henry	Trade	Protestant	MA/African-American	Unemployed (Handymn)
Heidi	H. S.	Baptist	IL/African-American	Own Business
Ivan	H. S.	Cogregationl	NJ/African-American	Retired (US Navy)
Irene	H. S.	Baptist	VA/African-American	Homemaker
John	H. S.	Protestant	GA/African-American	Personnel Manager
Judy	H. S.	Protestant	MA/African-American	Retired (Secretary)
Ken	11th	Protestant	NY/African-American	Retired (Welder)
Kate	11th	Protestant	MA/African-American	Volunteer
Larry	H. S.	Protestant	FL/African-American	Own Business
Laura	H. S.	Protestant	MA/African-American	Volunteer

At the time of the interview, each participant received a brief, typed explanation of the study and written permission to audiotape was obtained from each respondent (see Appendix A). The voluntary and confidential nature of the study was stressed by the researcher prior to beginning the interview. Participants were encouraged to stop the interview process at any point if they felt uncomfortable in continuing. One female subject requested at several points throughout the interview to answer questions with the tape recorder off. All other participants completed the interview in its entirety without interruption.

The data collection started with the interviewer obtaining demographic information which was recorded in writing on a separate sheet of paper (see Appendix B). Although the interview format was relatively structured, the open ended nature of the questions allowed for flexibility and freedom of expression in respondents' answers. This freedom is important in generating a rich data base (Kvale, 1983). The interviewer's clinical skills were also employed to encourage subjects to provide as much information about themselves as possible, without making the respondents uncomfortable.

In several instances, the interview process was terminated with couples who had agreed to participate in the study. On two occasions, the researcher started to conduct interviews with one partner in a couple, only to discover that their spouse's ethnic background was not African-American. In both instances the partner's cultural roots stemmed from the Caribbean. Thus, these interviews were not completed or incorporated into the study. These couples were informed of the reason for discontinuing the interview and they were thanked for their willingness to contribute to the study. In

another situation, an interview time was set up, and the respondent was not at home. A follow-up phone call was made and another time was set up. The respondent again was not at home. At this point the researcher made the decision to discontinue efforts to complete the interview. The couple was contacted by telephone and informed of this decision. The couple gave no explanation for the missed appointments.

The Interview Format. A semi-structured interview, developed by O'Brien and Mackey (Boston College), was used to collect data for this study (see Appendix B). The open-ended and flexible structure of the interview allowed for the participants to share information and opinions in an in-depth manner, a necessary element of the qualitative approach. An outline served as a guide for the interviewer. This guide addressed four areas: 1) The Relationship; 2) Socio-economic influences; 3) Parents' Marriage; and 4) Participant's View of the Marriage Over Time and Wrap-up. Participants were asked to consider aspects of their marriage during three developmental phases: 1) pre-child rearing years (time prior to the birth of their first child); 2) child rearing years (from the birth of their first child until the youngest child reached age 18); and 3) post-child rearing years (from the time that the youngest child reached age 18 until the present). These three stages were incorporated into many of the interview questions because of research suggesting that the characteristics of marriage change over time (Zube, 1982).

The first section of the interview, focusing on aspects of the relationship, explored areas such as initial attraction to spouse, family support of the relationship, and the respondent's life circumstances at the

time of marriage. The interviewee's role expectations were examined, as were his/her expectations about needing to put effort into the relationship. The respondent was asked questions about the couple's style of communication, decision-making, and problem-solving, especially where interpersonal differences existed. The individual's style of solving problems was also explored. The person's perception of the amount of conflict in the relationship was examined, as well as his/her perception of the degree of fairness on the relationship. Respondents were also encouraged to talk about the couple's child rearing practices. Participants were asked to describe the amount of sensitivity, understanding, respect, and trust that they had for their spouses, and that they perceived their spouses' having towards them. Finally, each interviewee was asked to describe the couple's sexual relationship and its importance as well as the presence of non-sexual intimacy in the marriage.

In the second section, a variety of external influences were explored to understand their potential impact on the marital relationship. These included religious beliefs, extended families, cultural background, socio-economic factors, and general values or other moral standards. Because of this study's focus on the potential impact of cultural variables on marital stability, this section was expanded in order to elicit more detailed information about the potential impact of each of these variables on the marriage. A special effort was made to understand the role of religion in coping with racism and discrimination, as well as the potential impact that coping with negative external experiences involving racism and discrimination might have on the marital relationship. The role of African-American

traditions in the marriage was explored also.

The third section addressed the respondent's parents' relationship. Participants were asked about parental attitudes toward divorce, whether they learned anything about marriage from observing their parents, what their parents' roles were in the relationship, how they solved problems and made decisions together, and whether the relationship seemed equitable. Interviewees were asked to describe their perceptions of important similarities in, and differences between, their parents' marriages and their own. Participants were asked to recall any traditions in their parents' relationships which stemmed from their African-American background.

In the fourth section of the interview, respondents were asked to describe qualities of their spouse, and other factors, which they believed helped the relationship to stay intact. Subjects were asked to describe what their spouse meant to them in the present as well as in the past. They were also asked speak about what changes they perceived in the marriage, as well was what remained the same over time. Changes in subjects' expectations about what they wanted from the marriage were also explored. Finally, respondents were given a chance to talk about any aspect of their relationship which the interview did not cover and which they felt had an impact on the stability of the marriage. They were also encouraged to share any additional thoughts and opinions about their experiences as a black man or woman.

Analysis of the Data. Analysis of the data was conducted according to the grounded theory method outlined in Strauss & Corbin (1990). All interviews were transcribed in their entirety. The researcher then developed

a list of categories based on key themes that emerged from the data. A category list generated by Podbelski (1992) served as a guide for the current study. Additional categories were added as they were identified, in keeping with the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Once these core categories were identified, this writer and a male researcher, who was familiar with the details of the study, coded each interview for the presence of key themes. This process occurred in conjunction with an opposite sex researcher in order to control for possible sex differences in identification of themes. The two raters first coded each interview separately, recording scores on a standard scoring sheet designed for the study (see Appendix C). Material in the transcriptions which supported each score was marked for later reference. The two raters then compared scores for each interview. If a discrepancy existed in an assigned score, the item was discussed, referring back to relevant interview material, until an agreement was reached. The discrepancy was noted on the scoring sheet and this information was later used in calculating inter-rater reliability scores. When coding was complete, inter-rater relaibility was .89.

This method of coding continued throughout the data collection stage. As categories and concepts were identified, comparisons were made to determine if relationships existed among them. Through this systematic analysis, several core categories emerged to which multiple subcategories could be related. This process created a systematically dense analysis of the data and enabled the researcher to generate hypotheses about factors implicated in marital stability.

HyperRESEARCH software program was used to organize the categories that had been identified in the coding. Data from each interview which represented different categories was highlighted and stored under the appropriate category name. The computer program allowed for easy retrieval of all information related to any given category, and facilitated the identification of trends in the data. Data was also analyzed using SPSS software. Nonparametric statistics were used to identify significant relationships among different findings, as well as to point out any changes that took place in the marriages over time.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF KEY THEMES

Introduction

This chapter presents major themes that emerged from the data. These themes address aspects of marital stability and satisfaction in the relationships of the 12 African-American working-class couples that comprised this sample. Data was analyzed using the grounded theory method espoused by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Themes emerged and were coded using line by line analysis of each interview transcript. Issues related to the premarital phase of the couples relationship are discussed first, followed by issues which arose during the years of marriage. In addressing these marital themes, three phases of the relationship are considered: pre-child rearing years, parenting years, and post-child rearing years (once the youngest child has reached the age of 18). In order to enhance the reported findings of this research, direct quotes by respondents which reflect trends that emerged within each individual theme are incorporated into the results. The names of each respondent have been changed in order to protect the confidential nature of the information that they shared.

Pre-Marital Themes

Initial Attraction

Fifteen out of twenty-four participants reported that their initial attraction to their spouse was positive. Common themes that individuals found attractive included physical appearance, personality of their spouse, and a combination of

both. One respondent stated he was attracted to his wife's family values. Several respondents did not remember specifically what drew their attention to their mate. Some examples serve to illustrate these experiences:

Amy: He was very outgoing. And I felt secure with him. And he didn't lie to me like some of my other boyfriends. I don't know, it's just like when you meet someone and you just know this is the right person.

Doug: What attracted me to [spouse] was she was a nice built young lady, you know: nice hips and everything, heavy. She was a nice looking young woman. And I lived across the street from [spouse] you know. And I used to see her come out on the porch and something was attractive to me. It's just the way she was built.

Judy: Oh let me see. I can't exactly pinpoint that. But after going out with him on a first date, I remember telling someone I was going to marry him. I'd say it was more than a physical attraction. Because he was very quiet, yet he was sort of outgoing, very friendly.

Seven individuals reported ambivalent feelings initially about their spouse, while one man reported having no initial feelings of attraction to his wife. One couple described experiencing mutually negative feelings about each other when they first met. More women (n=7) than men (n=2) reported initially negative or ambivalent feelings toward their spouses [X2 (2)=4.95, p=.084]. Following are examples which reflect these responses:

Carl: It was no real attraction to her. She had lost her home and she was just out looking for a room, and my mother took her in. And things took off from there. She was there and I was there and we just got together, you know. There was no real, real attraction.

Deb: He and I started to go out with each other. And I still couldn't make up my mind that this is who I wanted to be with.

Fay: We had met at a night club. He asked me for a dance. And I liked this record. Cuz I couldn't stand him, you know. I just didn't like him much, but I wanted to dance.

Family Support of Partner Choice

Respondents were asked about their perceptions of their families' approval of their choice of a marriage partner. Seventy percent of participants (7 men and 10 women) reported that they felt a strong sense of approval from their families. Three individuals (2 men and one woman) reported a mixed reaction on their family's part. Four people (3 men and 1 woman) described their families' reactions as negative. Some sample responses offer a flavor of the respondents' experiences with family support:

John: They loved her. My father said: "Marry her." My father was instrumental in saying that's the one. And my mother liked her of course, too.

Ken: My father didn't dislike my wife. But he tried to tell her and he tried to tell me that we were too young.

Heidi: Well, as I say, my family loved him, really. The first couple of times he came around, probably the first time really.

Beth: My mother did not plan for me to marry my husband. and my grandmother was just heartbroken because she had planned my marriage by the time I was seven, really. And it wasn't to this guy because we knew nothing about him.

Respondents in the study were also questioned about the impact of their families' reactions on their decision to marry their partner of choice. Twenty-three out of twenty-four individuals reported that their families' levels of acceptance had no effect on their decision to marry their partner:

Edith: No, they weren't involved in that decision at all. I don't think they should say anything. That's up to the person.

Ivan: We had a big row, and I told them: "This is me you're talking to. And I'm not listening to you about who I should go out with or who I should marry. I'll make my own choices."

Bob: I was going to do it anyways, if they liked it or if they didn't, because we had made up our mind.

Only one male described feeling influenced by his family in making his decision to go ahead with the marriage. Carl states:

> I impregnated her. And in talking it over with my mother, she figured the best thing to do was get married. I didn't want to really get married, cuz I didn't want to give up my freedom. I could go and come as I wanted. I was not ready for no damn commitments such as marriage. But my mother talked me into it. And I guess out of respect for my mother, I married her.

Circumstances at Time of Marriage

Eight of twenty-four respondents (equal numbers of men and women) reported experiencing conflictual circumstances at the time of their marriages. Individuals related their difficulties primarily to lack of family support and to unplanned pregnancies. Four couples spontaneously shared that they got married because the wife was pregnant, although not all of these couples experienced conflict because of their decision. Some examples follow:

> Beth: I got pregnant. And this is why I say my grandmother was broken-hearted. To my mother, it was a great disappointment. And to me it was a total surprise. Because I felt that he knew what I didn't, OK. And I didn't see. I didn't know enough about life to know that I was going to get pregnant, that there was that possibility.

Amy: I was a cadet nurse and the war had just ended. And in those days people didn't stress so much about having a career. I graduated from nursing school; I had a career. So my next step was to get me a husband.

Ken: I moved in with her brother and her mother when we got married. I lost my job the same week. I was a bellhop in a hotel. I lost my job and there we are, we're married and I had no place to live and no place to take my wife.

Expectations of Marriage

In speaking about their early role expectations in marriage 19 respondents (11 men and 8 women) espoused traditional expectations reflective of the values with which they were raised. Men expected to take on the responsibility of providing financially for the family:

Art: I was the breadwinner and the head of the household, the head of the family, a strong head, based on the tradition that I was brought up with. I've seen a lot of studies and they say that most of the black families are matriarchal. That might be true, now I don't know. But that was never true when I was growing up. The man was the head of the house and that was no problem.

Guy: I thought the man's job is to make a living. All the stuff around the house: cleaning up, cooking, caring for the house - you ain't supposed

to do that.

Women saw themselves as being primarily in charge of domestic responsibilities and taking care of the family:

Cathy: Clean house, keep the kids clean, cook. I used to cook; he does that now, but I used to cook. And I used to clean house and keep the kids clean and stuff like that.

Judy: The role that I expected to play was one of support to him. I very much wanted to be a mother, maybe because as an only child, I wanted to have more than one; and I wanted to get into that family mode.

Four women and one man expected to assume less traditional roles in which partners shared responsibilities as equally as possible:

Henry: We didn't say: "You do this. I have to do that." It's what we both felt it would take to make the marriage work, to make the thing work. We worked together as a team cuz, like I said, she worked 17 years and it was all nights. It was like 3:00 to 11:00. So I would come in from work and she would have the meal started, and then I would finish. We worked together, as I said, like a team. And I think that's why we're still together today, is because we try to do everything as a team.

Fay: Well, I thought the role I took...The shopping and stuff, I think you

should do it together. And as far as taking care of the house, what we used to do - we both worked. And when I got home (sometimes I got home before he did)...Whichever one got home first started to make dinner. And when we shopped on weekends, we'd do it together. He could cook and I could cook. And I say, if we do it together, that way I'd be helping him and he'd be helping me.

Whereas there were clear divisions about role expectations among most couples in the early years, people's expectations and behaviors in their marriages changed over time. Women entered the work force and took on more financial responsibilities, while men became more nurturing in their roles and took on more domestic responsibilities:

Carl: It's changed to an extent. I let her handle all the finances now. I used to handle it all. I don't know, we just got a little older.

Doug: I do all the cleaning up now. I'm the housewife now. I do all the cleaning. I fix her breakfast, I bring her breakfast every morning in bed. And I bring her pills; and she's a diabetic and I bring her needle up. And whatever she wants done I do it. I vacuum the house; I do all the cleaning up around here now. I do the floors, I do everything. And I don't even mind it; it don't even bother me. But it did. I thought women did all those things. Men didn't do that; it was a woman's job. And that's the way I thought then. Today I don't think that way; today I do it.

In anticipating marriage and the accompanying responsibilities, 13 of the respondents indicated that they did not have any expectations about needing to work at their relationship, or they expected that it would take no effort on their part to maintain their marriage:

Fred: Well, I have a strong belief that we were supposed to be together. Cuz we hardly ever had to work at anything. We just saw things the same way. And it's still like that today. I don't know if it was in my head that we had to work at it, but we never really seemed to need to.

Irene: It didn't enter my mind. I don't think about that.

Eleven of the twenty-four respondents believed from the outset of their marriage that they would need to extend an effort to maintain their partnership over time:

Doug: Yes, you do have to. It's just like building a house. you build a house and you just let it sit there and you don't do nothing for it, it's going to go; it's going to deteriorate and things are going to fall apart. You have to continue to do little things to it.

Ed: Oh, sure, yeah. Even today it takes extremely...a great effort to keep this thing going. I mean the children are away. Even so, you are going to have to work to keep this thing going. You're going to still have to cry when you don't want to cry. You're going to still sit down and say

"damn" when you don't want to say damn.

<u>Marital Themes</u>

<u>Marital Behavior</u>

Marital behavior in couples' relationships was divided into instrumental and expressive categories. Instrumental generally refers to a task orientation and expressive to a relational orientation. Factors associated with this definition of instrumental behavior include a tendency not to verbally express oneself, and a reserved style in terms of emotional and physical expressiveness. Factors associated with expressiveness include physical affection, and verbal and emotional expressiveness. Respondents were identified as either instrumental or expressive in their behavior based on their predominant styles.

Throughout the three phases of marriage, many respondents described themselves as primarily instrumental (8 men and 4 women in phase one; 7 men and 4 women in phase two; 6 men and 3 women in phase three). Several individuals describe their struggle with this style of behavior:

Doug: And I remember before, that in my own sick way of thinking, that I loved her all along. But I didn't know how to say it. And I went back to tell her and I used to call her from work or something and if I'd be talking, like I was going to work overtime or something...And she'd say: "I love you." and I just couldn't say that word. I didn't want to say it. But I knew I loved her...But I just couldn't come out directly and say it.

John: There's always been that sort of missing out on the romantic side

that I'm sure she craves and needs. And I guess when it comes to me, you get to the point where you feel it's obligated love. And you don't want to fight it, but there's this voice in the back of your head that says: "Oh, I wish I could reach out and do it normally without having to feel like I'm obligated." It should come naturally.

A large number of respondents displayed a mix of instrumental and expressive qualities throughout their marriages, with women falling into this category twice as often as men in the earlier stages (n=9 in phase one; n=10 in phases two and three). One man and four women described an expressive style in their marriage. Ed explained the difference between his wife's instrumental style and his own expressive nature:

She's a non-emotional person, non assertive. I've always been ready. Give me a little start and we can go from there. She's not a huggy-huggy, kissy-kissy. I am you see.

Kate, who also described herself as expressive, talks about how her husband's instrumental style interfered with her ability to be close to him at times:

Sometimes I would just like to cradle him in my arms and say: "Oh honey, everything is going to be alright." But he don't want that kind of poppycock. That's too mushy. But I cannot express the love I would like to because he's not that kind of man. I don't know why some men are like

that. But he don't want no mushy-mushy.

Fit

Partners' marital roles were assessed to determine how each couple functioned as a dyad. Couples were identified as complimentary in their roles when they divided responsibilities so that each partner was in charge of different aspects of the marriage. Complimentarity among couples was associated with a more traditional approach to relationships in which the man handled finances and the woman provided support and nurturing. Couples who shared evenly in the duties related to their relationship were viewed as symmetrical in their roles. This style is associated with a non-traditional approach to marital relationships.

Ten of the twelve couples described a complimentary style in carrying out their marital roles, a style which remained consistent over time. The following examples serve to illustrate both complimentarity and symmetry in dyads' marital roles:

Beth: We supplement each other. What he lacks, I take up.

Interviewer: Yeah, it sounds like you complimented each other.

Beth: We did. Definitely.

Henry: I'd say recently, I've taken over a lot of things that she used to do,

just to try to take some of the pressure off her because of the trouble

we've had. And I don't think it's fair that all of this should be on her

shoulders. So we're trying to do it together now instead of saying: "Hey,

all the bills, here, it's all yours." Now we try to sit down; we talk it out:

"We're going to do this; we're going to do that." We talk it out together now. It's a mutual agreement now basically.

Ivan: So it was for me to find work and keep the cash flow so that they stayed warm, they stayed shod, they stayed clothed, and they stayed dry when it rained out there. That was my prime concern, cuz after all, I brought em here. So it's up to me to see that they're taken care of...And then [spouse] picked up the other piece of that, of being in the home and taking care of things there.

Child Rearing

As discussed previously in respondents' role expectations in marriage, most individuals believed that it was the wife's responsibility to take on the role of primary caretaker of the children. However, as couples added the responsibility of children to their relationships, actual role behavior became increasing mutual in terms of how child rearing tasks were handled. In the earlier stage of child rearing, 50% of respondents reported mutual sharing of tasks related to raising the children, including changing diapers, bathing, and feeding. The other 50% of couples reported separate roles during this phase, with the wife being the person who cared for the children. All couples but one were in agreement about their perceptions of how child rearing tasks were divided. In the exception, the man perceived himself as an active participant in the raising of his child while his wife felt she had shouldered this responsibility without his assistance.

As children entered latency and teenage years, participants reported a steady increase of mutuality when dealing with their children. Sixty-three

percent reported sharing the responsibilities during the latency stage. By the time children had reached their teenage years, 71% of participants described child rearing as a mutual activity. Some examples of mutuality and separateness around child rearing follow:

Bob: After my wife had come home from the hospital...Well, we had a nurse one time for two or three weeks. My wife didn't do anything. And I'd come home, give all the kids a bath, dress em up, take em to the park. I did all that. I wouldn't let her do anything.

Kate: There was no split. Because when my son was little, he used to say: "I don't want to handle him. When he gets big enough where he can walk or do this or that..." But he didn't do anything. We didn't share this child raising. He just wanted this child to get big enough where he could throw a ball to him.

Doug: Well, [spouse] did most of the raising of the kids. But my role, what I tried to play, was to take em to church every Sunday morning...and then I would take em downtown for a ride...And they would play...I used to go to S____ practically every Sunday, cuz they used to play football over there with kids...And so while [spouse] was cooking the big Sunday dinner, I would have them out of the house so they wouldn't be in her way.

Relatedness

Respondents were not asked directly about their sense of connection with

their partner throughout the years of their marriage. This was inferred from the ways in which respondents talked about various aspects of their relationships. Many participants spontaneously spoke to a sense of interdependence as an important element of feeling satisfied in the relationship. Some couples described this quality as dynamic, with some periods of their marriage reflecting less of a sense of connectedness than other phases. For most participants, feelings of closeness increased over time. During the pre-parenting phase only 33% of respondents (5 men and 3 women) reported positive feelings about their relationships in this regard. During this stage, 58% of participants (6 men and 8 women) described mixed experiences with overall relatedness, and 8% (1 man and 1 woman) reported feeling no sense of closeness.

As couples entered the child rearing phase of their relationships, reports of positive feelings about relatedness increased to 46%. During this time the number of participants reporting a lack of closeness doubled to 17%, while 9 respondents (37.5%) continued to express mixed feelings about their level of interdependence with their spouse. When couples entered the post-child rearing phase, there was a marked increase in overall relatedness reported by individuals. At this stage, 67% (8 men and 8 women) reported feelings of mutuality with their spouse, while 29% of respondents still described mixed feelings of overall closeness. Only one person maintained that their relationship continued to be characterized by distance. Some examples follow, providing a flavor of participants' feelings of relatedness throughout the stages of their marriages:

Beth: I'm sure in our early marriage there are days when he thought:

"Boy, what am I going to do with this woman?" Now there are days when he thinks: "What am I going to do without her?" Cuz he tells me that sometimes. He says: "I don't know what I'm going to do without you." We talk to each other. And I think about what life would be like without Frank. It wouldn't be good for me. No.

Heidi: At first, when I first got married, I said I didn't love him. He said love would grow. It was like not...It wasn't the greatest, you know, like you could take it or leave it. But as the years and things go by, your love grows deeper and deeper...So, you know, I think now it's really great.

Judy: I think just about everything that we have in our lives, I see in an entirely different way than he does. And it's never really to the point of arguing. I think we could overcome that sort of thing if we had some sort of a coming together. In these years now as you get older, you want more of a companion. And it's just not there. Yet, I can't see myself leaving him again. I can't see us apart either. I don't know, it's sort of a love-hate relationship.

Intimacy

One aspect of relatedness that participants were asked to discussed involved the degree of psychosocial and physical intimacy that they felt with each other over the years. With regards to psychosocial intimacy, there was a marked increase over time in feelings of closeness with ones partner. In the pre-parenting phase, 29% (n=7) of respondents described an intimate connection

with their spouse. This sense among respondents grew to 33% (n=8) during child rearing years. In the later years of marriage 50% (n=12) of individuals described a satisfying level of intimacy in their relationship. Male participants' feelings of closeness increased by 50% from phase one to phase three. Art shares:

> I think my wife and I are closer now than we were. We can at least sit back and talk about things probably with a lot less emotion than we did, because we're very comfortable with each other now. I know I am with her. It comes with life.

Beth also offers an example of the closeness which most individuals described:

> I still say that God had a reason for bringing us here. I don't know yet what it all is, but it has made a good time for us and we became very dependent on each other. I find that I can be away from home, and when a certain time comes, I gotta get home; I have to come home because I know [spouse] is waiting. And I've seen him standing in that door looking. But when I turn the corner he's not there. An when I come in, he's like he's been fooling around. I say: "I saw you standing in that door looking for me."

Judy talks about a persistent lack of intimacy in her marriage:

> I guess I wanted to have a family and be closer than what he...the type of person that he was. So it caused a lot of problems, as far as he was very

open and friendly with people. That was something that I liked about him in the first place. But it became kind of a problem, because I felt like he was giving more to the outside, to friends and acquaintances, than he was to the family. So it created a problem.

Many couples spoke to an increasing sense of closeness as they entered the later years of their marriage. This may have been due to the shift that occurred for many around role responsibilities, with men taking on more nurturing roles as they grew older. Deb speaks to this in her response:

I need lots of tender loving care now, more so than I did when I was younger. Because when I was younger I didn't need so much. But I need a lot of understanding now, and a lot of TLC, and he does too. Cuz I notice that about him since he's gotten older...Whereas, years ago when our children were growing up and he was stronger, he didn't need all this love and all this TLC. But he does now. And he'll let you know it, that "I need my time for you to just rub my bald head."

The presence of physical intimacy (non-sexual touching) in couples' relationships decreased over time. Eight individuals (2 men and 6 women) reported frequent non-sexual touching in the early years of marriage. This number decreased to 5 people (2 men and 3 women) during the child rearing years. In the later years, only 4 respondents (1 man and 3 women) stated that touch existed in their relationships.

While overall reports of the presence of non-sexual touching in

relationships steadily declined, men showed a trend toward increased non-sexual expression, through touch, in their relationships. This pattern may be due to changes in men's marital behavior over the years (from instrumental to expressive). Ken's response illustrates:

> Like with me, I told you it took me a long time to find out that you can enjoy each other without having sex. You can do it by touching and talking and whatnot.

Other's also spoke to the issue of touching in their marriages:

> Edith: Well, like I said, I'm not a mushy-mushy, huggy-huggy person. I've never been mushy. I don't mind being hugged, but...Maybe I'm not explaining it like I should. But I was never a person...I like to be treated nice and treated with a lot of respect. I don't mind being hugged once in a while, but not all the time. That's just me.

> Fay: We do that [touching]...Not now that we're older. But when we were younger, that was a hang-up, yeah; that was the whole idea.

Relationship Variables

In addressing aspects of what helped couples to maintain a healthy sense of mutuality and intimacy, four variables were explored which were thought to impact relationships: sensitivity, understanding, respect, and trust. Respondents were asked about their own feelings toward their spouse along

each of these dimensions. They were also asked about their perceptions of their

spouse's feelings towards them in each area.

Respondents' perceptions of their own sensitivity toward their spouses

remained fairly consistent over time, with 16 individuals (8 men and 8 women

describing themselves as sensitive to their partner's needs throughout the

marriage. Seven participants (3 men and 4 women) described themselves as

mixed in their ability to be sensitive to the needs of their mate. Only one man

described himself as insensitive in the first phase, while only one woman

described herself as insensitive during the second phase of the marriage. As

couples entered their post-child rearing years, everyone felt they displayed

some level of sensitivity. Twenty-five percent of individuals (3 men and 3

women) described their level of sensitivity as mixed, while 75% of participants (9

men and 9 women) felt they were very sensitive to the needs of their spouse.

Examples follow:

Henry: I try to be [sensitive] cuz I know she's a little more sensitive than I

am. I try to be as much as possible. There's times that I don't agree but I

really don't raise a ruckus about it, cuz I know it would hurt her. So I

basically go along. I think I've spoiled her quite a bit.

Ken: I've been sensitive. I like to do things. All my life, if I overhear

something, or sometime you say something and you don't think I'm

listening...If someone has a desire for something and I can afford it, I like

to do things like that. So I have felt her needs and I have tried to provide

for them, cuz it gives me satisfaction.

Although participants' reports of their spouses' levels of sensitivity followed a similar trend of increasing sensitivity over time, there were significant differences between men's and women's perceptions of how sensitively they were treated by thier partner. Forty-six percent of individuals (9 women and 2 men) described feeling less sensitivity from their spouse in the first phase of marriage [X2 (2)=8.77, p=.012]. The number of respondents who described their mate as insensitive dropped to 33% in the second phase, with women outnumbering men seven to one [X2 (2)=7.25, p=.027]. Significant gender differences persisted during the post-child rearing stage, with 42% (8 women and 2 men) describing some degree of insensitivity on the part of their spouse [X2 (2)=6.24, p=.044]. Some examples serve to illustrate the range of subject responses:

Amy: Oh, not at all [sensitive]. He says whatever comes to him. It's not malicious. But it just comes out. Sometimes it hurts a lot.

Doug: And I've noticed that over the years with her, she will say things to me to hurt my feelings. My feelings are kind of easily hurt, you know. Cuz I'm a nice person. And when somebody says something to hurt me, it really upsets me. And she tries to sugar coat it after she does it, but it's out. She can't take it back. But that's improved over the years too.

Irene: It seems to me, as the years have gone by, he's gotten better and better. He tries to read my mind. He doesn't always get it right, but he's always thinking about it, you know. And sometimes he misses the mark.

And sometimes I'm really surprised, you know; I am really surprised with the things he comes up with.

With regard to understanding, a similar pattern emerged, with both partners' describing an increase in understanding in the relationship over time. Again, self reports were different than those of spouses, with spouses perceiving less understanding in their mates than partners attributed to themselves. During the pre-parenting phase, 6 men and 7 women described themselves as understanding; 5 men and 4 women reported a mixed ability to be understanding, and 1 man and 1 woman explained that they were not understanding at all. In contrast, only 4 men and 6 women reported feeling understood by their spouses during this phase; 6 men and 3 women felt inconsistently understood, and 2 men and 3 women described not feeling understood at all.

Self-reports of level of understanding steadily increased over time, so that 10 men and 10 women described themselves as very understanding of their spouses in the post-child rearing stage of marriage; 2 men and 2 women reported being inconsistently understanding; no one perceived themselves as not understanding at all. The differences in spouses' perceptions is notable. Only 6 men and 6 women reported feeling very understood; 5 men and 5 women describe their spouse's level of understanding as mixed, while 1 man and 3 women stated that their spouse was not understanding at all. Below are some examples of participants' perceptions of their own and their partner's level of understanding over time:

Carl: Well, myself, I think I understand her pretty good, as far as understanding her condition and her mind and whatnot. I'm not so sure that she understands me so good.

Guy: We got to understand each other as time went by, and we accepted each other more instead of trying to change the other one.

Kate: I understand a lot of things about him that I don't think he gives me credit for. And a lot of things I have looked on as I have matured, and I can understand where he came from because of the family that he comes from. And I can understand why he is like he is, because I don't think he had the relationship with his dad that he should have. And so it goes down. If he didn't have it, he don't have it to give. And I think that has a lot to do with how he is at times.

There was little variation over time regarding how much respect partners felt for each other and perceived from their spouses. During the first phase of people's relationships, 83% (10 men and 10 women) expressed high respect for their partner. This number dropped slightly to 79% during parenting years, and rose again to its previous level in the third phase of relationships. Similarly, 79% of respondents (9 men and 11 women) described feeling respected by their spouse in the first phase of marriage. This number rose to 83% during the second and third stages of marriage.

One man and two women described having mixed respect for their partner throughout their marriage, while one man consistently reported feeling no respect for his partner. Two men and 2 women perceived mixed respect from

their partners during the first phase of their marriage, and 1 man felt no respect from his wife in this stage. As couples entered the second and third phases of their relationship, no subjects reported feeling a total lack of respect from their partner, while 3 men and one woman felt mixed respect from their spouses during these periods. Some examples illustrate respondents' descriptions of respect in their relationships:

> Amy: I respect him highly; I admire him. As I said, he has many fine qualities that I wish I had. So I respect him.

> Doug: My respect has been pretty good for her, not 100% all the time, maybe 80% or 90% most of the time. But I figure what goes around comes around, and I try to be as fair and square as I can.

> Deb: I think he respected me pretty well after the children...You know before, it was just me and him. It was OK but it wasn't great. But when we started having these children, that was the first thing we had to learn, to have great respect for one another. You got to know that you got to draw the reigns in now, you know. You're really beginning to be a family and you got to have respect for one another.

When respondents discussed the amount of trust they had in their spouse, most reported complete faith in the other with a steady increase in trust over time (62% in phase one; 66% in phase two, and 79% in phase three):

Ed: But she sure trusts me. And I trust her. And see, we trust each other to the extreme...It took a lot of time to build that up.

Fay: I trust him; I trust him with my life. Sometimes I can't do for myself, like I can't go no place unless somebody takes me. And he's always good, if I have to go to the doctor, if he's on the job, he asks for that time off to go with me or take me. If I got sick and he was on the job, and they didn't let him come home, he was coming anyway.

However, some individuals stated that they had some reservations about trusting their partner (n=3 in phase one; n=8 in phase two, and n=4 in phase three), or did not trust them at all (n= 3 in phase one; n=1 in phase 3). Some common reasons that participants gave for not trusting their spouse completely or at all included financial irresponsibility, abuse of alcohol, and a history of extramarital affairs. Some examples follow:

Judy: Well, there was always a little hesitation there because I knew he had an eye for women. So I guess I didn't trust him completely, but I had nothing to base it on. So I just put it out of my head. Now I think I just shouldn't let myself go.

Doug: And it took a long time for [spouse] to trust me, cuz I was over four years sober and [spouse] kicked me out of the house because I didn't know how to live sober.

There was some disagreement among couples when comparing their perceptions of being trusted by their spouse versus their spouses' self-reported levels of trust in their partners. Participants still perceived that their mate's trust for them increased over time (14 reported feeling trusted in phase one; 15 in phase two, and 16 in phase three). Fewer respondents felt that their spouse had mixed feelings of trust for them than was actually the case (n=3 in phase one; n=4 in phase two, and n=3 in phase three). More individuals perceived that their spouse had no trust in them at each stage than was in fact reported (n=7 in phase one; n=5 in phase two, and n=5 in phase three). Issues related to perceptions of mistrust revolved around themes of sexual fidelity. Some examples provide a sampling of the responses of participants' perceptions of being trusted by their spouses:

Kate: Insecure, yes. Because if I am going out, I might say: "I'm going to the square," or something like that. Well do you know that once I went out and there was a friend on the street who I used to always stop in to see. She was a white lady and she had a son living with her. So I went on into her house, and she had to go out somewhere. And she said: "Well, just sit here with the boy. I'll be right back." He saw me go in there, and he saw her come out, and he told me about it. And he didn't know what was going on. So I don't think he trusts me as much as I trust him. And I think a lot of men are like that.

Amy: Well, he knows I don't lie, I don't cheat. So I think he trusts me. He knows that whatever I say I'm going to do, I do.

Overall findings regarding relationship variables suggested that men's and women's level of sensitivity and understanding increased over time. However, gender differences persisted in both these areas, with women perceiving their husbands as significantly less understanding and sensitive overall. Reported levels of trust increased steadily in relationships. However, some respondents described ongoing reservations about trusting their spouses. In these instances, partners were typically dealing with issues of sexual infidelity and alcoholism. Little variation was observed over time in the degree of respect for ones spouse. Almost all respondents reported consistently high levels of respect for their partners throughout the marriage.

Sexuality

Respondents reported diminishing degrees of satisfaction with sex in their relationships, especially from the child rearing years to the post-parenting phase of their marriages. Eighty-three percent (n=20) of men and women reported positive feelings about the quality of sex in phase one, and no one reported negative feelings about this aspect of their marriage during this time period. Similarly, 79% (n=19) reported a satisfying sex life in phase two. In phase three only 37% (n=9) of individuals reported satisfaction with their sexual relationship; 7% (n=7) had mixed feelings, and 33% (n=8) stated that they did not enjoy this aspect of their marriage. For 66% of couples, their sexual relationship changed in later years due to at least one partner experiencing an illness or a physical problem. Some examples of subjects' responses follow:

Carl: Well, we had good sex. I ain't kicking about that, no complaints. We had a good sex life. But in the last few years, something's gone wrong within me. But I haven't had the money to go get it checked out, you know. But it has slowed down to a degree, see. But I don't mind, cuz I'm tired of it anyway, tired of it. The same thing all the time, like eating hamburgers. You know every move and everything she's going to say. So it does got tiresome after a while.

Amy: I'll tell you, I had a hysterectomy. Oh, we were great friends and lovers for many, many years. But then I had a hysterectomy about ten years ago and I noticed since then my desire for sex kind of changed. And it changed because I found it painful. And he said: "Go to your doctor," which I did. And so my doctor gave me hormones. But because of the history in my family of cancer...I don't like to take pills or anything at all that I think might be harmful to me. So I used to try to use patches that would give you a little estrogen, but I was allergic to it. So I stopped that (which really works). And then I stopped that and I just did nothing. So just, it's a funny thing, but men don't lose their desire, let me tell you. I did because it was just not a comfortable experience; it really became painful. But because they say I'm supposed to, I just go along with the program. and I don't really enjoy that. I'm sorry to tell you that.

Deb provides an example of someone who feels satisfied with her sexual relationship:

Deb: I'd say that our sex life has been pretty good, probably better now since we're older and everything. But I don't ever remember having too bad a sex life with [spouse], you know.

Respondents showed variability in the level of importance they attached to the sexual part of their relationship over the years. In phase one, six individuals (3 men and 3 women) felt that this part of their marriage was very important. This number dropped to 5 (3 men and 2 women) in phase two, and to 3 (2 men and 1 woman) during post-parenting years. Most respondents described their sexual relationships as important (n=17 in phase one; n=16 in phase two, and n=14 in phase 3). Participants increasingly reported that sex was not an important part of their relationship as they moved into their later years (n=1 in phase one; n=3 in phase two, and n=7 in phase three). Samples of subject responses follow:

John: And I think it's been very important for her because she used to tell me that's the only way she felt she could get close to me. And I took it more matter-of-factly. Again, a lot of times the romance piece was missing out of it, you know, the hand holding first, and the wine and roses and all of that. But I guess part of what's...I guess I never really had the all out passion that should accompany the love for the wife. It's almost like if she said: "The next two months, you can forget it," I probably wouldn't care.

Deb: I'd say yes, very, very important - to love, to touch and

everything. A man and his woman, they should be into it a lot.

Kate: At my stage of the game, who cares about sex or that stuff, who cares.

Alcoholism

Half of the couples in this study reported that one partner had a problem with alcohol during some phase of the marriage. This area was not addressed through specific questioning; however, the impact of alcohol problems on couples' relationships was significant and deserves attention.

As described earlier in the section, 5 males and one female were identified by their spouse as alcoholics or as having drinking problems. All but one of these individuals self-reported this information as well. Two people reported attending Alcoholics Anonymous for their problem. One admitted herself to a hospital. One man stopped drinking when he was diagnosed with diabetes. Only one person was reported by his spouse to still be an active alcoholic.

Both partners in all but one relationship spoke at length about the many different ways in which alcoholism affected their marriages. Some of the most common themes noted included a deterioration in communication; a decrease in psychosocial and physical intimacy; an increase in conflict around finances, as well as an increase in the reported level of overall disharmony in the marriage.

Carl describes the distance that he put between himself and his wife during the years when she was drinking heavily:

Well, I didn't want to start up a new home for one thing. And there's no kids there, cuz they just stayed away. They didn't even want to come near the house. So I just went along about my business, that's all. I made out like she wasn't even there; I was a single doer. I did my job, I went to work, I came home, I done my cooking, I done my cleaning. She could be sitting in the chair. Still, I wouldn't see her, cuz I didn't want to see her. So there was nothing there.

Doug speaks to a lack of intimacy and communication brought on by his drinking:

And in the afternoon, I'd be drinking all afternoon, and I'd stagger home at 11:00 or 12:00, half-stoned. And so the communication was broken down; it started breaking down real bad. She started going her own way and I started going mine. And it went that way for while a while, you know. And it almost tore us apart. It was really bad there for a while. And then finally, I forgot what year we moved, and things got really bad, just me and her. We were just living and staying under the same roof then by the time we moved to B___. Wasn't much communication; wasn't much of anything.. My drinking was tearing us apart and I didn't even know it.

Deb describes the increased level of conflict that was typical among couples dealing with an alcohol problem:

And memories not so good were when he would walk through that door after he'd been drinking. I would open up the door: "C'mon in. Just go somewhere and lay your behind down. Don't come near me. He would call me...And he would say: "I know you hear me." And I would say: "You're damn right I hear you but I don't want to hear you. So those weren't so good memories...Taking us out in the car. I didn't know that he'd had a drink or I wouldn't have gone. But getting out in the car and finding out...Why does he keep raising that trunk in that car? Why does he keep parking this car? Why is he doing this here? And then saying: "Take me home! Take me home right now! I mean it!" And he would say: "No, I'm not taking you home." I didn't drive see. And I said: "You'd better take me home with my kids, or else I'll get out of this car and stay right here on the highway, and I won't move until a state trooper comes along..." And of course I would be so glad to get back to the house so I could really cuss him out.

Gloria had to cope with financial uncertainty because of her husband's drinking:

I found out he drank heavy, and that meant at the end of the week there was hardly any money coming in. So then I had to look for something so I could balance, cuz we needed to eat.

Kate describes her overall dissatisfaction with her marriage caused by her husband's drinking:

Yes, yes. I think that it ruined it [the marriage] for a long time. I was trapped. What happened was it ruined my marriage, and I felt like I didn't have a marriage.

Equity

Equity in these couples' relationships appeared to have an impact on respondents' feelings of satisfaction and relatedness in the marriage. Participants' perceptions of equity in their marriages remained fairly constant over the three phases of their relationships. Most participants felt that their marriages were equitable throughout (10 men and 6 women reported feeling this way in all three phases). One woman who described mixed feelings about the degree of fairness in her marriage, reported an increased sense of fairness in the second two phases. One man, who initially reported a lack of equity in his relationship, described his marriage as mixed in terms of equity in the second and third phases. Some examples illustrate the range of responses about equity in the marriage:

Kate: Not really. I think that if I had to do it over again, I'd do it differently. I know I made a lot of mistakes. I know that I did a lot of things that I could have done better. So I do not think that I would make the same mistake again. I would try and make it turn out a little bit different...I don't know what I would do different though. Cuz maybe you start over and you're with a different person and it might not work out that way.

Doug: I really want to be fair with her, because I know if I'm not fair and honest with her, that things ain't going to go right for me. So I try to stay as close to the edge as I can. I say a lot of times (I don't know where I got it from), I try to live in a circle. I know if I step outside that circle, I'm going to have a problem. I know there's a certain way I have to live if I want my life to go peaceably.

Deb: Yes, as we grew older, but not in the beginning. I guess I didn't think he was fair, and he didn't feel I was fair. But as we grew, we grew stronger.

Communication

Most respondents described communication in their marriage as an important variable affecting the quality of their relationship which grew better with time. Thirty-three percent (n=8) of participants reported good communication in the pre-parenting years; 41% (n=10) reported satisfaction with the level of communication in the child rearing stage of marriage, and 46% felt that they had good communication with their spouse in the later years. Fewer individuals reported poor communication as time went by in their marriage (n=4 in phase one; n=1 in phase two and three). Respondents reporting mixed levels of communication remained fairly consistent across time (n=12 in phase one ; n=13 in phase two; n=12 in phase three). Gender differences in men's and women's communication styles were apparent in that women promoted discussions about marital issues, while men typically did not initiate conversations about problems in the relationship. The following excerpts offer

examples of individuals' perceptions of communication in marriage:

Deb: And we've always been real honest with one another. He's always let me know, no matter how bad something is, that I can talk to him about it. And the same way for him. If anything ever bothers him that's bad, he can just stop me and say: "Ma, I need to talk to you," and he'll talk to me.

John: I have to admit, maybe because of the two worlds situation, the communications were absolutely lacking in the beginning. I never, ever told her what I wanted, or things that got me going or turned me on. And I think she feels that I may have turned a deaf ear to what she wanted.

Irene: Well, there used to be [problems] because he didn't always want to listen. Instead of discussing something, he'd get irritated because I didn't agree with him. But I think we do better now. As I said, at first, he wouldn't discuss anything, just leave, rather than talk about it. So I'd have to persuade him that we needed to talk, we just had to talk. And I think as the years have gone by, I see that it's better. We can talk things out.

Decision Making

Both individual and joint styles of decision making were explored in the interview as a component of communication. With regards to individuals' reported styles, most respondents identified themselves as logical. This style was denoted by attention to all aspects of a situation, with a choice being made

based on consideration of the possible outcomes. The number of participants describing this style as their manner of problem-solving increased slightly over time, with more men than women reporting this style (n=13 in phase one, 8 men and 5 women; n=14 in phase two, 9 men and 5 women; n= 15 in phase three, 9 men and 6 women). Henry depicts this logical style:

I try to consider everything that could go wrong, everything that could go right. I look at...Mostly all the things I look at, I try to see the worst that could happen, the worst scenario of whatever it could be, and that's the way I look at it, and I attack it from that way. I try to.

Twenty-five percent of participants described themselves as having an intuitive style of problem-solving. This style was defined by a reliance on ones intuition, or inner sense, rather than on logic and reason. Four women and 2 men identified themselves as making decisions intuitively throughout their marriage. For example:

Gloria: I go to sleep, and when I wake up the Lord has planted different things in my mind. Or I'll say: "Lord, such and such a thing is going to happen. Take it over." And it doesn't always happen the next day. But during the time that it should come due, something will come into my mind to do, to deal with whatever problem I have at the time.

Kate: I go with my intuition and what I think is right. Course what I think is right at my stage of the game now is more sensible than when I was

younger. So I roll with the punches and I don't worry so much, because I might not be here tomorrow, so what am I going to worry about tomorrow for now.

The third style of problem-solving that people attributed to themselves was impulsive. These individuals acted quickly, putting little or no thought into their decisions. The number of respondents who solved problems this way decreased over time (n=5 in phase one; n=4 in phase two; n=3 in phase three). Women outnumbered men slightly in this category. Ivan offers a description of his impulsive style of decision-making:

I tend to be a little impulsive even now. Like the time I bought that automobile out there, my son got so mad at me because I wound up buying it down here in P___, and he could have gotten a better deal somewhere else. Meantime, my bride got upset: "I want my automobile. I want an automobile." And we were using a rented car at the time. We had wrecked the other one so badly we couldn't do nothing with it. And I thought well, I've heard enough from this woman. I'm going to buy a car. So I went down to E__'s and I bought the car, you know, just like that. I never gave my son a call. Course he goes: "You bought a car!? Where'd you buy it? I told you I could got it for..." I said: "Forget it. Just leave it alone. She's got her car, and I don't have to listen to her anymore."

Respondents were asked how they made decisions jointly. This topic was explored with the aim of understanding the degree of mutuality/separateness

with which couples made decisions in areas such as finances, leisure time and recreation, friends, and purchases. Couples showed variability in their approaches. Most common were patterns that described a variable style where men made decisions about what house or car to buy, and women were in charge of how to furnish the house. Other couples reported making all decisions jointly. Some dyads reported only making joint decisions around issues related to the children, or to recreation. Reflecting on a commonly held belief that black families are typically matriarchal, it is significant to note that almost all couples reported that the man was either the primary decision-maker, or equally involved in the decision-making process. Only one woman described herself as the sole decision-maker in the couple and expressed some level of dissatisfaction with this arrangement.

The number of participants reporting variable or joint decision-making styles increased over time. Reported mutuality rose from 25% to 29% to 38% over the three phases, while reported variability increased from 38% in phase one to 46 % in the later two stages. The number of respondents who described their problem-solving style as a couple as separate, decreased steadily as the marriage matured, dropping from 38% in phase one, to 25% in phase two, and to 18% in phase three. Separateness characterizes Amy's and Kate's styles of decision-making in their marriages:

Amy: He made them. I'd go along with him. I'll tell you, maybe this is giving him too much credit too, but I always thought my husband had good common sense. He read a lot and usually his judgment was pretty much right for whatever the situation was. Not always, but I respected

that. Not that I'm a person who couldn't have some influence. There are times when he'd listen to me. But generally he usually made decisions about stuff.

Kate: We really don't. What happens is, if I say to him: "Let's do so and so," or "What do you think?" he don't want to think. See, he hasn't had to think. So he'll say: "Whatever you want to do." He throws it back at me. He doesn't want to have the responsibility of it not working and him having been the one who said to do such and such a thing...So I have taken care of everything.

Henry felt that he and his wife empahsized mutuality in making decisions:

Henry: Well, we usually try to put em out on the table and see: well we got to do this, and this is wrong, what can we do to take care of it. And we usually, there again, just sit down and talk it over, mull it around and see what the best solution to the problem is. Not that I would go ahead and say: "Gee, we got to do this." Or she wouldn't say: "Well, it should be done like this." We'll talk it over. We'll reach a mutual agreement. And usually that's how we solve 99% of our problems.

Marital Conflict

The perceived level of conflict in participants' marriages was explored. The majority of individuals reported minimal conflict throughout their marriages (n=19 in phase one; n=18 in phase two; n=22 in phase three). Their was a

trend toward decreasing conflict as couples moved into their later years: Seventy-nine percent (n=19) of respondents described conflict in the relationship as insignificant in the early years, compared to 92% (n=22) in the later years of marriage. One woman reported a slight increase in the level of conflict during the child rearing years. Issues for this couple revolved around differences of opinion related to the rearing of the children. One couple reported consistently high levels of discord throughout their marriage, stating that arguments typically came up around the wife's inability to trust her husband. The following passages offer descriptions of respondents' perceptions of conflict within their relationships:

Carl: Every time I turned around she wanted to argue about someone who told her something, see. So that took up time and space and everything else. That's been going on now for maybe about 20-25 years of hassling.

Bob: Well, like I said, we've had our little ups and downs, but we never really suffered anything. We disagree sometimes about things. But then we get together and work it out.

Fay: I can't remember when the last time was we had a little argument. And we never had a real big argument.

Interpersonal Differences

Respondents were also questioned regarding their styles of handling

interpersonal differences. In addition, they were asked to describe their perceptions of their spouses' styles. The predominant means of dealing with differences were coded into two categories: confrontation and avoidance. As individuals matured in their relationships, there was a slight increase in people's tendency to confront differences (n=15 in phase one; n=16 in phase two; n=17 in phase 3). Gender differences were observed in terms of respondents' comfort with confronting issues. As was observed in communication style, women typically displayed more confrontive behavior than men. Some self-reports of both confrontational and avoidant styles follow:

Art: We don't keep anything down in you. If something is there, you let it out, get it out in the open. You can be mad, but then that's not going to last that long. And then it'll be over with and you start over again. Each day's a new day.

Cathy: I just don't bother saying anything about certain things. I just don't say anything about certain things. You know, just, if some things don't make sense, don't keep nagging about it.

Kate: I'm a person, I like to say what I have to say and then we can be friends again. But my husband holds grudges.

When rating thier partner's style of handling problems, women were perceived as significantly more confrontive than men. In the pre-parenting phase of the relationship, 3 men were perceived by their spouses as

confrontational, while10 women were viewed this way by their partners [X2 (2)=8.22, p=.004]. Significant differences in perceptions persisted in the parenting phase of marriage, but were less drastic, with 4 women and nine men continuing to view their partners as confrontational [X2 (2)=4.19, p=.041]. In the post-child rearing stage of relationships, significant differences in perceptions of spouses' styles of handling conflict disappeared [X2 (2)=1.60, p=.206]. More women (n=6) viewed their husbands as confrontive, while the number of men reporting confrontational styles in their partners remained consistent (n=9). Some examples help to illustrate participants' perceptions of their spouses' styles of handling interpersonal differences:

> Doug: She's a straight talking person. She comes straight out and lays it on the table. Me, I'm more...People do me like a rug. They can walk on me. And she won't allow it, but I will.

> Judy: He never argues. I think he would avoid confrontation at any cost. And that, in our younger years, was really frustrating to me because it said: "I really don't care."

Values and Beliefs

Religion

Respondents were asked to describe the impact of religion on their marriages. Religion played a central role in the lives of most participants. Thirteen participants in phase one, and 17 respondents in phases two and three, expressed that religion had influenced their relationship in a positive way.

A shift occurred from the first to the second phase of marriage, with more respondents indicating religion as having a more positive effect on the marriage. In the post-child rearing stage the positive impact of people's religion on their marriages approached statistical significance [$X2 (2)=1.82, p=.178$]. At every stage, more women than men described religion as playing an important role in their marriage. Religion was felt to have a positive influence by 9 women and 5 men in phase one, and by 10 women and 7 men in phase two and three. The following excerpts serve to illustrate this sentiment:

Amy: We usually go to church together all the time...We try to do the right thing financially at church. He's done a lot of things at church. He was a deacon for many years until his arthritis bothered him, and I sing in the choir. And all of our friends are of the same mind. So that kind of keeps us together too.

Doug: That's another thing that helped me respect [spouse] more, by me having religious beliefs. Cuz I like to pray for [spouse]; I pray for her every morning. I get back down on my knees at night when I go to bed. And so it does affect me and her. I always pray for [spouse]; sometimes I pray for her during the day. So religion is a big part of my life.

Four respondents (3 men and 1 woman) reported that religion had a mixed influence on their marriage in the first phase. Only one man described a mixed effect in phase two, and no one endorsed this view in phase three. Six respondents (4 men and 2 women) consistently described religion as having no

influence on their marriage. Ivan speaks to the insignificance of religion in his relationship:

> I'm not that religiously inclined. I had my religious experiences when I was younger and actually, it never wore off. So I've never been that regimented. I believe...I have a religious belief, but evidently it isn't strong enough to make me pursue it as some people do.

Respondents were asked about the role that their religious beliefs played in helping them to cope with racism and discrimination. This was an area of interest because of the potentially negative impact that such experiences may have on each partner in the marriage, introducing added stressors with which the couple may have to cope. The effects of racism and discrimination on the marital relationship will be discussed in greater detail in the section addressing this issue.

The majority of participants (10 women and 8 men) reported religious beliefs as having a significant positive impact on their ability to cope with racism and discrimination. For example:

> Beth: Well, I always said that if I didn't know God, if I had no faith in him, I think I could be out there being worse than the boys in the hood. Find me an M-16, buy me one and shoot up. But I've only tried to work for racial harmony among people. And I try to be an example of what blacks are really like when you get to know them.

Bob: See, I've been around a lot of people, different nationalities and that sort of stuff. I been called all kinds of names. And if it hadn't been for my religion, I wouldn't be here. I would have busted them in the mouth. But I just, you know, let it go and say: "You don't know any better," you know, and let it go at that.

Heidi: Because, yeah, you think that you know what you're going through, that God was...Well, you wouldn't think that there wouldn't be a God. But you go through so much, you think "Why me?" And then somehow it'll work out for you. so there has to be someone up there looking out for you. So I say, yeah, to me, you really have to have faith.

Six respondents (2 women and 4 men) stated that religion had no impact on their ability to cope with racism and discrimination. Irene explains:

I have never equated the things that have happened to me because I'm black with religion, per se.

Attitudes Toward Divorce

Participants' values about divorce appeared to have an impact on marital stability. Fifteen respondents came from intact homes, while parents of 8 individuals had gone through a divorce. One couple had separated for a short time during the middle years of their marriage. Another woman disclosed that she had left her husband for a brief time but returned home because of the children. Many respondents spontaneously expressed how the values in their

family of origin impacted their marriages. For example:

Fred: My mother and father never talked about divorce. They took their marriage vows and that commitment very seriously. And I'm the same way.

Henry: We didn't believe in it; we don't believe in it. We're still married...I've been married, like I said, for 37 years. And my father remarried after my mother died. And they were still married up until the time he died...So we come from a long family of people who believe in sticking together, all my cousins and uncles and aunts, they're all still together and married. We just come from a long line of people who believe that once you're together, you're supposed to stay together.

Other Values

Fifteen out of twenty-four participants stated that other values had influenced their marriages in a positive way. Some commonly mentioned values which people attributed to marital success included honesty and trust, commitment, fairness, supportiveness, respect, and teamwork. Below is a sampling of respondents' descriptions of the importance of some of these values:

Kate: Because when I got married, we believed everything that minister said to us, and we believed it was for better or for worse, to death us do part. And that's another reason that keeps you together. Because I took

the vow seriously. I felt that this is it and this is how it's going to be.

Bob: Well, I always think like this: When you get married and raise them kids, I feel that you're supposed to be true to each other and treat each other fair, you know what I mean. I just felt that way all my life, whether it's true or not. It's always helped.

Heidi: Just like I said before, you have to have trust, you have to have love, and you have to be able to sit down and communicate. To me those are the things that some marriages...They don't communicate. And you know you have to sit down and iron everything out. It's hard to make a marriage work out. That's what I believe.

External Factors

Participants were asked whether several variables outside of their relationships had any impact on the quality and stability of their marriage over time. These factors included finances, extended families, cultural variables, and racism and discrimination.

Finances

In the early years of marriage, most respondents reported that finances had a negative (n=13) or a mixed (n=4) effect on their relationship. Three individuals reported that money had a positive impact on their marriage, while 4 stated that it had no effect at all. Some examples reflect people's experiences and struggles related to financial issues during this phase:

Henry: But basically that's what it was, was money. Not...Me at the time, I would have to say it was probably me. I didn't have any value on money. At the time it didn't mean anything to me, so...It was probably because of the way I was brought up and the way she was brought up. Things were a lot tougher for her than they were for me. I was more or less, say, spoiled, and pretty much got what I wanted as a youngster. So it had a lot to do with that.

Interviewer: Right in the beginning, was there an area of conflict that you always seemed to be fighting about?

Deb: Money! Money, honey, yup! I'm the big spender. [Spouse] can squeeze a quarter til it hurts. Me I can't, and I'm very bad.

The negative influence that finances had on many relationships dropped significantly as couples entered child rearing years. Only 6 individuals reported ongoing negative effects during this phase, while 5 respondents reported that money had a positive influence on the relationship. Eight people stated that finances had a mixed effect, and 5 stated that it had no effect on their marriage during this phase. Some individuals attributed their struggles with money to differences in spending habits. Thus, negative influence abated as couples learned how to accommodate each other:

Judy: We worked out a budget so our budget carried all the expenses we have for the house and everything. And then I have my own money in my

own account for expenditures; he has his own separate account. So he doesn't have to explain to me when he wants to buy a new camera, and so I don't have to explain to him when I want to buy something. And that in itself has cut down on arguments. It's working for us; it's the best way.

As couples entered their later years in marriage, fewer people (n=2) reported finances as having a negative impact on the relationship; 7 of the respondents felt money had no impact at this stage; 11 perceived money to have a mixed impact, and 4 saw money as positively affecting their marriage in the post-child rearing years.

Deb: We're OK, pretty well off financially. We got a few bucks and that's it. And I sport around my nice Caddie that he gave me. He sports around in his little funk box.

Participants were also asked about the perceived impact that their race had in terms of their ability to provide financially for their families. Although 6 men and 8 women reported experiencing discrimination at work at some point in their lives, few respondents (6 men and 4 women) had the perception that they had been held back in providing for their families because of their race. Excerpts from different interviews illustrate the range of responses:

Deb: I hadn't really thought about it like that. You know, we've been overly blessed. We've been overly blessed as far as finances have been.

Beth: Not just me, for all black families, on the whole. I mean average, above average, and below average. And this is why I said earlier, white men know and they hold the strings to the economy. And this is how they keep black people in slavery today. Not so much by the force of telling you; it's the economic pullback, that line there that holds you back.

Ivan: No. By and large, whatever I needed for the well-being of the family, I was able to get it. And I never had a difficult time finding a job.

Extended Families

Respondents were asked about their perceptions regarding the influence of their own and their partners' extended families on the marriage. Men and women were equally divided in their observations of the role their own families had played in their marriages. During the initial stage of the relationship, 54% (n=13) of individuals felt that their extended families had no effect on the relationship; 25% (n=6) reported a positive impact, and 13% (n=3) felt mixed about the impact of their own families on the marriage. Eight percent (n=2) described a negative influence throughout the three stages.

Fifteen people reported no influence in the second and third stages of marriage. Two participants expressed mixed feelings about the role their family of origin played in their marriage during the latter two stages. The number of respondents describing positive feelings decreased as well in these two stages (n=5). Following are several examples which represent the ways that extended families were thought to affect the marriage:

Ivan: Well, we moved away from them. And there were only one or two after a while that would even bother to visit, which was alright with me. I didn't need them telling me how to run my life because I was growing older and I didn't need that... So the only time I saw them was if I went down to visit them on my own. I didn't put [spouse] through it because I knew if we all came together there would be some tension here.

Heidi: Actually, they had no effect whatsoever on our marriage.

Edith: I said to my brother one time (we were having a problem) and I said: "I don't know if I can take this any longer." And he said: "You know, you married him for better or for worse and you got to take it and do the best you can." This is the only one. He's the only one; the rest of them haven't said anything.

When describing the influence of their spouse's families of origin, most participants reported feeling a decreasing impact throughout their marriages (n=11 in phase one; n=16 in phase two; n=17 in phase three). Positive effects were described by 2 participants in the early years, and by 6 individuals in the later stages of marriage. Reports of perceived negative influences of spouses' families dropped steadily from the early years (n=3) to the post-child rearing years (n=1). Examples of different experiences follow:

Amy: I told you what a beautiful relationship I had with my in-laws. And that lasted until they both passed away, which is getting to be about 12 or

15 years ago. My sister-in-law, they were all wonderful people who greatly influenced my life, greatly influenced my life.

Doug: Well, I kind of think they resented me because of my way of doing things. Because, like I say, I was drinking and I was unpredictable, and they could see...[Spouse's] mother could see some things. But she could also see the good side of me too.

Irene: I hadn't even met them. As a matter of fact, if I had met them before I had married him, I probably wouldn't have.

Respondents were also asked about early living arrangements, since the literature suggests that extended families frequently share living quarters. The impact of these early living arrangements on the couples marriage was also explored. Six couples reported living with relatives when they were first married. These participants described mixed reactions to their living arrangements. Three couples reported no effect on their relationship. For example, Judy explains:

It was quite short and I can't remember. There wasn't any problem. It was OK.

One couple described a negative effect. Ivan states:

It didn't go over well at all. Cuz as I say they were a bunch of

domineering old broads. And that's the only way I can describe them.

Two couples had differing perceptions of the impact of their living
situation. One spouse in each of these dyads reported a negative experience,
and the other reported no problems:

Carl: It was great, cuz we all stuck together. There was no hatred or
anything amongst us.

Cathy: We couldn't do what we wanted to do. In somebody else's house
you can't, you know. It's hard.

Culture

Participants were asked to describe how their race and ethnicity may
have influenced their marriage. Twenty-two respondents (11 women and 9 men)
reported that their race and cultural background had no significant impact on
their marriages. The two respondents who felt some influence of these factors
on their marriages described a negative impact. Following are examples of
particpants' experiences:

Art: I don't think it has anything to do with influencing my marriage. I
think I have the same values as anybody else, I mean as the majority,
the mainstream.

Judy: I think since you told me that you were trying to interview African-

American families, I've been doing some thinking about how much the race issue related to our marriage. And I'm still wondering about that because it probably wouldn't be obvious to me, since I'm only living in one life so I can't do a comparison. But I think it may have had more to do with it than I thought. Because if you spend your whole work day and most of your social life, not with a facade, but putting your best foot forward, you may just be a little bit tired by the time that you're with each other. Or you may not know when to stop. Because I wouldn't mind if we both let our hair down. I don't think we do that together. It may be just that we don't know when to stop.

One way of understanding the role of African-American heritage in couples' marriages was to explore the presence of traditions in any phase of their marriages which respondents could trace to their black backgrounds. Most individuals reported no African-American traditions in their marriage, except for traditional cooking. People who spoke to some type of traditional values did not describe a custom that was clearly related to their subculture. Rather, these customs appeared to be tied to American culture at the time. For example several participants mentioned strictness around dating:

Ivan: Well, the only traditions that I can even recall were pretty much in place for all of society. There were certain things that you didn't do, you didn't dare do. And if you did, you were in a world of hurt cuz your family was going to be on your back. The dating thing, it was movies or picnics, very simple stuff compared to what they do today on a date.

Respondents were questioned about the presence of African-American traditions in their parents' relationships in order to get a sense of whether culturally related customs had once been present. Twenty-three of twenty-four individuals stated that they never observed any such traditions in their parents' relationships. One woman spoke clearly to African traditions that influenced her grandmother's marriage, but she described these customs as dying away:

Beth: Because my grandmother, my father's mother, was a stickler for blood lines. She would rather...And this is how I was brought up - that a marriage was arranged prior to, and a child was brought up to belong to that family and you got married in that. That was a tribal thing that goes back to Africa.

Interviewer: Did any African traditions influence your dating?

Beth: No. Because when I stopped living with my grandmother, my mother was not like that. she was born in the city.

The other 23 respondents expressed a belief that their families of origin were raised in a white culture and therefore, had no ties to African-American traditions in marriage:

Ivan: So all of the teachings that these people had, cause of course, my great-grandmother, all of the teachings to her children were from what she learned from back here. And they in turn learned a little bit more because society's changing. But they still have a great regard and they had been trained by my great-grandmother, their mother. So they take

this on the next step. And of course there weren't too many of them that had children. But those that did have children, some of what great-grandmother taught them, they're teaching their children, plus whatever else is new in society, you see. So, it's based on the white culture, do you see? This is where they came from. This is all those people knew.

Several respondents believed African-Americans today are more aware of their cultural background than previous generations:

Deb: Hell, they [parents] didn't even know Africa existed. No. I mean nobody discussed back there in them days about Africa. That's just a new thing.

Judy: To my knowledge I don't think there was anything like that in those years. I think we've become more aware as a race of tradition now.

One variable that emerged from the data which may explain the diverse opinions of respondents regarding the presence of African-American traditions in marriage, and the impact of race on relationships, deals with the extent to which these individuals identified with their African-American heritage. Only one woman spoke at any length about the effect of her black heritage on her marriage. This respondent discussed the resistance that she, as a black woman, felt about sharing the "secrets" of her culture:

Beth: It's hard for people that are outside to understand black families at

all. They write a lot about us and know nothing about us. I can't understand that to this day. And I think maybe a lot of their knowledge comes from reading. Some whites read books, books by black people. Because I can never forget reading a particular book...I'm trying to remember it. But when he spoke about some things, I said: "Oh my God! The boy is telling all our secrets to the world! ...He's telling! He's telling! He's not supposed to tell!" Because there are things we have in common, every black person, I think, that we know that no one else knows. They're not supposed to know. We're not supposed to be telling it. You know, like you know the way things supposed to be. Everybody else is not supposed to know that. But now a lot of people do. Because I feel that once they do they steal our heritage, things that belong exclusively to...These are the things that make you what you are and keep you strong.

Aside from this woman's level of awareness about her culture, responses, in general, spoke to a minimal degree of identification with their black identity. Some examples illustrate this:

Deb: I don't find nothing in particular, no more than any other woman. And I'm trying to quit thinking about myself as...I know I'm black. I'm trying to think of myself as just a woman and a human being, that's all.

Henry: My African-American background is just the fact that I am black, and to me, I don't feel any different than you do. I don't feel like I am

different because...I'm a firm believer that we're all God's children, and
that we are all created equal.

Racism and Discrimination

Participants were asked about their experiences with racism and
discrimination in an attempt to find out what impact, if any, these experiences
had on their relationships. Only one woman stated that she had never
experienced racism or discrimination. All other 23 respondents spoke about
experiencing varying degrees of racism and/or discrimination throughout their
lives. Examples follow:

Art: Well, I remember writing a letter to the Air Force telling them
that...Sometimes schools or institutions or things will arbitrarily say: "We're
only going to let 2%, 3%, 10% of blacks and Hispanics and Asians into a
certain thing. And they cannot do it legally. But they do. And I think when
I talk about the quota, when I was trying to get into Officer Candidate
School, they probably said: "Of this class of (I don't know what it was at
the time) we can only have 4 or 5 blacks or so." And boom, that's it. And
like in my post-military career here, they had one senior engineer that was
black and that was it. But there were only, say, 4 positions that were
senior. And if they had a black one there, and another came along, which
was me in this case, he couldn't get there because they already had that
quota, you know.

Ivan: We moved to this neighborhood, and we had some little hassles cuz

nothing's perfect. We had this little restaurant in E___. In the month of February, some lady walked in in the afternoon. And we were just getting started and wondering: "Gee, did we make the right move?" Cuz there wasn't anything happening. Nobody in the place but my wife and myself. And this lady walked in and ordered a cup of coffee. And I heard her when she asked my wife: "You folks own this place?" And [spouse] said: "Yes." And she put the dime on the counter and she said: "I can't drink this coffee," and she got up and walked out, cuz we were too black for her."

Irene: You want to know why I didn't finish college? Well, as I said, we were poor, and I had to have scholarship money or I couldn't go. To get scholarship money, you had to get good marks. But that was alright cuz I knew I was smart. Well, I was. So I intentionally took something I knew I could do well and quickly, cuz I wanted to be able to bring home some money so my mother could get up off her knees. And I went right in there making all the good marks...It was the home economics department. And I'd do a test, say 100 questions. If I got one wrong, I'd get a "C". Not for the white kids. There were only two black women in that class. I was one of them. And somebody explained to me why they did that...Well, in that course in your last year, the best students got to live in the model house and take care of the model family and whatever. And they'd have to share a room. And at the rate I was going, I was going to have to be in that house with some white student, and they just weren't going to put up with that.

Respondents were asked about how they coped with racism and

discrimination both as individuals and as a couple. Individually, people reported coping in a variety of ways: 8 participants (5 men and 3 women) reported that their style of coping was to confront situations; 8 people (3 men and 8 women) described a tendency to avoid confrontation; and 2 women described a mix of the two approaches. Examples follow:

Beth: We have to live with it. We live with it and we're hurt with it a lot of times. It's something that could happen at any given moment. And it comes in different ways and a lot of people do it without realizing. But now there are days when I don't let it go by. There are times when I just let it go.

Gloria: There's a saying: "Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me." And if I am in a place where somebody tries to be smart or nasty, I close my ears. And sometimes from the actions of people, you can tell what's coming. And if I just automatically close my ears and I don't hear it. And people say: "How can you do that?" Well, I start thinking about something that's pleasant, like a beautiful day when the sun came out and it was nice, and I don't let those people bother me.

Art: I confronted it. You know, that's been something that you did, you coped with all your life. And I say cope with, you try and cope with it. Sometimes you're successful. Sometimes you're not. Certain things that happen you can never say: "To hell with it."

Five dyads reported confronting situations and four reported an avoidant style. Two couples had differing perceptions of how they dealt with racism and discrimination. Examples illustrate:

> Art: We've confronted it and told 'em to go to hell.

> Fred: Like I said, we try to understand and forgive.
> Interviewer: Would you ever talk about it with each other?
> Fred: Once in a while we might say something about everyday things. But usually we just let it go.

When asked how their experiences had impacted their marriages, 20 respondents reported no impact. Ed describes this experience:

> Ed: Again, as I just mentioned, we were singled out. Say a raise comes up and you're working your head off. And then they go on by and he gets a raise and you don't get the raise. So you look at it that way. But no enough to dwell on it or take it home.
> Interviewer: So that didn't really affect you marriage either?
> Ed: No.

One person reported a negative impact, and three individuals described a positive influence. Bob's response represents the idea that dealing with racsism strengthens a marriage:

Bob: It probably made it stronger. I'd come home from a particularly

tiring day and if something like that had happened, we'd discuss it.

Certainly we supported each other in that. And it made our relationship

stronger, because when you support each other in something like that,

you seem to grow stronger I believe.

Influence of Family of Origin on Marriage

Respondents were asked about their perceptions of the degree of

similarity between their marriages and their parents' marriages. Twenty-five

percent of participants reported being raised by people other than their biological

mother and father: Four individuals reported being raised by an aunt and uncle,

and 2 stated they were raised by grandparents. In addition, six participants were

raised solely by their mothers and did not know their biological fathers. In these

instances, respondents were asked to base their perceptions on what they

observed in their primary caretaker's relationship.

Most women were consistent over time in their perception of discontinuity

between their own marriage and their parents' relationship (n=10 in phase one;

n=11 in phases two and three). These women felt that their relationships

differed from their parents' in terms of marital roles, expressiveness, and equity.

Significantly more men than women saw their marriages as similar in the early

stage [X2 (2)=8.08, p=.018]. Differences between men's and women's

perceptions of continuity with their families of origin decreased during child

rearing years [X2 (2)=3.76, p=.152]. This was due to the fact that men saw

themselves as raising their children in a manner that was different from the way

in which they were raised by their parents. As couples entered the later years of

marriage, gender differences in perceptions of similarity with parents' marriages continued to subside [$X2$ (2)=3.14, p=.208].

When participants spoke to the level of continuity in their relationships, they expressed similarities and differences primarily in terms of role responsibilities, relatedness, and child rearing styles. For example:

Cathy: well, my mother used to get my father supper. Whenever he would come home from work, she would have it ready. That's what I tried to do when he was working. He would come home and things would be on the table, food and stuff like that.

Fred: I thought I was never going to be like my father. I didn't like to have to see my mother work so hard without him helping her out. Some people say that you end up like your parents. But that wasn't true for me. I had my mind made up that I was never going to have a relationship like theirs.

Amy: Well, my father was a little more sensitive to my mother. My husband's insensitive to me. But he's getting a little better as he gets older, not much.

Henry: I was always lenient cuz when I was brought up I had real, real strict parents. And I always said I would never be as strict on mine, that I'd tow the line with them, but that I'd let them get away with more.

Marital Satisfaction

Couples expressed increased satisfaction with their marriages over time. Significantly more women (n=9) than men (n=3) expressed initial dissatisfaction with their relationships [X2 (2)=8.45, p=.015]. This difference decreased as couples entered the parenting stage [X2 (2)=3.64, p=.162]. By the time participants reached the post-child rearing years, significant differences between husbands and wives had entirely disappeared; most participants (n=20) expressed satisfaction with their relationships [X2 (2)=1.33, p=.513]. For example, Deb states:

No, it got even better. Because after [spouse] and I found out for sure in our marriage that once he didn't pick up a drink, he was a totally different person to me, and I had more respect for him, more love, and I wanted to do more things with him. So for the last twenty something years it's been great like that.

Henry also expressed satisfaction with his marriage:

Well, I feel, if it wasn't for this relationship, I don't know where I would be today. I think it was one of the best things that ever happened to me. I don't know how she feels about it, but that's the way I feel about it. I just don' think I would be anything if I wasn't with her, or if I didn't meet her, or if she wasn't in my life, because she really influences my life a lot. And I'm just as much in love with her today as I was 37 years ago.

People who expressed unhappiness with their relationships tied these feelings to a lack of intimacy and connection with their partner:

Carl: There's no hope of it getting any better. I'd like it to change, but I ain't got much hope.

Kate: We don't have the kind of relationship the way I would like it to be, but it's not making me unhappy. I don't know how to explain it. I'm accepting what I have. And I'm saying to myself: "Well, what am I going to try to change him for. He's been like this all the time. Why now? you've put up with this all these years, so you make the most with what you have now. You work for what you have now." So that's what I'm going to do.

CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter reviews salient themes which emerged from this study of marital stability among African-American working-class couples, and discusses the data in terms of previous research findings. Clinical implications and directions for future research are addressed.

Sixteen main themes were identified as contributing to stability among couples interviewed for this study. Of the sixteen core categories, four related to premarital themes, including initial attraction, family support, circumstances at time of marriage, and expectations in the marriage. Three core categories revolved around marital themes, specifically: marital roles, relatedness, and communication. Values and beliefs encompassed three more core categories: religion, attitudes towards divorce, and other values. Four categories were related to external factors, including: finances, extended families, culture, and racism/discrimination. Influence of family of origin and marital satisfaction also emerged as salient categories. Following is a discussion of the significant findings related to these sixteen core categories. Special attention will be paid to the impact of gender differences in participants' reported experiences of marriage.

Implications of Significant Findings

The portrait of a stable marriage. This study provides an overall view of the complex and dynamic nature of seasoned marriages, with specific reference

to black couples from the working-class. Twenty-two out of twenty-four participants in this study completed no more than a high school degree, with many participants receiving less education. One woman completed a two year nursing degree, and one man completed a college degree. The results of this study remain consistent with theory on factors that affect marital stability and indicate that marital quality is a major determinant of whether a marriage will remain intact (Lewis & Spanier, 1979). According to Lewis & Spanier (1979), the primary variable of marital quality is mediated by a number of threshold variables, including marital expectations, commitment and obligations, tolerance, religious doctrine, external pressures and social stigma, divorce law and legal aid, and real and perceived alternatives. With the exception of the influence of social stigma, and the roles of divorce law and availability of legal aid, the constellation of factors identified by Lewis & Spanier (1979) as being involved in marital stability were reflected in the results of this study.

Pre-marital themes. Several significant pre-marital themes emerged from the data. In keeping with Lewis & Spanier's findings of pre-marital factors that influence marital stability and satisfaction, initial attraction to ones spouse came out as a salient theme. However, unlike previous findings (Podbelski, 1992) in which the majority of respondents reported positive feelings towards their spouse, many participants in this sample described ambivalent or negative feelings when they first met their partner. Several women noted that they experienced an active dislike for their husbands when they first met. One woman described how her husband convinced her to marry him, telling her that love would come later. One man reported feeling a persistent lack of attraction to his wife initially, and throughout their marriage.

It's interesting to note that despite these initially negative experiences, a number of couples also reported a relatively short period of dating prior to deciding to get married. For example, one woman had described an early dislike for her husband, reported that they were married three weeks later. Thus, while initial attraction does seem to be an important variable in determining marital adjustment and longevity, data from this study suggests that its impact may vary among couples.

Another interesting pre-marital variable that emerged from the data focused on the impact of how each spouse's family reacted to the couple's decision to marry. The literature on African-American family structure suggests that acceptance of the marriage by partners' families of origin is an important feature which impacts the viability and stability of the relationship (Billingsley, 1990). Billingsley (1990) describes marriage in the African system as the union of two groups, rather than two individuals. He claims that this tradition continues today among African-Americans, and he explains that it is common for marriage to require the sanction of both families. He notes that when this does not occur, and element of instability is introduced. With this in mind, it was striking to note that only one respondent in this study reported that his parents influenced his choice of a marriage partner. The remainder of the sample's responses were characterized by independence from their family, and feelings that what ones family of origin endorsed had no impact on their choices.

Marital roles. For the most part, participants in this study anticipated carrying out traditional roles in their marriages: Men expected to provide financially for the family and women anticipated playing a supportive, nurturing role in the home. Several participants had an initial expectation that they would

be more non-traditional in their marital roles, with both partners sharing tasks equally. In the early years of their relationships, most couples did exhibit traditional role behaviors, with women caring for the home and children, while men supported the family financially and were left in charge of most major decisions. However, as couples moved through their child rearing years, they reported more flexiblity in marital roles. Men often took part in child rearing and women took jobs outside of the home.

The trends denoted in these couples relationships support the current theories on power structure in African-American marriages. Stereotypic views of power structure among black families portray these families as primarily matriarchal, and assume that marital stability and satisfaction are compromised as a result of this style (Moynihan, 1965). However, couples in this sample typically viewed their roles as dividing along traditional lines, especially in the early years of their marriages. As their relationships evolved, more role flexibility was described by people in this study, supporting Willie's (1976; 1985) findings that black couples divide responsibilities depending on the needs of the relationship, rather than adhering to rigid, traditional roles. Willie explains that this flexibility allows couples to cope with additional environmental stressors. For example, a number of couples in this study noted that both partners worked due to financial need, and shared the duties of raising the children, and caring for the home. In fact, all but two women in this study entered the work force during their child rearing years and remained employed into the third stage of their marriage. These women typically did not relinquish their household responsibilities. Rather, they expanded their roles to include employment outside the home. Men in these couples often took on more household duties

and played a more significant role in child rearing. With the exception of two couples, dyads also exhibited a trend toward more mutual decision-making.

Despite shifting role responsibilities among couples, the majority of dyads were classified as complimentary regarding their fit throughout their marriages, that is the fit in marital roles was characterized by differences rather than similarities This observation suggests that while partners may take on a range of duties in the relationship, typically each partner is in charge of a separate aspect of the marriage, rather than sharing duties equally. The results of this study regarding marital roles and decision-making are important in light of previous research in the area of marital power.

Gray-Little (1982), in her study of 75 African-American, working-class, urban couples from the South, found male dominant couples to be more satisfied than either wife dominant or egalitarian couples. In the present study, couples who shared duties more equally reported the highest levels of satisfaction in their relationships. These results support findings by Corrales (1975) and others (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Centers, Raven, & Rodriguez, 1971). In a representative area sample of 200 couples, Corrales (1975) found that the highest levels of satisfaction were reported by couples who shared in decision-making, followed by male-dominant dyads and dyads in which both partners made a number of independent decisions. Wife-dominant couples reported the lowest levels of satisfaction.

Only one couple in the present study described themselves as wife dominant. In this pair, the woman expressed significant dissatisfaction with her marriage due to the fact that she had to handle all the duties related to life with her husband. This woman's experience supports research findings which

associate wife-dominant relationships with higher levels of dissatisfaction.

Overall, these findings provide information around the relationship between marital power, marital satisfaction, and marital stability among African-American working-class couples. The notion that black families are matriarchal, and thus more unstable, was dispelled by data provided in this sample. In fact, increasing role flexilbility and mutuality in decision-making among most of these couples appeared to lend strength to their marriages.

Gender Differences. Much of what couples reported in terms of marital themes reflected gender differences, especially with regards to factors of relatedness such as sensitivity of spouse, marital behavior, psychosocial intimacy, and the sexual relationship. Other research on the marital relationship identifies differences in how men and women behave in marriage (O'Neil, et al., 1987; Zube, 1982).

Recently, a number of theorists have focused on describing differences between men and women in terms of their relational capacity (Block, 1984; Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1986; Surrey, 1984). These authors believe that socialization and development combine to create a distinct difference between the psychology of males and the psychology of females. Women, these theorists suggest, have a more communal orientation and therefore, are more concerned about interpersonal relationships, and are more focused on affiliation than are men. Men typically embrace a more agentic orientation, with a focus on autonomy and achievement, self-assertion and self-expansion. According to relational theory, the woman would focus on interdependence in a marriage relationship, putting effort into preserving harmony and connection in the marriage, while the man would be more focused

on independence and achievement in his career (being less able to express himself emotionally in the relationship). Reports by men and women in this study support this difference.

In the early years of the marriage, three quarters of the women viewed their husbands as lacking sensitivity. Almost all of the men felt that their wives were very sensitive throughout the marriage. The number of women reporting minimal or no sensitivity by their husbands decreased over the years, supporting the notion that men move towards greater expressiveness as they enter their later years (Zube, 1982). While men displayed more affiliative qualities over time, women shifted to adopt more assertive, independent behavior in the relationship. As women moved into the middle years of their marriage, many took on jobs and developed interests outside the home. It appears that both sexes displayed an increasing adaptablity in terms of role behaviors as their marriage became more seasoned. The changes that were observed over time in these couples regarding both affiliative and instrumental qualties may contribute to the increased satisfaction witnessed, as partners negotiated a balance between independence and interdependence.

Gender differences were also reflected in dyads' reports of marital behavior. Expressive behavior was characterized by the display of emotional concern for others' well-being. Instrumental behavior typically focused on expression through "doing." Women reported a mixture of instrumental and expressive behaviors throughout their marriages. Most of the men in this sample were identified as instrumental in the earlier years of their marriages. Again, as with sensitivity, men adopted a more expressive style as they aged. Some men spoke eloquently of their inability to be open emotionally with their

spouses as the relationship evolved. These men described varying degrees of success around learning to develop their own expressiveness. One man continued to feel unable to express his feelings openly to his wife, and was deeply perturbed by his inability to reach out to her. Another man reported that through attending Alcoholics Anonymous and by responding to his wife's example, his efforts at expressiveness in the marriage became more natural over time. Both of these men, as well as other respondents, tied feelings of satisfaction in the marriage to levels of marital expressiveness. This may suggest the detrimental effect that rigid sex role identification has on the quality of a marital relationship.

Despite increased role flexibility in the men in this study, gender differences remained in subjects' reports of psychosocial intimacy. This type of intimacy refers to a person's ability to talk about him- or herself in a disclosing way, sharing his or her wants and needs with his or her partner, and allowing that partner into his or her inner life (Rubin 1976; Scarf, 1986). For most men, their perceptions of psychosocial intimacy grew steadily over the years, suggesting a growing feeling that they could trust and rely on their mates. In the later years of marriage, three quarters of the men in this sample felt satisfied with the level of intimacy in their relationships. The wives of these men, however, reported a different experience. Throughout the stages of marriage, three quarters of these women described a lack of psychosocial intimacy in their relationships. This discrepancy between men's and women's perceptions may relate to the gender difference noted earlier. Men, who were instrumental, may not have been as able to convey to their spouses their true feelings of intimacy and attachment. Women, who were expressive throughout their marriages,

may have expected more affective expression from their husbands when assessing the level of intimacy in the marriage.

Gender differences also appeared around subjects' assessments of the sexual relationship, particularly in the later years of marriage. Most husbands and wives expressed satisfaction with their sex life in the early and middle years of their relationship. As couples entered the post-child rearing years, three quarters of the women described their sexual experience as mixed or negative, while half the men still reported a positive experience with sex. Over half of the participants reported that a physical problem in themselves or in their spouses accounted for their decreased enjoyment of sex in the relationship. People reported a wide variety of ailments. Several men reported being impotent. One woman described experiencing pain due to a hysterctomy. Another woman reported discomfort with her body image following a masectomy. Several men had strokes which interfered with their ability to engage in sexual activities. Despite the reported shift in sexual enjoyment, most participants continued to view the sexual aspect of their marriage as important. Again, more women than men exhibited a shift away from valuing their sexual relationship with their husbands.

When assessing the overall degree of satisfaction with their marriages, more women than men expressed mixed feelings about the quality of their relationships in the initial stage of marriage. Also, more women than men perceived their relationship to be unfair, especially in the early years of the marriage. Over the course of time however, these gender differences disappeared, and both men and women entered the later years of their marriages expressing feelings of satisfaction with their partnerships. It may be

that the learning that took place among the men in this study around expressing feelings and becoming increasingly concerned with their partners' well-being had an effect on the overall feelings of satisfaction and equity reported by the women in this sample. Women may also have adapted to their felt lack of satisfaction by becoming more autonomous and finding ways outside of their relationships to meet their needs. Changing perceptions of equity in the relationship also may be tied to women's increasingly assertive behavior, allowing them to set better limits in the relationship and to ask for what they needed from their partners.

Another area where gender differences were observed related to effects of alcoholism on these couples' relationships. Half of the couples shared that one partner suffered from a drinking problem. Of these six couples, five identified the husband as having the problem with alcohol. Couples who were affected by alcohol unanimously reported their own or their spouse's drinking problem as having a significant negative impact on the degree of relatedness and intimacy in the marriage. Decreased feelings of closeness, in turn, were universally reported to have a negative influence on marital satisfaction in one or both partners. Although it was not possible to compare this group with other samples, a disproportionate number of couples may have suffered from the presence of alcoholism in their relationship. It may be that black men suffer from external pressures and personal stress related to race which may be witnessed in the black males' likelihood of develop a drinking problem. Alcoholism does have a negative impact on the quality and stability of the marriage, as reported by people in this study who were dealing with problems brought on by excessive drinking.

Values and Beliefs. Seventeen respondents reported that religion played

an important role throughout their marriages, typically stating that their religious beliefs gave them a positive outlook on their relationships. Women consistently ascribed more importance to the role of religion in their lives than did men. It was interesting to note how participants also relied on their religious beliefs as a way to cope with racism and discrimination. Almost all respondents felt that religion had allowed them to let go of angry feelings toward a world that was often harsh, and even allowed them to feel love and forgiveness for people who expressed racist attitudes. Hines & Boyd-Franklin (1982) note that religion historically has been emphasized in the black culture as a means of preserving the family and the community in the face of an oppressive society. Responses by the participants in this study support this notion.

Many couples reported strong beliefs related to commitment in marriage, and expressed negative attitudes toward divorce. This finding is significant when one considers the rapidly growing numbers of black couples who are divorcing today. The stability among couples in this sample may be explained by Billingsley's (1990) observations that working-class blacks, as a group, have the most stable marriages. The fact that this sample was older in age, hailing from a different generation, may also have impacted the attitudes expressed about divorce and commitment.

Other values that were commonly identified as important in these marriages included love, trust, honesty, respect, fairness, and supportiveness. All of the results in this study related to values and beliefs support the literature on stable marriages which indicates that attitudes, values, sense of commitment, respect for divorce law, and religious doctrine, mediate and influence marital stability (Hicks & Platt, 1970; Lewis & Spanier, 1979).

External Factors. Several external variables were explored with couples.

Finances emerged as the only factor having a significant impact on couples'

marriages. Over half the sample felt negatively affected by lack of money in the

early years of their marriage. However, over time, these couples reported

increased financial power and decreased conflict around financial issues in their

relationships.

A number of respondents reported that they felt that their race had held

them back in being able to provide for their families. However, only one person

acknowledged that this difficulty had a detrimental effect on his marriage. These

results contradict findings which suggest that a sense of alienation from status

attainment, and dissatisfaction with one's lifestyle, are related to marital

instability and dissatisfaction among African-American couples (Pinderhughes,

1982; Renee, 1970; Scanzoni, 1977). Perhaps these couples are

demonstrating coping strategies which have helped them to adapt to an

overwhelming situation. The resiliency which these couples displayed in the

face of financial hardship, especially in the beginning of their relationships,

should receive further attention, as resiliency appears to have had a positive

impact on marital stability.

Regarding other external variables, participants' extended families had

little reported influence on their marriages. One third of the participants in this

study reported that their extended families positively influenced their marriages

in the early years. However, by the time the couples in this study reached the

child rearing years, well over half of the sample claimed that they had little

meaningful contact with their extended families. These results were unexpected

since much of the literature on African-American families cites the central role

that extended families play in the lives of these people (Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 1982; Billingsley, 1990). The structure of families in this study does not differ from the structure of other American families. This finding calls into question the observation that African-Americans differ from other American subcultures in terms of family structure. The extent of African-American family connections, and the structure of families among this group, needs to be further explored so as to understand its role in marital stability.

Participants were asked about whether or not their experiences with racism and discrimination had affected their marriages. Almost all respondents reported experiencing racism and discrimination at some time in their lives. However, participants stated that these experiences did not impact their marital satisfaction or stability. In some instances, people noted that dealing with racism contributed to a sense of closeness in their relationships. Couples who described this experience felt that they relied on each other for support and shelter from outside events.

When asked how their African-American heritage had impacted their marriage in general, most respondents claimed that it did not influence their marriage. Almost no participant could recall observing traditions in their parents' relationships which stemmed from their black roots, and they denied the presence of any such customs in their own marriages. In fact, this sample tended to identify themselves with the American culture, minimizing their connection with their African-American heritage. This trend was unexpected since so much attention today focuses on the revival of African traditions and a valuing of cultural differences. However, several possible explanations exist.

A number of respondents replied to questions about their cultural

background and its impact on their marriage by stating that this focus was a new phenomenon, and one about which people from their own generation had little awareness. Most couples in this sample were in their 60's and 70's and had been married for over 40 years. Thus, the generation gap that some participants spoke to may have had a very real impact on their inability to speak to the presence of African-American traditions in their marriages. Respondents may also see African-American awareness as a middle-class black phenomenon to which they do not connect.

Another explanation for this sample's disconnectedness from their roots may be provided by understanding differences that exist in individual's cultural identity awareness. Much research exists which has identified various developmental stages that people pass through around identification with various cultural groups (Cross, 1971; Helms, 1990; Jackson & Hardiman, 1983). These stages appear to be associated more with exposure to a given culture (i.e. the African-American subculture) and education, rather than with age. Statements made by many participants in this sample suggest that most of this sample falls into the earlier stages of identity development in which there exists limited self-awareness related to ones subculture, and potential dislike of ones own group, accompanied by a focus on assimilation with the majority culture.

Finally, participants in this study may have a limited ability to respond fully to questions regarding the impact of their cultural background on their marriages because of the fact that their world view is limited to their experiences as a African-Americans. A person may not be able to speak cogently to an experience in which they are immersed. Ibrahim (1985) observes how challenging it can be to step outside of ones world view in order to analyze ones

perspective as compared with the perspective of people from another culture or subculture. It may be easier for a person from a different cultural background looking in from the outside to identify characteristics that are unique to a certain group.

Implications for Marital Therapy

The examination of seasoned marriages, such as the ones described in this study, provides a point of reference from which to address marital issues among couples experiencing difficulties in their relationships. This study provides important data on successful marriages, and focuses on the strengths which dyads exhibit that have helped in keeping their relationships intact. Several researchers have drawn attention to the importance of focusing on the healthy aspects of marital and family relationships as an alternative to the tendency in the mental health profession to overemphasize pathology in the client (Altrocchi, 1988; Wilcoxon, 1985).

In addition to exploring well-functioning marriages, this study focused on the dynamic nature of marriage, addressing changes in the relationship over time. By gaining insight into the developmental stages that marriage partners negotiate, the clinician will be equipped better to help couples normalize the changing needs and struggles which dyads might experience throughout the different stages of their relationships. Clinicians could use information regarding the core areas which seem to influence marital satisfaction and stability as a way to assess couples' needs in therapy. By collecting data from clients related to each of the major areas explored in this study, the therapist could then sensitively design treatment interventions which reflect the idiosyncratic needs of

different couples. In determining where attention should be focused in therapy, it would be important for the clinician to attend to the couples' perceptions of the quality of various aspects of their relationships, such as level of conflict, marital roles and behavior, degree of intimacy, and styles of communication and decision-making.

The results of this study have specific implications for understanding treatment considerations for African-American working-class couples who seek marital therapy. A growing body of literature is identifying cultural diversity as an important variable for clinicians to consider (McGoldrick, et al., 1982; DeAngelis, 1990; Sue & Zane, 1987). These researchers view the personal experiences of identity conflict, racism, and oppression as central considerations in the development of new models of psychotherapy.

The fact that few participants in this study clearly identified cultural differences that were a central part of their marriage brings into focus the need for the therapist to be sensitive to the extent of the client's identification with their subgroup, as well as with the majority culture (Ibrahim, 1985). In order to conduct effective therapy with African-American and other ethnic minority groups, it is essential for the therapist to continuously monitor their own world view as well as that of the clients so as not to focus on inaccurate or insensitive goals for treatment (Horner & Vandersluis, 1981).

Despite reports by this sample that their cultural background had little impact on their relationships, one trend emerged which supports the literature on treatment considerations with African-Americans. Hines & Boyd-Franklin (1982) point out that black families have strong feelings against airing "dirty laundry" in public, and they are more likely to seek help from other family

members, friends, or the church rather than from a counselor. In several of the interviews conducted for this study, this writer noted the resistance to disclosing family problems. In one instance, the respondent requested that the tape recorder be turned off every time she spoke of difficult issues in her relationship. Others talked about their reliance on advice from family members during hard times in their marriage. Despite the barriers of race, educational background, and socio-economic level that separated this interviewer from the respondents, people gave honest and open responses to the questions. It may be that the distance between the interviewer and these participants made it easier for them to provide objective, thoughtful answers. With regards to the issue of self-disclosure, clinicians working with African-American couples should explore with them their feelings about seeking treatment.

Directions for Future Research

This study provided data on factors related to stability in the marriages of African-American working-class couples. While the results were informative regarding themes in these relationships, further research, both qualitative and quantitative, is needed in order to understand the central aspects of marital satisfaction and longevity among this population. Continued analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of black working-class couples' marriages will help clinicians to provide more effective treatment for black couples who experience instability in their relationships.

In terms of improving our knowledge of how cultural factors may influence marital stability and satisfaction, future research with people of color should also take into consideration educational and generational factors which might

influence a person's awareness of their ethnic background. Among African-Americans, the focus on their heritage appears to be fairly recent. Thus, one might find significantly different results if one were to interview couples who had been married for 15 to 20 years, rather than 35 to 55 years. With regards to educational influences on cultural awareness, it is possible that people with higher levels of education will have a greater awareness of their cultural identity. For example, the one respondent who had completed his college degree made this researcher aware of the shift from using the term "black" to using the term "African-American" to describe his race; he was quite adamant about using the current terminology.

Researchers' understanding of stability in marriage can be enhanced by replicating the current study, as well as by assessing and comparing marriages among people from a variety of socio-economic, and racial/ethnic groups. It would also be important and effective to conduct research with couples who have been divorced, in order to more clearly delineate which factors have the greatest impact on marital longevity.

While this study supported Lewis & Spanier's (1979) notion that marital satisfaction is a key variable in the prediction of marital stability, the relationship between these two constructs remains unclear. Further research is warranted to clarify what contributes to marital satisfaction and marital stability, and to understand the relationship between these two variables.

Summary

Marriage among African-American working-class couples who have been married for more than 20 years appears to be a dynamic relationship in which

each partner describes changing feelings and experiences throughout the different stages of their relationship. Based on this study, it appears that couples stayed together due to shared values of religion, and commitment to their relationship. Satisfaction in the relationship also appeared to play a role in marital longevity. Important aspects of their married life which people spoke about included their initial attraction to their spouse, pre-marital expectations, marital roles and behavior, intimacy and relatedness, external factors, influence of their own parents' marriages, and their overall sense of satisfaction with the relationship.

Couples in these seasoned marriages seem to have negotiated a balance between independence and mutuality. Relationships were characterized increasingly by a sense of closeness and satisfaction, with men becoming more affiliative over time and women behaving in a more autonomous manner. Couples reported highly individualized perceptions of what constituted a satisfying and acceptable partnership. Most valued mutuality in decision-making, and in sharing of marital roles and responsibilities. Many couples spoke to increasing levels of intimacy over time as being integral to their growing feelings of happiness in their relationships.

Interventions with couples seeking marital therapy should take into account the developmental nature of the marriage relationship. Therapy should also include a focus on the common variables in marriage described above, while still respecting the fact that much variability exists in how couples define success and satisfaction in marriage. Despite the homogeneous nature of this sample, couples displayed many individual differences in how they defined satisfaction in their marriages. As clinicians and researchers, It is important to

be attuned to individual differences in what couples perceive as contributing to satsfaction in marriage.

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Appendix A

Information and Consent Form

I understand that the interview sessions with Christine Hamel are part of the research for her doctoral dissertation under the direction of Dr. Bernard O'Brien of Boston College. The material collected will also add information about African-American marriages to a study on seasoned marriages being conducted by Drs. Bernard O'Brien and Richard Mackey. The purpose of this study is to better understand how African-Americans keep their marriages together for at least twenty years.

The purpose of the interview session with Christine Hamel is to share my personal ideas, feelings, and life experiences concerning my marriage. I am aware that the interview is expected to last about two hours.

I understand that the interview will be tape recorded. I realize that I have the right to listen to the tape at my request and that I am free not to answer any questions I choose. I am also free to stop the interview at any point.

The information obtained from this tape will become part of the research material for this study. Christine Hamel guarantees that my identity will be kept confidential and will not be revealed in any reports generated by this study.

I recognize that these interviews are not designed or intended to be psychotherapy or treatment of any sort. I am aware that I may ask about any and all aspects of the study, and that further information on the project will be provided at my request.

I have read this consent form and agree to be a part of this research study.

Signed:_____ Date:_____

I, Christine Hamel, agree to respect the aforementioned conditions of this research project.

Signed:_____ Date:_____

Appendix B

Interview Guide

Introduction:

Thank you for being in the study. Brief explanation of the project. Read and sign consent form.

Explain structure of the interview:
1. Background information.
2. Your marriage as it was when you were first married and how it has stayed the same as well as how it has changed in terms of roles, expectations, and needs.
3. The issue of being African-American, and the influence of cultural, religious, and socioeconomic factors on your marriage.
4. A look at your own family background and values and how these influenced your marriage.
5. The influence of your parent's marriage on your own marriage in terms of roles, expectations, and relating.
6. Your assessment of the important factors in your marriage over time.

Background Data:

Name:_____Date of Birth:_____
Occupation:_____Income:_____
Educational Level:_____

Children:
Names   Birth Dates
_____
_____
_____
_____

Other People Living in the Home:
Names   Relationship
_____
_____

Geog. Origins:_____ Religion: _____
Date of Marriage:_____
Spouse's Name and Birthdate:_____

Interview

I. **The Relationship**

A.   Initial attraction, life circumstances, family reactions.

1. As you look back to the time when you met (spouse), what first attracted you to him/her? What do you think attracted him/her to you?
   a. What interests did you share?
   b. How long did you date before you decided to get married?
   c. Did any African-American traditions influence your dating?
   d. How were you sure you wanted to marry (spouse)?

2. How did your family feel about and react to (spouse)?
   a. Tell me about your family's reaction to your marriage (feelings of approval or disapproval).
   b. How did your family's reaction affect your decision to marry (spouse)?

3. How did (spouse's) family react to the marriage?
   a. How much of an impact did their reaction have on your plans to get married?

4. What was going on in your life around the time of your marriage educationally, vocationally, family, etc.?
   a. Who did you live with when first married?

5. What kind of role did you see yourself playing in the relationship?
   a. What about (spouse's) role? (Expected, actual, changes).
   b. Did you expect to have to work at the relationship? Why?

B. Roles, expectations, problem-solving. Issues of relatedness and equity in the

   beginning, during child-rearing, and post-childrearing.

1. Can you tell us how you and (spouse) got along?
   a. In general?
   b. What has been important to getting along? Sense of humor?
   c. How would you describe the communcation between you?

2. How did you go about making decisions and solving problems? (Re: work, friends, recreation, where to live, etc.)
    a. How did you handle differences (values, career, sex, etc.)?
    b. How would you describe your problem-solving style as compared to (spouse's)?
    c. Is there one particular area of conflict which stood out during each of the three phases of your marriage?
    d. Can you give me some examples of how you faced and dealt with crises (health, financial, etc.)?

3. How did you handle child-rearing responsibilities? (early, latency, adolescence)

4. How do you feel about your relationship?
    a. Looking back, what has been good, not so good and/or bad about the relationship?
    b. How much understanding do you feel (spouse) has had of you? (differentiation, separateness, etc.)
    c. How much understanding have you had of (spouse)?
    d. How sensitive has (spouse) been to you? And you to him/her?
    e. How much respect do you feel (spouse) has had for you? And you for him/her?
    f. How much trust have you felt for (spouse)?
    g. How much trust do you think (spouse) has felt towards you?
    h. How have you gotten along sexually? In terms of non-sexual intimacy like hugging and touching?

5. Overall, have you felt a sense of fairness in the marriage?
    a. Despite differences, have things balanced out?
    b. Do you feel that your ways of solving problems as a couple have been generally fair to each of you?
    c. Have there been situations where one of you had more influence than the other (money, friends, recreation, work, living, etc.)?

II. Socioeconomic Influences

How have the following played a role in your life together and how have they affected your marriage?

A. Religion

    1. How important has religion been in your life? What church activities do you participate in? How regularly?

    2. How have your religious beliefs affected the way you cope with racism and discrimination?

B. Extended families.

    1. What influence has your family and your spouse's family had on your marriage?

C. Cultural factors including ethnicity and race.

    1. Do you feel that being a black person in America has affected your marriage?

    2. How have you and (spouse) coped with discrimination and racism?

D. Economic factors, including income.

    1. Do you feel that you or (spouse) have ever been discriminated against in the workforce because of your race?

      a. How did you and (spouse) handle situation?

      b. Did it affect your relationship in any way?

    2. Do you feel that being a black person has ever made it hard to provide financially for your family?

      a. If yes, how did this affected your relationship with (spouse)?

E. Are there other values, beliefs, or moral standards, that have played a role in your life together (Is there a motto that fits for you?)

    1. Are there any African-American traditions or values that are part of your married/family life?

III. Parents' Marriage

A. What were your family's attitudes toward/experience with divorce?

B. What do you think you learned about marriage from observing your parents?

> 1. How did you view your parents' relationship in terms of roles, relatedness, and equity?
>
> 2. Can you tell me how your parents got along?
>
> 3. How did they go about making decisions and solving problems? (Ask for some examples of how a disagreement was solved.)
>   a. Despite differences did things balance out in their marriage?
>   b. Did you feel that their ways of solving problems were generally fair to each partner? Were there situations where one of them had more influence than the other (money, friends, work, etc.)?

C. What are some important similarities in your marriage compared to your parents' marriage?

> 1. What are some important differences?
>
> 2. Did your parents have any African-American traditions that were a part of their marriage?
>   a. If yes, do you follow these traditions in your own marriage?

IV. Participants' Views of the Marriage Over Time and Wrap-Up

A. As you look back, what were the personal qualities of (spouse) that kept you together?

    1. What other factors in the relationship kept you together?

    2. Were there any African-American traditions that helped you to stay together?

B. In what ways has your marriage changed over the years? How has it remained the same?

    1. How have your expectations changed or remained the same?
       a. How does what you are currently looking for in the relationship differ from your earlier expectations? (needs, roles, relatedness, communication)

C. What words best describe what (spouse) means to you now? In the past?

D. Are there any other things that you wish to add that were critical issues or factors that kept you in the relationship? Significant events, periods of assessment and/or renewal?

E. Is there anything else that you think would be important for us to understand about your marriage, yourself, or your spouse?

    1. Anything else about your experience as an African-American that would be important for us to know about?

Thank you!

Appendix C

Scoring Sheet

_____ _____ _____
code #   name   spouse's name

_____ _____ _____ _____
interview date   income   occupation   interviewer

_____ _____ _____
education   age   # of years married

_____

1. Subject's initial attraction to spouse   (0) negative (1) ambivalent (2) positive _____
2. Subject's family support for spouse choice   (1) disapproval (2) approval (3) mixed _____
3. Subject's circumstances at time of marriage   (0) no conflict (1) conflictual _____
4. Role expectations of self in marriage   (1) traditional (2) non-traditional _____
5. S's expectation of need for effort to sustain marriage   (0) no expectations (1) no (2) yes ____
6. Subject's perception of the sexual relationship   (0) negative (1) mixed (2) positive
                                                  (A) first phase   _____
                                                  (B) second phase   _____
                                                  (C) third phase   _____
7. S's perception of the importance of the sexual relationship
                        (0) not important (1) important (2) very important
                                                  (A) first phase   ____
                                                  (B) second phase ____
                                                  (C) third phase   ____
8. S's perception of the presence of intimacy in the marriage (0) no (1) mixed (2) yes
                                                  (A) psychosocial intimacy
                                                  (1) first phase   ____
                                                  (2) second phase ____
                                                  (3) third phase   ____
                                             (B) non-sexual physical touching
                                                  (1) first phase   ____
                                                  (2) second phase ____
                                                  (3) third phase   ____
9. S's personal style of decision making (0) logical (1) impulsive (2) intuitive
                                                  (1) first phase   ____
                                                  (2) second phase ____
                                                  (3) third phase   ____
10. External decision making style of the marriage couple (0) separate (1) variable (2) mutual
     (e. g. friends, recreation, vacations, purchases)   (A) first phase   ____
                                                  (B) second phase ____
                                                  (C) third phase   ____

11. Style of handling interpersonal diffrences in marriage (1) avoid (2) confront

(A) Subject's style

(1) first phase _____
(2) second phase _____
(3) third phase _____

(B) S's perception of spouse's style

(1) first phase _____
(2) second phase _____
(3) third phase _____

12. S's reported level of marital conflict (0) minimal (1) major

(A) first phase _____
(B) second phase _____
(C) third phase _____

13. S's perception of the responsibilities for child rearing   (0) individual (1) mutual

(A) children's infancy _____
(B) latency period _____
(C) adolescence _____

14. S's perception of relationship variables: Spouse to Subject (0) no (1) mixed (2) yes

(A) sensitivity

(1) first phase _____ (2) second phase _____ (3) third phase _____

(B) understanding

(1) first phase _____ (2) second phase _____ (3) third phase _____

(C) respect

(1) first phase _____ (2) second phase _____ (3) third phase _____

(D) trust

(1) first phase _____ (2) second phase _____ (3) third phase _____

15. S's perception of relationship variables: Subject to Spouse (0) no (1) mixed (2) yes

(A) sensitivity

(1) first phase _____ (2) second phase _____ (3) third phase _____

(B) understanding

(1) first phase _____ (2) second phase _____ (3) third phase _____

(C) respect

(1) first phase _____ (2) second phase _____ (3) third phase _____

(D) trust

(1) first phase _____ (2) second phase _____ (3) third phase _____

16. S's perception of fairness/equity in the marital relationship (0) no (1) mixed (2) yes

(A) first phase _____
(B) second phase _____
(C) third phase _____

17. S's perception of communication within the marital relationship (0) no (1) mixed (2) yes

(A) first phase _____
(B) second phase _____
(C) third phase _____

18. Subject's overall sense of relatedness   (0) negative (1) mixed (2) positive

(A) first phase _____
(B) second phase _____
(C) third phase _____

19. S's perception of other influences on the marriage
    (0) negative (1) no influence (2) positive influence (3) mixed
      (A) finances
(1) first phase _____ (2) second phase _____ (3) third phase _____
      (B) religion
(1) first phase _____ (2) second phase _____ (3) third phase _____
      (C) subject's extended family
(1) first phase _____ (2) second phase _____ (3) third phase _____
      (D) spouse's extended family
(1) first phase _____ (2) second phase _____ (3) third phase _____
      (E) culture/ethnicity
(1) first phase _____ (2) second phase _____ (3) third phase _____
      (F) other values (list in comments)
(1) first phase _____ (2) second phase _____ (3) third phase _____

20. S's perception of similarity of own marriage with parents' marriage
          (0) discontinuity (1) mixed (2) continuity
      (A) first phase   _____
      (B) second phase _____
      (C) third phase   _____
21. S's perception of own marital behavior (0) instrumental (1) mixed (2) expressive
      (A) first phase   _____
      (B) second phase _____
      (C) third phase   _____
22. S's parents' attitudes toward divorce (1) disapprove of divorce (2) accepting of divorce _____
23. S's perception of interpersonal fit with spouse (1) mixed (2) complementarity (3) symmetry
      (A) first phase   _____
      (B) second phase _____
      (C) third phase   _____
24. S's overall sense of the marriage as satisfying? (0) no (1) mixed (2) yes
      (A) first phase   _____
      (B) second phase _____
      (C) third phase   _____
25. S's perception of role of African-American traditions in relationship (1) no (2) yes
      (A) first phase   _____
      (B) second phase _____
      (C) third phase   _____
26. Early living arrangement   (1) with family (2) alone   _____
27. Impact of early living arrangement   (0) no (1) negative (2) positive (3) mixed ____
28. S's perception of religion's role in coping with racism and discrimination
              (0) no (1) negative (2) positive _____
29. S's perceived style of coping with racism/discrimination (0) mixed (1) avoid (2) confront
      (A) first phase   _____
      (B) second phase _____
      (C) third phase   _____
30. S's perception of discrimination in workforce   (1) no (2) yes _____
31. Couple's style of handling racism/discrim.   1) avoid (2) confront/discuss _____
32. Effect of racism/discrimination on marriage (0) no (1) negative (2) positive _____

33. S's perception of African-American traditions followed in parents marriage   (1) no (2) yes
   (A) first phase _____
   (B) second phase _____
   (C) third phase _____

34. S's perception of role of African-American traditions in marital stability
   (0) no (1) negative (2) positive _____

35. Impact of S's family's reaction on decision to marry   (0) no (1) negative (2) positive _____

36. S's perception of race affecting economic factors   (1) no (2) yes _____