

ABSTRACT

Practices, Availability and Marriage:
A Critical Look at the Relationship between Courtship Practices, Mate Availability and
Marriage Among African American Women

by

Romaine A. Wright, BA

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents research on courtship practices and examines mate availability, both in relation to low marriage rates among African American (AA) women. Previous research indicates that courtship practices greatly influence the outcomes of relationships and that the presence or absence of certain courtship practices are predictors of marital outcomes. However, there remains a gap in the current literature in which traditional research on courtship and marriage outcomes fails to account for the influence of sociocultural factors. Therefore, the purpose of the proposed study is to use the conceptual model and social psychology methodology to yield data that addresses the influence of race and ethnicity on courtship and marriage outcome. Marriage statistics help to evaluate mate availability within the AA community to determine if a decrease in available mates has contributed low marriage rates among AA women. A sample of AA women, both married and non-married, will be drawn from the general population through advertisements and flyers around the community (college campuses, hospitals/clinics, social service agencies, etc.). Participants will complete four self-report measures to collect data over a one-year time period and aggregate scores will be analyzed via regression analyses and a modified replication of a previous study that assessed mate selection preferences and social exchange theory. This cross-sectional, quantitative, survey method study and conclusions drawn would help to predict social implications of increasing single-parent AA homes and AA children born out-of-wedlock on the overall AA community; this research may elicit plans for social change within the AA community in regards to views on marriage.

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DEDICATION

Single women, marriage does not guarantee happiness and being single does not guarantee pain. For those of you with dreams of taking vows know that it should not come as a sacrifice for other parts of your life; you should not lose yourself for the sake of making a commitment but you must compromise and show some vulnerability to make it work. Writing this thesis has confirmed for me the fact that times have changed and expectations for marriage in the United States have changed. Society has loosened standards for what constitutes a relationship and acceptable dating practices for both men and women.

I did not need to do research to find that African American women have the lowest rate of marriage; my mission was to find evidence of the cause. I have not found that evidence but I have had a revelation. African American women always want to stand strong and show that we can survive on our own; we do not need a man to provide for us, we work for ourselves. What we fail to recognize is that in the same moment our *would-be husbands* make that very same statement; they do not need a women to cook and clean for them, they can do it themselves. What is the difference? Many of us still want the commitment; most of them just do not see the need.

If you want to get married find a happy medium between your independence and your relationship; if you are happy being single find peace in yourself and joy in your heart. I wish you luck either way as my destiny is fulfilled. Thank you for your attention.

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Chapter 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

One can consider courtship as the road along which two partners develop an understanding of each other, select each other as mates and end the journey by joining in holy matrimony; however, it seems that today many women, more specifically African American women, never make it to the end of that road where courtship ends and continues into marriage (Manning & Smock, 2002; U.S. Department of Commerce, 1990; U.S. Department of Commerce, 1993). This thesis reviews previous research and identifies a gap within that research; that gap is the basis of the study I have proposed in the following pages. Using statistics from census reports, peer-reviewed journal articles, news articles, interviews and roundtable discussions, and books, I was able to gather information needed for my research.

A 2005 U. S. Census Report indicates that 66.5% of African American women between ages 25-29 and 29.5% of ages 40-44 have never been married. This stands in sharp contrast to the reported 41.5% and 12.2%, respectively, of all American women (U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Education & Social Stratification Branch, 2006). These figures indicate that as all women age the rate of marriage increases but that for all age ranges there are fewer married African American women than married American women overall with the largest difference, 25.2% of women never married, at the interval between ages 30-34. With these statistics identified it is necessary to determine possible causes of this trend through research.

Decades of courtship research has shown that practices during the *dating period* greatly influence the outcome of the relationship; some of these practices include premarital cohabitation and premarital pregnancy and birth. Unfortunately, the studies on marriage outcomes, and therefore, their results, have been very limited (Niehuis, Huston, & Rosenband, 2006). Three main types of research have been identified in regards to this topic: demographic, behavioral, and mate-selection. Demographic, behavioral, and mate-selection research have assessed courtship affects on marriage outcomes based on the presence of, or absence of, a specific event during courtship without identifying the roles of outside influences such as social and cultural norms (Niehuis, Huston, & Rosenband, 2006). This limitation to the research is significant and makes it difficult to draw conclusions related to sociocultural variables and their possible affects on courtship and marriage outcomes. As such, it is necessary to investigate to determine if a relationship exists between these variables and courtship and marriage outcomes.

To better assess marital outcomes, or influences on marital outcomes, it is necessary to evaluate several factors beyond just courtship practices; one must also examine areas such as mate availability, personality, and the influence of social networks and cultural norms; all of these factors are addressed in using Niehuis, Huston and Rosenband's conceptual model (2006) which is the framework for my proposed study.

Organization of Chapter

This chapter begins with a description of the strategy used to search literature for information about the topic of interest. Next, specific terms used throughout the literature review are defined in relation to the topic of interest. The chapter continues by

presenting information gathered from previous literature on courtship practices, mate availability and contributing factors. The chapter also includes discussion of the conceptual designed by Neihuis, Huston and Rosenband (2006), compares it to past research on marriage and courtship practices and presents current perspectives on the model. The chapter concludes by presenting the foundation of the proposed study: the purpose, statement of the problem, hypotheses to be tested and the significance of the study being presented.

Literature Search Strategies

The strategy used to find related literature began by searching the Walden University library to access EbscoHOST. The following databases in EbscoHOST were specifically targeted: PsycARTICLES and PsycINFO. Additional, peer-reviewed articles were gathered from Sage Publications Online which provides access to a wide range of scholarly journals. All statistics presented were gathered via reports from the US Census Bureau and associated organizations. Initial key terms, associated with marriage and level of education, used to search for references included: African American marriage, marriage statistics, and marriage and education. After the topic was modified to address courtship practices and other factors influencing marital outcomes key words searched included: courtship practices, marriage theories, and social exchange theory. Finally, to add the factor of mate availability statistics on incarceration and interracial marriage were gathered and incorporated into the literature review.

Definition of Terms

Courtship practices: events and/or activities occurring between the time people meet and marry (Neihuis, Huston & Rosenband, 2006) such as premarital cohabitation and premarital pregnancy and birth

Premarital cohabitation: when a couple shares the same residence, or *lives together*, prior to becoming legally married; “a step leading to marriage, playing much the same role as engagement” (Manning & Smock, 2002).

Premarital pregnancy and birth: pregnancy and birth occurring outside or marriage (Neihuis, Huston & Rosenband, 2006).

Social exchange theory: theory based on the idea that all human behavior and social interaction is an exchange of costs and rewards where what is given is more valuable to the receiver than costly to the giver and vice versa (Zafirvoski, 2005).

Neihuis, Huston and Rosenband’s conceptual model: a model developed to assess the link between courtship and marriage (i.e. the influence of courtship on marriage outcomes) including the influences of several different factors. Some of these factors are individual character traits brought into relationships that remain stable throughout courtship and into marriage, partner compatibility, and the influences of cultural and social networks (Neihuis, Huston & Rosenband, 2006).

Courtship Practices

Traditional research methods try to predict possible outcomes of the relationship by measuring the presence or absence of certain courtship practices. In my research I have found that premarital cohabitation and premarital pregnancy and birth are courtship practices that have the most significant influence on relationship outcomes.

Premarital Cohabitation

Studies have shown that while some couples who live together while courting eventually get married, the number of cohabitations that result in marriage is decreasing dramatically (Manning & Smock, 2002). A possible cause for this happening is changes in couple's expectations that cohabitation will result in marriage. Research on this area has focused on economic factors, race/ethnicity, gender roles, pregnancy and childbearing, and relationship quality. In a study by Manning and Smock (2002), the effects of race/ethnicity show that cohabitating African American women have significantly lower odds of expecting to marry than cohabitating White women and similar odds of expecting to marry as cohabitating Hispanic women; employment was also a factor where cohabitating women employed part-time have significantly higher expectations for marrying their partner than cohabitating women that have full-time employment or are unemployed (Manning & Smock, 2002). This study presents evidence that the influence of factors on marriage outcomes, such as premarital cohabitation and income, differ across race lines. While this study measures the influence of race and income, it fails to account for the influence of other sociocultural factors that greatly affect marriage outcomes.

Despite much research, evidence of the negative effects of premarital cohabitation remains inconclusive (Niehuis, Huston, & Rosenband, 2006). Several studies report strong negative effects of premarital cohabitation on the overall outcome of relationships, however, it has been found that several confounding variables also influence the effects of premarital cohabitation on marriage outcomes making it difficult to draw concrete conclusions (Niehuis, Huston, & Rosenband, 2006).

Premarital Pregnancy and Birth

Like premarital cohabitation, premarital pregnancy and birth have also been found to affect marital outcome; because of growing commonality both practices have been associated with the decrease in marriage rates and marital stability reporting that they, premarital pregnancy and birth especially, represent a “deviation from expected sequencing of life-cycle events in the United States” (Niehuis, Huston, & Rosenband, 2006). Also like premarital cohabitation, the effects of premarital pregnancy and birth on marriage outcomes are influenced by confounding variables. Age has been found to be a confounding variable that influences the effects of premarital pregnancy and birth where the severity of the effects decreases as women’s age at the time of marriage increases. Culture also appears to be a confounding variable influencing the effects of premarital pregnancy and birth where the severity of the effects is greater for Caucasian women when compared to African American women (Niehuis, Huston, & Rosenband, 2006).

Race/ethnicity has been found to be a significant confounding variable on the effects of premarital pregnancy and birth on marriage outcomes with African American women being “less effected” than Caucasian women so it is important to look at the “norms” of the African American community regarding premarital pregnancy and birth. Most of the research on norms in African American marriage depicts the African American woman as resistant or even avoidant of marriage as a result of being stripped of *the male* during slavery. Literature such as *The Negro in the United States (1949)* by sociologist E. Franklin Frazier and *The Negro Family: A Case for National Action (1965)*, otherwise known as the Moynihan Report, by Daniel Patrick Moynihan made claims that African American women have children and either do not get married or do

not stay married as a demonstration of “freedom” from subordination making premarital pregnancy and birth a “norm” in the African American community. The problem with reports such as those by Frazier and Moynihan is that none directly assess African American women and only focus on the lower class of the African American community (Browning & Miller, 1999).

To counter this problem Browning and Miller (1999) evaluated African American women on marriage, the messages about marriage they were taught as children and the messages about marriage that they are teaching their own children. The study found that the African American women who were already married had more conservative views of marriage (i.e., marriage is forever and the man should be the head of the family) when compared to non-married African American women; consistent with this the married women also gave more conservative messages about marriage to their children. Interestingly, the study also found that both married and non-married African American women passed on more traditional views of marriage to their sons than their daughters and views of women on welfare were less conservative than women that were employed. Overall, the study found that marriage messages from African American women in the sample depended greatly on the social circumstances of the women and were not culturally-based but structurally-based (1999).

Consistent with the findings of Browning and Miller (1999), a study on transmission of culture (Harris, 1995) found that most socialization of children occurs in peer groups outside of the home where behavior and norms are established by a larger social group instead of the parents and that socialization is based greatly on one’s personal experiences in society also indicating that a norm does not exist. Interestingly

Harris also reported that divorce may be hereditary where personality characteristics that increase the likelihood that one will divorce (i.e. impulsivity, disagreeableness, and tendency for alcoholism) have heritable components (1995). Though the focus of Harris' research was personality development the same information can be applied to assessment of courtship practices where specific personality traits influence marriage outcomes. As such, like premarital cohabitation, there has been inconsistency in conclusions drawn regarding the influence of premarital pregnancy and birth on marriage outcomes across racial/ethnic lines.

Mate Availability

While courtship practices such as premarital cohabitation and premarital pregnancy and birth have a significant influence on courtship and marital outcomes for the general population a factor that is widely overlooked is mate availability, especially within the African American community.

Statistics presented by the Bureau of Justice (2007) for Midyear 2006 indicate that on June 30, 2006 an estimated 4.8% of African American men were in prison or jail compared to 1.9% of Hispanic men and 0.7% of Caucasian men. Statistics also show that African American men comprised 41% of over 2 million men in custody and that African American men age 20 to 29 comprised 15.5% of all men in custody (Sabol & Harrison, 2007). Statistics also show that by December 2006 there was a ratio 3,042:100,000 of African American male prisoners to all African American males compared to ratios 1,261:100,000 for Hispanic males and 487:100,000 for Caucasian males (Bureau of Justice, 2006).

Given these statistics, it is obvious that incarceration is by far one of the greatest factors limiting the availability of African American men and there are other contributions to this issue including perspectives on marriage and interracial marriage. It is easy to look at rates of interracial marriage to determine if they have increased and by how much, however, there are several different approaches one can take for examining perspectives on marriage; I have chosen to look at the social exchange theory and its soundness among African American women.

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory is an *economically based* model which asserts that, much like a business transaction, people seek to find the *best value* when choosing a mate; with this theory each individual carries a *market value* and seeks a mate with similar value to make an appropriate match (Kendrick, Groth, Trost, & Sadalla, 1993). Research using this theory identifies gender differences within the model where the traits that attribute to a mate's value vary between men and women in accordance to societal norms. It has been found that under this theory American women measure mate value based on characteristics that denote economic success and status where American men measure mate value based on characteristics that denote beauty and attractiveness; these preferences could be reversed in a society where women are seen as more dominate and men are more submissive (Kendrick, Groth, Trost, & Sadalla, 1993). To measure perspectives on social exchange theory Kendrick, Groth, Trost and Sadalla (1993) had participants complete surveys rating mate preference characteristics and the same surveys to rate themselves (self-appraisal). Analysis of survey answers indicated the level of congruence with social exchange theory for the sample; a modification of this study will

be used to measure level of congruence with social exchange theory for the proposed study where the sample will include women only and will only sample the African American population.

In order for social exchange theory to be accurate within the context of the topic of interest one must examine the financial status of African American men. Anecdotal evidence reveals that many attribute low marriage rates in African American women to the lack of significant status for African American men. If we apply social exchange theory to this notion we could infer that African American women would have low marriage rates because they are unable to find mates of *best value*. However, there is no evidence to support this and statistics are the only source to inform this idea.

A 2006 U.S. Census report was examined to confirm information regarding the financial status of African American men; the report presents evidence that African American men and women have similar value in regards to income and attainment of education. The report yielded almost identical percentages of employment, 82% of African American men employed versus 83% of African American women employed, and greater income for African American men than African American women with 5.7% of African American men with income \$25,000 - \$27,499 compared to 4.13% of African American women with the same income (income between \$25,000 - \$27,499 was the highest income presented on the report). When compared African American men and women also had similar percentages for attainment of high school diplomas (29.2% of men to 27.4% of women), associate degrees (6.1% of men to 7.4% of women), bachelor's degrees or beyond (13.7% of men to 15.0% of women) and homeownership (56.9% of men to 52.7% of women); this indicates that the value of African American men to

African American women is parallel and, if social exchange theory holds true, marriage rates among the two populations should be comparable which is in sharp contrast to actual marriage statistics. Much like the other research methods discussed, I find that social exchange theory fails to account for other contributing factors such as interracial marriage and, as stated earlier, the availability of African American men is limited by incarceration. Additionally, it mistakenly assumes that all African Americans are heterosexual, and gives no explanation for how these dynamics work for same-sex orientation.

Interracial Marriage

Interracial marriage is yet another factor that is overlooked by the general population when considering the availability of African American mates for marriage. Marriages of African American men to Caucasian women have become one of the most prominent forms of interracial marriage in the United States (Gullickson, 2006). In his examination of the history of interracial sex and marriage Gullickson (2006) found that there have been inconsistent patterns of interracial marriage over time with increases during the periods of 1900 to 1910 and 1960 and beyond, attributed to the Reconstruction and the Civil Rights Movement respectively; a decrease was found during the period between 1880 to 1930 (overlapping with an increase) and interracial marriage rates leveled off during the period between 1910 to 1930 which is attributed to the deterioration of Jim Crow laws (p. 309).

Gullickson (2006) examined interracial marriage under two theories: status exchange theory which asserts that high-status African Americans will exchange their status for the racial status of a Caucasian spouse while Caucasians will exchange their

racial status for the high status of an African American spouse; structural assimilation theory which states that education increases all groups' willingness to marry across racial lines which is believed to promote "universalism" (p. 293). These theories are evaluated by use of the outmarriage and odds ratios to measure statistics gathered from Census reports; results indicate that interracial marriage today is "disproportionately likely among black men and white women" (p. 299) when compared to marriages between Caucasian men and African American women (Gullickson, 2006).

A U.S. Census report released in June on 1998 provided additional information on this matter. The report listed rates of interracial marriage from 1960-1992 and statistics from the report indicate that rates of interracial marriages between African Americans and Caucasians has averaged approximately 20% of all interracial marriages in America with the greatest percentages of 32.7% reported in 1960 (consistent with Gullickson's findings). The rate of interracial marriage between African American men and Caucasian women was consistently 2-3 times greater than the rate of interracial marriage between Caucasian men and African American women for all years reported except 1960 for which the rates were almost identical (49.6 and 50.4 respectively). As such, it is evident that interracial marriage is a possible factor affecting marriage rates for African American women, in regards to mate availability; where fewer African American men are available for marriage to African American women.

Niehuis, Huston and Rosenband's Conceptual Model

It has been shown that traditional research fails to consider sociocultural factors influencing marital outcomes. Use of the conceptual model developed by Niehuis,

Huston and Rosenband (2006) will provide a more thorough assessment of additional factors affecting relationships such as perspectives on marriage and interracial marriage.

Past Research

Past research on courtship practices have taken a variety of approaches including demographic research, behavioral research and mate-selection research however, many studies seem to lack recognition of the connection between social and cultural influences and marital outcomes (Niehuis, Huston, & Rosenband, 2006).

Demographic research assesses the rate at which events such as premarital cohabitation and premarital pregnancy and birth occur. Such studies have found dramatic increases in these events since the 1970s and associate these increases with the increase in divorces rates and the decrease in marriage rates over the same time period without considering the numerous social factors influencing courtship practices. Within demographic research, the life-course theory was developed presenting a sequence of “normal” transitions throughout life in the following sequence: from courtship to marriage to parenthood and childrearing to empty nest and retirement (Niehuis, Huston, & Rosenband, 2006). Given this theory, deviation of any kind from the sequence results in “disadvantageous” marital outcomes.

Behavioral research encompasses both traditional behavioral and social learning theory by focusing on behavior and communication skills (Niehuis, Huston, and Rosenband, 2006). In the matter of relationships behavioral research finds that negative interaction between couples during conflict is the origin of relationship distress while relationship satisfaction is the result of positive behavior and exchanges between partners (Niehuis, Huston, & Rosenband, 2006); thus behavioral research is very useful for

studying communication and conflict resolution for both married and non-married couples but, like demographic research, it still fails to accommodate sociocultural factors influencing relationships, either negatively or positively. Many marital intervention programs use behavioral methods to improve communication for couples; however, these improvements have shown only to last for a few years after the intervention.

An example of behavioral research is a study by Knobloch and Carpenter-Theune (2004) which looked at interpersonal communication in regards to topic avoidance (purposefully evading communication with a partner about an issue). The study proposes a transition between casual relationships into more intimate courting and eventually marriage; according to Knobloch and Carpenter-Theune, during early stages of this transition, topic avoidance is low and as a couple becomes more intimate there is a great need to avoid volatile topics which may create or add to relationship turbulence. The study found that intimacy was negatively associated with the number of topics being avoided by participants, participants' rating of self threat, participants' ratings of relationship importance, and participants' ratings of relationship benefits. Thus, it was shown that topic avoidance, which can be seen as a function of a lack of communication, has negative effects on the stability of a relationship. Like with other behavioral research, this study failed to address possible origins of avoiding topics limiting conclusions drawn to statements regarding the connection between communication and romantic relationships; no sociocultural variables were considered.

In contrast to demographic and behavioral research, mate selection research assesses how partners court and commit to each other over time viewing courtship as a process that evolves and varies from couple to couple by outside factors that influence

them; however, few mate selection studies consider social networks, interpersonal processes, and cultural contexts to be important variables in the development of romantic relationships (Niehuis, Huston & Rosenband, 2006).

One study that does account for sociocultural factors was conducted by Schoen and Cheng (2006) where race/ethnicity and level of education were associated with partner choice/mate selection and the shift in patterns of partner choice in the United States. The study found that overall marriage is least prevalent in the African American community and among those Americans with less than 12 years of education. Schoen and Cheng also found a shift in partner choice where marriage is becoming a “union of equals”; in all communities, though more prevalent in the Caucasian community, people of higher education are choosing partners with equal educational levels; Schoen and Cheng believe this to be associated with increased interracial marriage in the United States. When both race and education are considered, the proportions of ever getting married is magnified where only 38%-65% of African Americans with less than 12 years of education will get married comparable to 89%-96% of Caucasians with 16 or more years of education. This study is an example of mate selection research that incorporates some sociocultural factors; however, the variables assessed in this study were “surface” variables and still failed to give a holistic view of predictors of marriage outcomes.

Current Perspectives on the Model

In response to past research and to embrace “how the total character of courtship affects marriage,” (2006, p. 24) Niehuis, Huston, and Rosenband (2006) presented a Niehuis, Huston and Rosenband’s conceptual model (2006) of the link between courtship and marriage (i.e., the influence of courtship on marriage outcomes) that includes several

different factors that impact courtship and marriage outcomes. Some of these factors are individual character traits brought into relationships that remain stable throughout courtship and into marriage, partner compatibility, and the influences of cultural and social networks. This model is the framework for my study where participants' individual attributes are measured and compared across marital status and in regards to level of education and socioeconomic status.

In contrast to demographic research, which looks at the presence or absence of specific events during courtship (e.g., cohabitation or pregnancy and birth), and behavioral research, which looks at communication during courtship to predict marital outcomes, the Niehuis, Huston and Rosenband's conceptual model (2006) classifies courtship processes into three categories: a) those that define the progression of commitment (demographic); b) those that describe the quality of interaction such as communication skills and conflict resolution (behavioral); and c) those that reflect individuals cognitions and evaluations about their partner and their relationship (mate selection). All of these components help to predict marital outcomes in addition to the influences of social networks (e.g., approval of parents and friends) and cultural contexts (eg. race/ethnicity and education) which are also part of the framework for the Niehuis, Huston and Rosenband's conceptual model (2006) in predicting marriage outcomes.

In addition to providing a holistic approach to predicting marriage outcomes, Niehuis, Huston and Rosenband's conceptual model (2006) was developed to overcome six specific limitations to previous prediction studies: a) many studies are based on data collected from only one partner; b) premarital data is only collected at one point in time; c) based on data that was either not designed to assess marital success or failure

(demographic) or data only gathered from small, homogenous samples thus lacking statistical power needed to carry out multivariate analyses; d) like premarital data, postmarital data only collected at one point in time; e) gathered data more than once, either premarital or postmarital, but failed to analyze data in terms of changes over time; and f) rarely assessed other indicators of marital quality aside from happiness, satisfaction, and adjustment as outcome measures, such as affection, love, trust and respect. Niehuis, Huston and Rosenband's conceptual model attempts to overcome these limitations by taking a more detailed approach to data collection with methods such as daily diaries and narrative data.

Summary

To bridge the gap left by traditional research methods used to assess the effects of courtship practices on relationship outcomes I propose use of Niehuis, Huston and Rosenband's conceptual model (2006) as the framework for my study. This approach allows for a deeper analysis of influences on courtship and marriage outcomes by including sociocultural factors as influences such as marriage perspectives and interracial marriage as functions of mate availability.

Courtship Practices, Mate Availability and the Conceptual Model

While these have been countless studies done attempting to predict marital outcomes the approaches taken in the research have limited the findings by failing to holistically assess the courtship process. It is arguable that the influences of sociocultural factors are greater predictors of marriage outcomes than courtship practices such as premarital cohabitation and premarital pregnancy and birth. While traditional research (i.e. demographic, behavioral, and mate selection) has provided evidence for a variety of

predictors of marriage outcomes they fail to recognize contextual variables present in the courtship process.

Niehuis, Huston and Rosenband's conceptual model is an attempt to take a holistic approach to predicting marriage outcomes where contextual variables are considered in addition to those variables assessed in traditional research. Niehuis, Huston, and Rosenband (2006) assert that the conceptual model focuses on relatively stable characteristics that partners bring to their premarital relationship, partners' compatibility in these characteristics, and the courtship process as they are all causally related to and influenced by sociocultural factors influencing the relationship. They emphasize that previous research has only looked at part of the whole picture and that this model encourages researchers to "link constructs across individual, couple, social-network, and cultural levels, because each level is thought of as providing the context for the others" (2006, p. 42).

Purpose of the Present Study

Comparisons of marriage rates within the African American community over time show large decreases in marriage rates with a 27% increase between 1980 and 1990 in the number of African American adults that have never been married (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1993). This is consistent with overall marriage rates in America which indicate that fewer Americans between ages 20 and 34 are married when compared to past decades (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1990); however, African Americans continue to have the lowest rate of marriage, more specifically, African American women.

With this information it becomes necessary to take a conceptual approach to evaluating courtship practices that affect the outcome of the relationship (i.e. whether or not the couple marries and the possible outcome of the marriage).

Over the past few decades while the number of married African American women has been decreasing, the level of education attained by African American women has been increasing. U.S. Census reports from 1980 and 2005 show a 10% increase in the number of African American women ages 30-34 that have completed 4 years of college and a 1% increase for completing 5 or more years of college for the same age group (U.S. Census 1980, U.S. Census, 2005). Comparison of these reports demonstrates a trend of higher education for African American women over the past 25 years.

Given the statistics presented in the U.S. Census reports discussed it appears that there are less African American women married when compared to both previous African American generations (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1993) and to all American women (US Census Bureau, 2005); it also seems that the level of educational attainment for African American women has increased over the past 25 years (U.S. Census 1980, U.S. Census, 2005).

Using the conceptual approach it becomes possible to evaluate the affects of sociocultural influences on marriage rates among African American women where previous research has fallen short.

Statement of the Problem

Past research on courtship practices and marital outcomes is limited in that it fails to account for sociocultural factors influencing relationships and data is only collected at one time interval. To bridge the gap in research, I have chosen to take Niehuis, Huston

and Rosenband's conceptual approach by assessing character traits associated with courtship and marriage, courship practices, and sociocultural factors across both married and non-married African American women. After the data are collected at three different time intervals and compared across marital status sociocultral influences can be evaluated and it can also be determined if level of education has a significant affect on marriage for this population.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

Null Hypothesis (H_0): The rate of premarital cohabitation reported by non-married females will not differ from the rate reported by married females, as measured by the Confidential Biographical Questionnaire (Buss and Barnes, 1986).

Alternate Hypothesis (H_1): The rate of premarital cohabitation reported by non-married females will be greater than the rate reported by married females as measured by the Confidential Biographical Questionnaire (Buss and Barnes, 1986).

Hypothesis Two

Null Hypothesis (H_0): The rate of premarital pregnancy and birth reported by non-married females will not differ from the rate reported by married females, as measured by the Confidential Biographical Questionnaire (Buss and Barnes, 1986).

Alternate Hypothesis (H_1): The rate of premarital pregnancy and birth reported by non-married females will be greater than the rate reported by married females, as measured by the Confidential Biographical Questionnaire (Buss and Barnes, 1986).

Hypothesis Three

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There will be no statistically significant difference between perspectives on Social exchange theory for non-married women than for married women, as measured by a modified replication of Study 1 by Kendrick, Groth, Trost and Sadalla (1993).

Alternate Hypothesis (H_1): There will be a statistically significant difference between perspectives on Social exchange theory for non-married women than for married women where non-married women will present greater correlations between mate selection criteria and self-appraisal indicating positive views on the theory, as measured by a modified replication of Study 1 by Kendrick, Groth, Trost and Sadalla (1993).

Hypothesis Four

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There will be no statistically significant relationship between marital preferences, as measured by the Marital Preferences Questionnaire (Gough, 1973), and current marital status, as measured by the Confidential Biographical Questionnaire (Buss and Barnes, 1986).

Alternate Hypothesis (H_1): There will be a significant relationship between marital preferences, as measured by the Marital Preferences Questionnaire (Gough, 1973), and current marital status, as measured by the Confidential Biographical Questionnaire (Buss and Barnes, 1986).

Significance of the Study

Comparisons of the data collected from the Confidential Biographical Questionnaire and the self report measures of married women to non-married women will allow researchers to consider possible reasons why large numbers of educated African American women today are not getting married. This information may be very beneficial

for premarital counseling for single African American women considering marriage and for marital counseling for married African American women. Psychologists will also be able to use the information gathered for future studies on marriage outcomes by sampling the general population. Participants in the study will complete the biographical questionnaire and self report measures three times: Time I, Time II (6 months later) and Time III (1 year later) to minimize the effects of self report. Researchers will then be able to evaluate the impact of these findings on the African American family as a whole and their implications for future African American generations. Potential implications include continuous increases in single-parent African American homes and African American children born out-of-wedlock; similar implications are also possible in the larger population. Future studies might be able to address African American males and/or the general population (including all races and cultures) to determine if the results are consistent across genders and cultures. The remaining chapters describe the proposed design and a summary of entire project.

Chapter 2

PROPOSED DESIGN

Introduction

This chapter will detail the methodology of the proposed study. In addition to presenting the procedures to be used in the study information will be presented on the measures to be used, how the hypotheses will be analyzed, and limitations and assumptions present in the study. Because there is very little research attempting to evaluate the influences of sociocultural factors on marriages rate among African American women this study examines courtship practices and mate availability as well as personality traits and mate selection in relation to the social exchange theory. Although the population of interest for this study is African American women the study could easily be replicated to include other racial/ethnic backgrounds as well as men.

Methodology

The conceptual framework from which this study is designed “presents a heuristic, multifaceted, developmental model of the link between courtship and the first marriage, viewing both periods as part of a larger ecological system. The model is intended to guide research and lead to a greater understanding of how the total character of a courtship affects a marriage (Niehuis, Huston, & Rosenband, 2006). Within this framework is the methodology of social psychology; it is this methodology that makes the conceptual method differ from traditional methods of research. The Social Psychology School of Thought merges sociology and psychology in the belief that social structure, norms and interaction help to shape one’s mental processes. Application of this belief to courtship and marriage allows one to consider the influences of social factors

and their affects on thought processes associated with courtship and marriage. As stated in Chapter 1, this connection is not represented in previous research studies and the proposed study tries to bridge that gap.

Design

This will be a cross-sectional, quantitative, survey method design in which courtship practices and successful marriages are measured among married and non-married African American women.. This study will go beyond current studies by comparing results across marital status and analyzing the data to assess possible affects of educational and income levels.

Participants

The population of interest is both married and non-married, heterosexual African American women ages 25-50 of all educational backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses. Recruitment will be by way of advertisement in newspapers and flyers around the community (college campuses, hospitals or clinics, social service agencies, etc.). A sample size of approximately 350 participants will be used to allow for participants who may not complete all three sessions. The sample size for this study was chosen based on sample sizes used in previous research studies such as Kenrick, Groth, Trost and Sadalla (1993) and should provide an accurate sample of African American women of all educational and socioeconomic levels.

Measures

Due to the lack of existing measures to assess demographic measures to meet the needs of this study a general Confidential Biographical Questionnaire will be developed and used to assess participants' physical characteristics, demographic characteristics,

academic and professional achievements, background relationship/marital information, information on family involvement and influence, courtship practices, etc. The questionnaire will be based on the questionnaire used by Buss and Barnes (1986), however, the questions will target the population and design of the study. Also, the following are potential self-report measures will used: the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS) to assess aspects of “perfectionism” and levels of obsessive-compulsion behavior; the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-Brief Version (EPQ-BV) to measure the following personality dimensions: Psychotocism, Extraversion, and Neuroticism; and a modified replication of Study 1 by Kendrick, Groth, Trost and Sadalla (1993) to assess mate preferences, self appraisal and marriage perspectives in relation to Social exchange theory.

The measures used for assessment will each evaluate one of the three traditional methods of data collection identified in Chapter 1; use of measures targeting each reseach method assists in closing the gap of previous studies. The Confidential Biographical Questionnaire will measure demographical information as well as assess the rate at which events such as premarital cohabitation and premarital pregnancy and birth occur. This will allow researchers to draw conclusions about demographic statistics such as level of education, income, courtship practices and marriage messages and their role in current marital status in African American women. The Confidential Biographical Questionnaire will be formatted as represented in Table 1 based on the formatting for the questionnaire used by Buss and Barnes (1986).

Table 1

Sample Questions from Confidential Biographic Questionnaire

Question	Possible Answers
Demographic Information:	
	(0) (1) (2) (3)
Into which ranges does your current age fall?	25-30 36-40 41-45 46-50
Which of the following describes your marital status?	Single, never married (0) Single, in a relationship (1) Married (2)
Relationship Influences:	
	(0) (1)
My family is heavily involved in my life.	Yes No
	(0) (1)
I believe that the husband must lead the household.	Yes No
I think it is acceptable to have children before marriage.	Strongly Disagree (0) Disagree (1) Neutral (2) Agree (3) Strongly Agree (4)

Both the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS) and Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-Brief Version (EPQ-BV) will measure behavioral information, specifically various types of perfectionism: self-oriented perfectionism (unrealistic standards for perfectionism for the self), other-oriented perfectionism (unrealistic standards for perfectionism of others), and socially-prescribed perfectionism (the belief that significant others expect oneself to be perfect). The MPS consists of 45 statements to which one must answer on a rating from 1-7 with a score 1 indicating “strongly disagree” and a score 7 indicating “strongly agree”. In studies testing statistical soundness of the MPS by Hewell, Flett, Turnbull-Donovon, and Mikail (1991) it was reported that the MPS subscales have adequate internal consistency in clinical samples of 263 psychiatric patients as evidenced by coefficients alpha of .88, .74 and .81 for self-oriented, other-oriented, and socially prescribed perfectionism respectively; a second study of 95 patients almost identical alpha values, .88, .85 and .75 for self-oriented, other-oriented, and socially prescribed perfectionism respectively. In regards to validity the studies found adequate evidence of concurrent validity for the three perfectionism subscales. As previously stated, the MPS is used to measure perfectionism, which is a personality trait that may have significant influence on the outcome of a relationship/marriage.

The EPQ-BV, developed in 2005, is the revision of the original Eysenck Personality Questionnaire developed by Eysenck and Eysenck in 1975 and later versions, EPQR-A and the EPQR-S; this updated version was designed to maximize brevity and reliability where previous versions were found to have unsatisfactory reliability coefficients. The measure consists of 24 items used to assess three personality traits: Psychoticism, Extraversion, and Neuroticism, as well as a “lie scale”. Like the older

versions, the measure offers a dichotomous response format in which one must answer each item either “Yes” or “No”. Sato (2005) concluded after having participants complete both the EPQR-S and the EPQ-BV twice that the EPQ-BV has good internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and concurrent validity. Sato found coefficient alphas of .80, .78, .59 and .73 for extraversion, neuroticism, psychotocism, and lie scales, respectively; he also found a test-retest reliabilty score of .93 for the extraversion and neuroticism measures and showed concurrent validty by finding high correlations (.88 and .89) between the EPQ-BV and older versions of the measure.

Like perfectionism, psychotocism, extraversion, and neuroticism are personality traits that may greatly affect the outcome of courtship and marriage and will provide needed behavioral data for the study.

To measure mate selection the study will conduct a modified replication of Study 1 by Kendrick, Groth, Trost and Sadalla (1993). Surveys will be used to assess participants’ mate preferences regarding 24 dimensions, which are aggregated into eight composites based on considerations from previous research, by asking participants to identify the minimum percentage of each trait that they would find acceptable in a mate; participants will complete the same survery for “self-appraisal” by rating themselves on the same dimensions. The replicated study will be modified by sampling on African American men where the orginal study sampled both men and women of various ethnic/racial backgrounds. Analysis of the data collected will allowed conclusions to be drawn regarding partcipants’ level of congruence with social exchange theory where a high level of congruence indicates the desire to find a mate with similar “value”.

Kendrick, Groth, Troth and Sadalla (1993) found the following reliability scores for the study on the basis of Cronbach alpha: overall net minimum (.94), status (.86), dominance (.81), attractiveness (.83), family orientation (.56), agreeableness (.84), extraversion (.67), and intellect (.56).

Procedures

Participants in the study will be categorized by marital status into two groups: non-married and married; non-married participants must be women who have never been married; married participants can be at any point in marriage from newlywed to having been married for several years.

Participants will complete all measures at three different times: Time I, Time II (6 months later) and Time III (1 year later) to minimize the effects of self report.

Participants will be given instructions to score items on each measure in accordance with that measure (as described above). After data from all three test times has been collected participants' scores on individual items for each measure will be combined to yield a mean score for that individual test item. Aggregate scores for test items will be analysed under scoring guidelines for each measure and analysis of all data will be completed.

To ensure participant confidentiality each participant will be assigned an identification number based on the order in which they enter the testing room (i.e. Participant #1 is the first to enter the room, Participant #300 was the 300th to enter the room). These numbers will be used throughout the study to identify all participants.

Data Analysis

Hypothesis One

Null Hypothesis (H_0): The rate of premarital cohabitation reported by non-married females will not differ from the rate reported by married females, as measured by the Confidential Biographical Questionnaire (Buss and Barnes, 1986).

Alternate Hypothesis (H_1): The rate of premarital cohabitation reported by non-married females will be greater the rate reported by married females as measured by the Confidential Biographical Questionnaire (Buss & Barnes, 1986).

Analysis. A regression analysis will be used to determine if a relationship exists between premarital cohabitation and marital status. While it is not possible to conclude a causal relationship between these covariates one can identify whether a trend is present and draw conclusion based on data from the sample. Values will be assigned to each variable such that responses to the Confidential Biographical Questionnaire will indicate presence of absence of the variables.

Hypothesis Two

Null Hypothesis (H_0): The rate of premarital pregnancy and birth reported by non-married females will not differ the rate reported by married females, as measured by the Confidential Biographical Questionnaire (Buss & Barnes, 1986).

Alternate Hypothesis (H_1): The rate of premarital pregnancy and birth reported by non-married females will be greater than the rate reported by married females, as measured by the Confidential Biographical Questionnaire (Buss & Barnes, 1986).

Analysis. A regression analysis will complete used to determine is a relationship exists between premarital pregnancy and birth and marital status. A causal relationship cannot be concluded, however, the data collected will indicate whether or not premarital pregnancy and birth has statistically significant influence on relationship outcome.

Values will be assigned to responses to the Confidential Biographical Questionnaire corresponding to the presence or absence of the variables as seen in Table 1.

Hypothesis Three

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There will be no statistically significant difference between perspectives on Social exchange theory for non-married women than for married women, as measured by a modified replication of Study 1 by Kendrick, Groth, Trost and Sadalla (1993).

Alternate Hypothesis (H_1): There will be a statistically significant difference between perspectives on Social exchange theory for non-married women than for married women where non-married women will present greater correlations between mate selection criteria and self-appraisal indicating positive views on the theory, as measured by a modified replication of Study 1 by Kendrick, Groth, Trost and Sadalla (1993).

Analysis. Analysis of the data will be replicated as done by Kendrick, Groth, Trost and Sadalla (1993) with modifications to account for sampling only one gender instead of both genders. Analysis to be used include examining aggregate criteria collected for reliability, a multivariate analysis of covariance on mate preferences and self appraisal (as the covariate), analyses of covariance for each of the eight composites as a dependent variable with self-appraisal as a covariate, and correlational analyses of self-appraisal of each composite and minimum desired value on the same composite.

Hypothesis Four

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There will be no statistically significant relationship between marital preferences, as measured by the Marital Preferences Questionnaire

(Gough, 1973), and current marital status, as measured by the Confidential Biographical Questionnaire (Buss and Barnes, 1986).

Alternate Hypothesis (H₁): There will be a significant relationship between marital preferences, as measured by the Marital Preferences Questionnaire (Gough, 1973), and current marital status, as measured by the Confidential Biographical Questionnaire (Buss and Barnes, 1986).

Analysis. Scores on items from the Marital Preferences Questionnaire will be analyzed and compared across marital status. A regression analysis will be used to determine a possible relationship between mate preferences and relationship outcome. Specific relationships will be highlighted such that one can identify the most influential preferences for the sample.

Further conclusions can be drawn from the additional areas of analysis that do not directly address the hypotheses.

Assumptions & Limitations of the Study

Assumptions

Like all studies, certain assumptions must be made in the development of this proposed study. The following assumptions will have the most significant impact on this study: (a) participants will give honest responses to test items and (b) measures used will accurately measure influences on courtship and marriage for all participants. These assumptions are necessary as a basis for the study and will be reflected throughout.

Limitations

Like assumptions there are limitations that will affect the validity of the proposed study. Most directly related to the assumptions of the study is that all measures used are

self-report measures; use of self-report measures makes it impossible for researchers to gather empirical evidence making the study quantitative in nature. The quantitative design of the study also limits internal validity because the study does not include a “control group” for comparison. Lack of a control group makes it more difficult to determine if a correlation exists between the independent variable (IV) and dependent variables (DV), which are marriage (IV) and courtship practices (DV) and marriage (IV) and level of education (DV).

The largest limitation to the proposed study is the lack of external validity of the results. While the population of interest is African American women ages 25-50 the results of the study can only be generalized for African American women, especially because sociocultural factors play a large role in the study. External validity can be countered by replications of the study which should include women of a different racial/cultural background, women of all racial/cultural backgrounds, and even men. These replications will increase the level of external validity from the results of the study.

CHAPTER 3

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

Initially this study began as a personal observation regarding the marital status of the African American women in my own social circle. It was recognized that only a small percentage of women that sought postsecondary and graduate-level education were married or in a committed relationship with intent to marry. Through routine networking and communication, listening to the radio interviews and forums, watching television and reading recently published books written by African Americans it was quickly learned that this “problem” could also be observed in the greater African American population.

Two articles posted in the Washington Post by author Joy Jones were highly relevant to this project; the first article, entitled *Between Black women: Listening With the Third Ear* and dating back to September 1, 1991, describes the issues as follows: “Have you ever met this woman? She has a good job, works hard, earns a good salary. She went to college, got her master’s degree; she is intelligent. She is personable, articulate, well-read, interested in everybody and everything. Yet, she is single” (Jones, 1991, p. 1); this appeared to an intriguing yet accurate description of the targeted population for the study. In the second article entitled *Marriage Is for White People* and dated October 9, 2006, a little over 15 years later, Jones makes this claim, “Sex, love and childbearing have become a la carte choices rather than a package deal” (Jones, 2006, p. 2); the article also gives an account of her interactions with a 6th grade class in which the Black male students were only interested in learning what it takes to be a

good father and not how to maintain a marriage because marriage just seemed to be “too much drama” (Jones, 2006, p. 1).

It was evident from Jones’ articles that this issue was not just an “observation” but is, as I believe, becoming an epidemic across the United States and within the African American community. As such I felt compelled to research this topic and target my study to the possible correlation between attainment of higher education and low rates of marriage among African American women.

Summary of Chapters 1 and 2

This thesis presents research on courtship practices in American women, more specifically African American women, and the effects of these practices and mate availability on marriage outcomes. In looking at these factors it becomes possible to compare courtships and marriage perspectives of married women to those of non-married women where we find that the presence or lack of specific courtship practices and mate availability greatly influence the outcome of the courtship process (i.e., whether or not the partners marry). To surpass limitations found in traditional approaches (demographic, behavioral, and mate selection) to research on marriage outcomes Niehuis, Huston and Rosenband’s conceptual model (2006) is used for analysis of courtship practices and sociocultural influences. A study is proposed assessing both married and non-married African American women in the areas of courtship practices, mate selection preferences, demographic information, and behavior/personality characteristics by way of a series of formal psychological measures. The study proposes that by using Niehuis, Huston and Rosenband’s conceptual approach (2006), analysis of the data collected across marital

status will allow conclusions to be drawn regarding factors affecting marital status in African American women.

Regression analyses will be used to determine if correlations exist between the independent variable (marriage) and the dependent variables (courtship practices and congruence with social exchange theory), individually.

Practice Implications

Information gathered from the proposed study will help mental health providers to guide African American women regarding their decisions for marriage. The data will identify a larger range of factors that influence relationship and marriage than previous studies and will provide evidence of the impact, whether negative or positive, of those factors. For instance, if it found that non-married African American women report higher rates of family involvement than married women one may decide to better *regulate* family involvement in personal relationships. Another example maybe finding a relationship between marital status and marriage preferences which would imply a need to evaluate one's own preferences to determine if they are realistic.

This study could help professionals have some answer to questions about the state of marriage in the African American community; it would provide some empirical evidence of possible causes for the epidemic. In as little as a few sessions one can examine an individual's relationship "history" and be able to identify possible factors affecting the relationships. Let's look at a possible session: a consumer asks the professional "why am I still single at 40", to respond the professional can have the consumer list mate preferences which can then be compared to the findings of the study to determine if the preferences are more characteristic of a non-married women or a

married women. I am sure that information would prove valuable to many women (my friends and I included) where one can categorize preferences for a significant other.

Future Directions

To address limitations to external validity replications of this study should include both women and men of other racial cultural backgrounds as I discussed in Chapter 2. Within the design of this study lays many other factors that can be targeted in future studies such as the roles of evolutionary marriage messages and mate selection preferences (this was addressed in the proposed study but could also be used as a dependent variable); future studies can also build on other methodological approaches such as evolutionary theory and social construct theory which both deal directly with attraction and mate selection.

It is important to note the future studies must maintain the conceptual framework of the proposed study where sociocultural factors are incorporated into the research; if this framework is not upheld the research will be consistent with traditional methods which, as I have provided evidence, provide a limited pool of results.

Social Implications

Comparisons of the data collected from the demographics survey and the self report measures of married women to non-married women will allow researchers to speculate possible reasons why large numbers of African American women today are not getting married. Researchers will then be able to measure the impact of these findings on the African American family as a whole and their implications for future African American generations. Potential implications include continuous increases in single-parent African American homes and African American children born out-of-wedlock;

similar implications are also possible in the larger population. Future studies might be able to address African American males and/or the general population (including all races and cultures) to determine if the results are consistent across genders and cultures.

Integrative Summary

While overall marriage rates in America are decreasing, African Americans are my target group because they continue to have the lowest marriage rates. Within the African American community, African American women are the specific population of interest because, as previously discussed, research has found that interracial marriages today are most often Black men-White women relationships in which educational homogamy is high (Schoen & Cheng, 2006) and most African American women of high education and status that I know are single and have never been married. As an African American woman that is seeking higher education and status, the research and my proposed study will provide insight for both my personal life and my professional career.

Establishing, or negating, a correlation between decreased marriage rates and the factors examined in African American women will bring about further exploration of additional factors affecting decreased marriage rates in America overall. If a correlation is found that is dissimilar to correlations found in other studies (Schoen & Cheng, 2006 and Manning & Smock, 2002) it will be necessary to investigate cross-cultural effects.

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9/04 - 5/08 Candidate for Master of Science – General Psychology, Walden University, Minneapolis, Minnesota

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8/06- Present Program Director, Reaching Your Goals, Inc.
Facilitate development and implementation of all programming for the organization. Oversee leaders of all locations for quality assurance. Seek and secure additional funding for programming. Manage collaborations with other community agencies. Provide training for staff.

Previous positions held include Lead Qualified Professional and Qualified Professional.

12/04-12/05 After-care Social Worker, Archdioceses of Philadelphia-Catholic Social Services

Provided counseling and support to families with children that have returned from foster care placement. Monitored family progress and assist with budgeting. Taught parenting skills as needed. Communicated with collaterals and participated in legal proceedings as needed.

Associated Professional Experience:

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Oversee daily activities of the after-school program and facilitated implementation of the curriculum. Organized fund-raisers for the program. Direct supervision of after-school staff and babysitting staff. Provide counseling and support to staff and consumers as needed.

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