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Expectations and Marriageability in African Americans: A Qualitative Content Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify individual factors that work alongside structural factors limiting the marriage rate of educated African American men to educated African American women. Previous research identified structural factors related to systemic racism that contribute to the marriage gap between Black men and women in America. The researcher in this study conducted a focus group with three Black men and another focus group with three Black women in order to identify any individual expectations or characteristics that each group considers when evaluating a partner's marriageability. Data was analyzed using conversation content analysis techniques on focus group responses. Findings uncovered two themes and six subthemes that best represent the areas within which the expectations of African American men and women differ. The themes include *Thinking of the Future* (*Growth Mindset* for men and *Maturity* for women) and *Treating Others with Care* (*Respect* and *Companionship* for men and *Respect of Personhood* and *Family Dynamics* for women). The researcher concluded that the rate of marriage between educated Black men and women is limited by each group's ability to be patient and understanding with each other while overcoming the interpersonal effects of systemic racism.

Expectations and Marriageability in African Americans: A Qualitative Content Analysis

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Marriage and Family Studies

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

By

Ashley Miller

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This thesis, directed and approved by the committee for the thesis candidate Ashley Miller, has been accepted by the Office of Graduate Programs of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
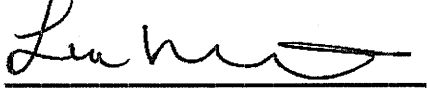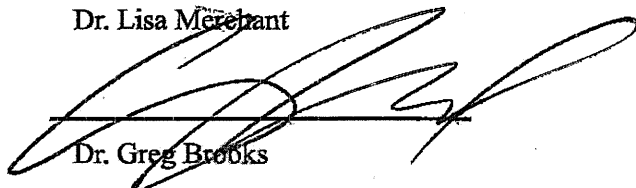
Master of Marriage and Family Therapy

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Thesis Committee

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Choosing a spouse is one of the most meaningful decisions a person makes in their life, especially considering the expectation for a lifelong partnership that is typically associated with the decision. Although this expectation is especially common for individuals with religious backgrounds, non-religious people often share the same sentiment. Marriage is for a lifetime. Given the clear significance of a lifelong commitment, it is not surprising to find that the presence of certain qualities may readily indicate potential partners as "marriageable."

Marriageability can be defined as a person's perceived suitability or attractiveness for marriage. Traditionally, marriageability for men is based on the idea that a man is marriageable once he can financially support and provide for his wife and family (Evans, 2021; Lichter et al., 1992). For women, there is not a widely accepted indicator of marriageability. While fertility, human capital, and economic self-sufficiency are referenced as indicators of female marriageability in one study, other studies neglect to identify any at all (Graefe & Lichter, 2007; Manning et al., 2010). However, in the 21st century, the idea of a marriageable man or woman is likely very different from what it was, considering the evolution of gender roles and possibilities. In the past, women were considered nurturers and homemakers, not financial providers, but today, the female labor force has grown tremendously. Compared to men, women are recognized as the more educated group in America (Raley et al., 2015).

For African Americans, the education gap between genders is even more prevalent. Unlike their peers, African American women have always needed to financially contribute to the home. Although not always the case today, out of economic necessity, dual-income households have been the norm for African Americans. However, now that Black women are more educated than their male counterparts, African American marriage rates are suffering, contributing to what many researchers have dubbed the "retreat from marriage" (Lichter et al., 1992). American marriage rates have been consistently dropping for the last 50 years, and that shift is even more pervasive in Black communities. In 2006, the rate of married White women between the ages of 25 and 54 was 67%. On the other hand, Guner et al. (2019) report that only 34% of Black women within the same age group were married, a 33-point difference between the racial groups. Highlighting the magnitude of the shift, in 1980, there was only a 17-point difference (Guner et al., 2019).

Multiple studies have posited several reasons for the decline in marriage rates across America, but the shortage of marriageable men is the most identified and researched cause (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000; Lichter et al., 1992; Raley, 1996). Since the decline is more extreme in African Americans, many studies focus on this group as it relates to the retreat from marriage and the shortage of marriageable men. Throughout this research, three primary causes have been identified, which include (a) the population shortage of Black men compared to Black women, (b) the educational imbalance between Black men and women, and (c) the intermarriage of Black men to non-Black women; with the latter being the least researched (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000; Lichter et al., 1992;

Raley, 1996; Raley et al., 2015). Together, these factors leave educated Black women desiring marriage with very few prospects (Holland, 2009).

For this study, there are two breaks from conventional practice worth noting. First, intermarriage is still relatively uncommon. As of 2015, more than 80% of American marriages are between couples who share the same racial background (Livingston & Brown, 2017). However, African American men are at the root of the overall intermarriage rate increase today. With the most dramatic changes since 1980, Black intermarriage rates have more than tripled (Livingston & Brown, 2017). Under close examination, it is evident that Black men make up the bulk of this change, as they are twice as likely to intermarry compared to Black women, who conform to the trend and tend to prefer a spouse of the same race (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000; Livingston & Brown, 2017; Rudder, 2015). The second break from convention worth noting occurs as it relates to education status. Traditionally, women marry men of the same race who have similar or higher education levels (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000; Raley, 1996). Today, Black women with bachelor's degrees or higher struggle the most in their attempts to find a spouse (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000; DeLoach et al., 2022; Hurt et al., 2014; Raley et al., 2015). At the same time, however, educated Black men with bachelor's degrees or higher are the most likely to intermarry compared to Black men with some college or a high school education or less (Livingston & Brown, 2017). Considering these two trends, the conventional expectation that educated Black men would marry educated Black women remains unmet.

This research study examined marriageability in educated African American men and women. As it stands today, Black men and women with similar, high levels of

education are not likely to marry, but very little research has been done to explore the reasons behind the pattern. Most of the present literature forms conclusions based on quantitative data without allowing African Americans to provide their insight as to why this discrepancy exists. Additionally, the majority of the present research into this issue examines structural causes related to systemic racism without accounting for any individual factors that may contribute to the phenomenon. The purpose of this content analysis was to identify the qualities that educated African American men and women consider marriageable traits. More specifically, the researcher aimed to answer the following question: What are the expectations for marriageability in educated African American relationships? Qualitative data was collected from focus groups with both men and women to determine which characteristics they each use to describe a marriageable partner.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The fact that educated African American women are struggling to find

marriageable companions has not yet been connected to the idea that individual factors

may play a significant role. While a few researchers qualitatively examine the ideas of

marriageability in Black men or women, most scholars quantitatively study various

structural causes for the marriage gap.

African American Marriage

In general, African American marriages have faced unique struggles for decades.

According to Raley et al. (2015), African American women are the most likely to get

married later in life, the most likely to experience marital instability, and the least likely

to get married at all. While generally expected, marriage between educated Black men

and women is becoming increasingly rare. Most of the literature that examines this

anomaly explains the occurrence as being due to sex ratios, education gaps, and

intermarriage rates (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000; Lichter et al., 1992; Raley, 1996; Raley et

al., 2015).

A Shortage of Black Men

Concerning sex ratios, many quantitative studies examine how the number of

Black men available for marriage is significantly lower than that of the Black women

available for marriage. A 1992 study analyzed data from the National Longitudinal

Survey of Youth (NLSY) and found data very similar to Raley's team (Lichter et al.,

1992). Lichter et al. (1992) provide even more detail, specifying that for every unmarried 25-year-old Black woman, there are only 0.304 marriageable Black men available, with *marriageability* being defined using the traditional context of a man's ability to financially provide for a family. Compared to other races, especially around this age, African American men are more likely to be victims of systemic racism at this point in their lives, resulting in unemployment, incarceration, or death (Hurt et al., 2014; Lichter et al., 1992; Raley, 2015).

   Systemic racism refers to the racialized practices and beliefs that are deeply embedded in many of the nation's systems, including the legal, criminal justice, political, economic, health care, and school systems (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Braveman et al., 2022). Bonilla-Silva (1997) described America as having a racialized social system that was built on the idea of White superiority and non-White inferiority. This racialization of our society means that all people, often unconsciously, participate in systemic racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2021). Bonilla-Silva (2021) provided an example of these non-racist racialized behaviors, describing the very normative action of a White family who purchases a home in a White neighborhood, sends their children to a predominately White school and associates mostly with other White people. Although not racist, these actions have been racialized by society and, unfortunately, have a more traumatic impact for the victims on the other side of this racialization.

   For Black Americans and other "people of color," which is a racialized term touting the same message of White superiority, American society and its structures place them at a disadvantage. With White Americans, historically, holding the power to draw boundaries, create rules, and set the hierarchy, Black Americans fall victim to these

standards, which are often experienced as barriers. Structural racism, a major component of systemic racism, refers to the role of the policies, laws, and institutional practices, both written and unwritten, that allow systemic racism to thrive (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Braveman et al., 2022). African Americans, especially Black men, were and—although change is happening—often still are denied access to opportunities afforded their peers.

Braveman and her associates (2022) explored the numerous ways in which this has occurred historically and how it continues to impact African Americans today. Homeownership, thus wealth building, has been blocked by unfair lending practices like redlining, which maintains negative effects on African Americans neighborhoods and their communities' ability to grow. Economically, African Americans have been disadvantaged in receiving limited opportunities for upward mobility, including unfair hiring or promoting practices and discrimination related to having a Black name (Williams, 2020). America's criminal justice system, infamous for the mass incarceration of its own mostly non-White, people, has targeted people of color, which negatively impacts household earning potential and family structure. Coupled with the school-to-prison pipeline, which is upheld by those same beliefs of superiority and inferiority, young Black men are often stripped of a fair opportunity to participate in society and provide for their families in a non-criminal or effective manner (Braveman et al., 2022).

According to Raley et al. (2015), young Black men are three times more likely to be unemployed and seven times more likely to be in prison. In fact, the number of Black men under 40 with a prison record nearly doubles the number of Black men under 40 with a bachelor's degree. Incarceration, unemployment, and crime-related death severely limit the number of Black men available for marriage. Moreover, facing life after

incarceration or enduring unemployment has clear impacts on a person's marriageability. However, the researchers noted that these factors do not fully explain racial marriage differences.

More notably, these studies do not address the disparity in the availability of would-be-marriageable men to educated Black women specifically, because men who survive the effects of systemic racism still often neglect to marry Black women who have also attained such a status. Unlike other sources, Raley et al. (2015) suggested that a potential cause of this phenomenon is that the Black middle class has a more difficult time finding mates since their social circles are not likely able to connect them with potential partners. Black people are still finding themselves in unicorn-like positions at work and in their social communities. No matter the number of educated Black men or women in a room, typically, it is decidedly disproportionate to the total number of people in the room. Still, these studies demonstrated how sex ratios play a major part in educated Black men and women not marrying. While part of this is due to the number of African Americans within the typical age range for marriage at present, a large portion of this discrepancy has resulted from systemic racism.

Educational Imbalances

In the case of highly educated, middle-class Black women, educational attainment is the greatest structural component that impacts their ability to find marriageable partners. Multiple quantitative studies described the present educational conditions in America in which educational attainment is higher for women than men (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000; Hurt et al., 2014; Raley et al., 2015; Vaterlaus et al., 2017). Even more, it is significantly greater in Black women than Black men. Given the aforementioned

structural factors, many Black men have a harder time achieving higher levels of education. While incarceration, graduation, and crime statistics play a role, educational attainment was always a significant consideration for Black marriages, likely due to the need for dual-income households (Lichter et al., 1992; Raley, 2015). Raley (2015) explained that since around the 1960s, educated women are more likely to find a spouse than women who are not. Interestingly, Lichter et al. (1992) supported this, going as far as to suggest that a good job enhances a Black woman's attractiveness, which conflicts with the modern educated Black woman's problem. On the other hand, the results of an earlier study provide more insight. In 1996, Raley (1996) redefined *union* to include both cohabitation and marriage, and her results suggested that women who work part-time are more likely to form a union than unemployed women and women who are employed full-time. Raley (1996) suggested that the association between full-time employment and union formation is much weaker than the association between part-time employment and union formation. However, it must be noted that the results related to unemployment and full-time employment were not found to be significant, so this conclusion may be flawed. As it relates to school, Raley's results indicated that active enrollment in school is a union-deterrent, but there is a greater likelihood of union formation immediately after finishing (Raley, 1996).

One qualitative study highlighted the fact that many women notice that higher education results in self-efficacy (Holland, 2009). When these women are exposed to examples of healthy relationships while away at college, they come to recognize that there is less of a need to settle for a man who does not meet their desired standards (Holland, 2009). Couple this recognition with the fact that people tend to marry

individuals of similar socioeconomic status, and it is evident how educational attainment damages the educated Black woman's chances to find a spouse.

Intermarriage and Black America

Although least covered by any of the studies on this topic, intermarriage is another structural component that is shown to impact the number of marriageable Black men available for partnership with African American women. Historically, intermarriage is uncommon, and that remains the case throughout America. Little more than 15% of couples have intermarried (Livingston & Brown, 2017). However, when it comes to Black men, the trend does not appear quite as expected.

In 2009, and again in 2014, Christian Rudder, co-founder and former president of OkCupid, analyzed trends from three different online dating platforms and found results that suggested the recorded trend is still a reality. Analyzing attraction based on the number of responses received and matches made by race, Rudder (2015) found that people are most attracted to individuals of shared race. However, for Black men, the trend was less apparent. While all other groups, both racially and by gender, were most attracted to their racial counterpart, Black men were not (Rudder, 2015). In fact, according to the OkCupid results, Black women found Black men to be 24% more attractive than the average man, defined and calculated by the group's average rating of the other presented races. Black men, however, showed less of a preference toward any race and identified Black women as 1% less attractive than the average woman. This remained true on the other online dating platforms like Match.com and DateHookup.com. On Match, Black men found Black women to be 13% less attractive than average, while Asian and Latina women were identified as 9% and 8% more attractive than average,

respectively. On DateHookup, the most diverse of the three sites, Black men found Black

women to be 9% less attractive than average, while Asian and Latina women were

identified at 7% and 9% more attractive than average, respectively. White women were

also found to be about 5% less attractive than average on each platform by Black men.

Although the deviations from the average were relatively small, the Black male group

was the only group within the study to rate his counterpart negatively (Rudder, 2015).

Rudder also compared "match percentages," which predict compatibility based on the

user's answers to a questionnaire, disregarding appearance. He found that race, like a

Zodiac sign, has little impact on compatibility, unlike more important factors, like

religion, politics, or education (Rudder, 2015). Together, these results suggest that the

perception of an individual's race, not any individual characteristic of a person, greatly

shifts a person's likeability, and correspondingly, their marriageability.

Crowder and Tolnay (2000) explored the effect of intermarriage on the Black

marriage pool and found evidence to suggest that the most marriageable Black men,

concerning the traditional, economic description of marriageability, are the most likely to

intermarry. In other words, the wealthiest, most educated, employed Black men tend to

be found in intermarriages (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000). More to the point, the results

highlighted that intermarriage drains the pool of marriageable men, leaving behind the

less attractive men to make up the pool available to African American women (Crowder

& Tolnay, 2000). The Pew Research Group provided more recent data showing that 21%

of Black newlyweds with a bachelor's degree were intermarried (Livingston & Brown,

2017). However, the rates for people with some college and a high school diploma or less

do not fall too far behind at 17% and 15%, respectively. Another analysis conducted by

Crowder and Tolnay (2000) led them to conclude that intermarried Black men tend to marry women with the most education, income, and occupational prestige. Since the study is limited by quantitative analysis, their conclusion could be mistaken, and a qualitative analysis would be necessary to confirm. Nonetheless, these findings strongly suggested that there may be more than structural factors impacting African American marriage rates today.

Marriageability

Unless otherwise noted, all of the referenced studies thus far are based on quantitative data from various surveys or databases. One suggested that men and women are beginning to seek partners that could fulfill supplementary roles, as opposed to the more interdependent and complementary roles expected in traditional marriage (Lichter, 1992). That same study suggested that structural factors, like those discussed above, play a larger role than any individual factor. Still, few researchers have ventured into qualitatively analyzing individual features that make a person marriageable according to African Americans.

Marriageable Men

In a study targeting college-educated, single mothers, Holland (2009) uncovered spousal criteria required by these women. Trustworthiness, ambition, and empathy were at the core of their desires, along with the presence of these traits during the dating stage (Holland, 2009). As mothers, a few more standards were suggested, including being a good caregiver and a positive role model. Women who were not parents but desired to have children in the future found the same traits to be desirable, if not required (Doyle et al., 2014; Holland, 2009; Marks et al., 2006).

However, Evans (2021) took a different approach and asked upwardly mobile African American men in graduate school to provide their own insight on what makes a man marriageable. His findings suggested that self-sustainability, maturity, and a willingness to grow are the requirements for being a marriageable Black man (Evans, 2021). Holland (2009) and Evans (2021) provided unique perspectives on male marriageability, but nothing bridged the gap to generate an understanding of why educated Black men and women struggle to marry. Another study by Schoen and Weinick (1993) stuck to the traditional view of marriageability and suggested that women emphasize economic capabilities when measuring marriageability. While it did not provide anything new to the literature, it did suggest that the idea of marriageability has undergone a major transformation in the last 30 years, with emotional and mental characteristics becoming more valued than material wealth.

Marriageable Women

Schoen and Weinick (1993) also analyzed what men consider when making marriage decisions and concluded that men emphasize non-economic characteristics, like youth and appearance. As with their male marriageability findings, this result would likely shift in a more modern study. In another study, Council (2021) examined Black men's desires. Clashing with the findings of a few earlier quantitative studies, Council's review suggested that Black men are less satisfied in marriages with career-minded partners. According to Council (2021), Black men prefer for their wives to be focused on goals related to the family's well-being. This could suggest that one reason for educated Black women being disproportionately single is simply incompatibility in that successful Black men and women want different things. A well-educated Black woman may not be

as likely to desire to focus on the home. It is also worth noting that this male satisfaction comes at the expense of the wife's satisfaction, due to household and childcare demands being heavily weighed on her alone.

Interestingly, Hill (2022) added a third perspective on Black men's beliefs surrounding career-minded partners, suggesting that high-status Black men desire equality in the home, despite historical evidence suggesting otherwise. Many previous studies recognized that African Americans have not been traditionally afforded the privilege of a true division of labor in marriage. This more recent study suggested that the necessity for dual-income households is lessened in marriages with high-earning Black men but remains the preference. According to Hill (2022), high-earning Black men prioritize protecting over providing and desire wholly egalitarian partnerships. Different from White men's shift to egalitarian marriages for the sake of feminism and equality and different from the former African American need for dual-income households, high-earning Black men are reported to have this desire solely based on fairness (Hill, 2022). Embracing what Hill coined as "hybrid masculinity," these men fuse egalitarian ideals, traditional roles, and essentialist beliefs about gender to redefine gender roles in the home. In their view, husbands should protect, handle the dirty work, and take up an equal share of the household labor. Similarly, they desire for their wives to express a form of "hybrid femininity," made evident by her recognition of a need for protection on top of her contributions to the home both domestically and financially (Hill, 2022). All respondents in Hill's study were educated, professional Black men between the ages of 24 and 40, bearing resemblance to the male respondents in the present study.

Taking a different approach, looking more specifically at female marriageability as opposed to Black men's desires, Manning's (2010) study provided an interesting insight into the minds of disadvantaged women who were unmarried. Seeking to introduce into the literature that individual limitations may make a woman an inadequate spouse, this study focused on disadvantaged women from one city in the United States, limiting its generalizability. Still, the study interviews revealed that economic instability, substance abuse, gender distrust, health issues, and children make a woman less of a marriageable partner (Manning, 2010). While all of these may not apply to educated Black women, gender distrust and children may impact a woman's ability to connect with potential partners (Holland, 2009; Manning, 2010).

One final study provided the perspectives of married African American men on the very question of interest: Why are Black women disproportionately single? As noted in the study, men are typically the partner to initiate a proposal, so understanding why they may or may not propose to Black women is valuable (Hurt et al., 2014). The most prominent responses from the men that addressed individual factors included a misguided approach to men, female hyper-independence, and an unwillingness to trust and rely on a partner. According to the respondents, the misguided approach comes in the form of bad attitudes, materialism, and high standards (Hurt et al., 2014).

Interestingly, the men also suggested that individual factors associated with Black men have a significant impact on why Black women find it difficult to find a partner (Hurt et al., 2014). Despite the inclusion of high standards as a negative trait for Black women, a significant portion of the respondents suggested that Black women should raise their standards. Thirty-four percent of the men agreed that Black women are not at fault

for being disproportionately single. These men reported that many Black men fail to

fulfill their responsibilities to both them and their partners (Hurt et al., 2014). By

engaging in criminal activity, failing to pursue higher education, and neglecting their

parental and spousal responsibilities, there are "few men" and "lots of grown boys" in the

world, as referenced by one respondent in the study (Hurt et al., 2014, p. 100). Again,

many cited traits are rooted in the structural factors referenced throughout the paper, but

there is no denying that many Black men have neglected their responsibilities and left the

women with no choice but to take them up themselves. Another respondent in the study

stated that Black women are left wondering why they would even need a man, due to

Black men failing to "step up" and "be the man" (Hurt et al., 2014, p. 99). The

respondents in Hurt's (2014) study also pointed out additional structural factors

impacting this situation, including systemic racism, labor market conditions, and a lack of

sufficient marriage education, which coincide with many conclusions from earlier

quantitative studies (Hurt et al., 2014; e.g., Lichter et al., 1992; Raley, 2015).

Social Exchange Theory

Many studies on the topic of African American marriageability circle back to the

principles of social exchange theory, proving it a valuable lens to take on during this

research. Social exchange theory argues that human interactions are built upon economic

principles and reciprocity (Smith & Hamon, 2022). Philosopher Adam Smith, along with

20th-century anthropologists Malinowski and Levi-Strauss made significant contributions

to the modern understanding of social exchange theory. Smith introduced the idea that

humans tend to think rationally to maximize profit. Malinowski and Levi-Strauss added

to this belief, extending this concept to both social and cultural contexts (Smith & Hamon, 2022).

Today, according to Smith and Hamon (2022), social exchange theory makes four basic assumptions: people seek reward and avoid personal loss, individuals are constrained by their choices, humans rationally weigh the pros and cons of their decisions, and, finally, social relationships are dependent on the reciprocal nature of these exchanges. In other words, every interaction contains an element of consideration for "rewards" and "costs," based on what the perceiver feels he or she may gain or lose from the exchange. As a result of this consideration, people are enabled to make better decisions and solve problems effectively. As it relates to marriageability, social exchange theory suggests that men and women examine the advantages and disadvantages of the characteristics of potential mates before committing.

A review of the present literature reveals numerous structural factors that limit marriageability in the African American community but very few individual factors. These structural factors seem to prevent the coupling of educated African American men and women, but the question of compatibility has remained. Educated Black men have been shown to find mates through intermarriage, but educated Black women are less likely to match with partners of any race. Tradition would suggest that the two groups of educated, same-race individuals would partner, but an unknown factor left unexplained by structural components prevents this union from forming. This study assumed that the unknown factor lies within the perception of Black women and men individually. Despite the likelihood of traditional marriageability and compatibility between the groups, marriages between educated Black men and women are more difficult to find. This

content analysis aimed to examine the perception of African American men and women as it relates to marriageability and sought to identify the characteristics that they each seek in a spouse.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

This qualitative study explored African American beliefs about marriageability and identified many of the traits that Black men and women consider in order to recognize a potential partner as marriageable. Identifying the spousal expectations of African Americans is an essential first step for future research examining the marriage gap between African American men and women. This study provides a foundational understanding of what many African Americans look for in a marriageable partner by developing a list of these characteristics based on primary data.

Methodology

The present study used a social exchange theory framework to identify traits of marriageability by utilizing a content analysis methodology on focus group responses. Content analyses are used to identify specific factors relevant to an experience or phenomenon based on written and spoken communications (Krippendorf, 2019). This methodology is useful to both quantitatively and qualitatively analyze data, based on the identified themes or attitudes and the frequency or saturation of those themes or attitudes. Originally, content analyses examined the number of times particular words or phrases were used, but later developed to include intention and attitude. Analyzing in content analysis involves reviewing written or spoken communication and coding and categorizing relevant themes. With this information, researchers are able to quantify,

analyze, and make inferences about the meanings and messages within recorded texts, including focus groups.

According to Krippendorf (2019), content analysis data should be interpreted "according to the meanings they have for their recipients," making the content and intentions of particular interest (Krippendorf, 2019, xii). Conversation analysis, one form of content analysis, allows researchers to capture "intonations, overlaps, and incompletions, as well as nonverbal behaviors" (Krippendorf, 2019, p. 73). Utilizing this methodology in a focus group provides the unique ability to access firsthand accounts of an experience, as well as the ability to measure validity based on verbal and nonverbal responses from other participants.

Conducting a content analysis in a focus group setting carries additional benefits, as well as additional considerations for data collection and analysis. Focus groups are both time and cost-efficient, which paired well with the limitations that surround the present study (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Additionally, focus groups create a social context for responses, which has been shown to encourage safety and spontaneity in responding, meaning participants are more likely to provide insight that may not become available in an interview or survey format. In this study, the researcher took on the role of moderator and facilitated the conversation, prompting quieter participants to provide their insight or opinions and encouraging talkative participants to make space for others.

The researcher also used the micro-interlocutor analysis method as presented by Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009). Unlike typical focus group analyses that solely focus on what's being communicated and how often, micro-interlocutor analysis examines the group dynamics and how each participant responds or reacts to various stimuli. This

approach to analysis typically results in themes related to specific details from the focus group, as well as information surrounding the saturation of the beliefs based on the number of participants in agreement or disagreement.

Sample

For the study, the researcher recruited six participants who were divided into one women's focus group and one men's focus group with three participants in each. In online focus groups, the ideal number of participants is half the number recommended for in-person focus groups, which is suggested to be between 6 and 12 participants, leaving 3 to 6 as ideal for this study (A Guide to Conducting Online Focus Groups, 2020; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). According to Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009), "mini-focus groups" made up of 3 to 4 participants are also recommended when participants share specialized knowledge or experiences related to the discussion topic, as was expected from the sample in the presented study. Onwuegbuzie's team also recommends at least a 20% over-recruitment rate in case there are changes in participant availability. In this study, all six recruited participants attended their assigned focus group.

To qualify, participants were required to be unmarried, heterosexual, and African American, as well as have obtained at least a bachelor's degree. Each participant fell between age 25 and 35, which ensured the participants represented a group of unmarried adults who are likely to be seeking a spouse given the typical age of modern marriages along with the historical expectation to be married by 25. Today, the national median age for marriage is 30.5 for men and 28.6 for women, but African Americans have married four years later than the national median historically (Korhonen, 2023; Raley, 2015). The researcher attempted to recruit participants from states with the top 10 largest African

American populations, which include Texas, Louisiana, Florida, New York, Illinois, Virginia, Georgia, North Carolina, Maryland, and Ohio. The list of states was modified to exclude California and include the 11th-most African American populated state, as California's African American population only accounts for 6% of the state population, as opposed to the other states with African American populations of at least 12%. This criterion attempted to minimize variations in diversity as it relates to finding romantic partners of the same race. In this study, the recruited participants were from Georgia, Louisiana, or Texas. This study also excluded any individuals who attended a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) due to their uncommon exposure to a large pool of educated and racially conscious potential mates. Screening questions are listed in Appendix C.

Participants were recruited through social media and word of mouth. Purposive, snowball, and convenience sampling techniques were employed, resulting in two participants in the women's focus group having a personal relationship, as well as two participants in the men's focus group being familiar with each other from shared college courses. For purposive sampling, flyers were posted in social media groups targeting African American alumni at various universities. The researcher also reached out to friends and associates on social media to encourage them to share the recruitment flyer with others who may be interested in participating in the study, a convenience sampling technique. Snowball sampling was used in the form of asking pre-screened participants to share the link to others who they believed might be willing to participate. No compensation was provided for participating in the study. Participation was voluntary and

participants were permitted to stop at will. Demographic information for the participants

is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Age	Sex	Birthplace	Current Residence	Relationship Status	Education Level	Annual Income
30	Female	Georgia	East Point, GA	Single (never married)	Bachelor's degree	$35,000 to $49,999
27	Female	Louisiana	Houma, LA	Single (never married)	Bachelor's degree	$35,000 to $49,999
26	Female	Texas	Katy, TX	Single (never married)	Master's degree	$50,000 to $74,999
35	Male	Georgia	Atlanta, GA	Divorced	Master's degree	Over $100,000
29	Male	Louisiana	New Orleans, LA	Single (never married)	Bachelor's degree	$35,000 to $49,999
27	Male	Louisiana	Baton Rouge, LA	Single (never married)	Master's degree	Less than $20,000

Screening and Informed Consent

All participants consented to participation before any screening or focus groups

began. The recruitment flyer (Appendix G) was posted on social media platforms,

including Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. The flyer contained a QR code that took

the prospective participants to a Qualtrics survey (Appendix C). The screening survey

opened with the Informed Consent (Appendix B), which clarified the purpose of the

study, explained how the data will be used and stored, and informed the prospective

participant of the focus group procedures. All applicants were required to consent to the

process, including focus group recording, in order to move forward. If the applicant

checked "I do not consent," they were redirected to a "thank you for your interest"

message and instructions to close their browser. If the applicant checked "I consent" and

digitally signed the document by checking the box, they moved on to the screening

questions (see Appendix C).

Procedures

During the screening questionnaire, if the applicant did not meet the study criteria,

the questionnaire ended before they left any contact information. Applicants who fit the

criteria left their name and contact information in the final question. Ten applicants met

criteria, but one did not leave adequate contact information and three others could not be

reached or could not attend the focus group at the scheduled meeting time. Applicants

who met the criteria were contacted by phone once after survey completion and again one

week before the scheduled focus groups. During the call, the researcher reviewed the

informed consent, purpose of the procedure, and meeting schedule. Recruited participants

were also granted the opportunity to ask any questions they may have about the process.

Both meetings were conducted via Zoom video conferencing. At the designated

start time for each focus group, all participants were allowed into the Zoom meeting

room. Each group was provided with a verbal reminder of confidentiality expectations, as

well as the instruction to discuss their responses to the questions as a group. After each

participant indicated that they understood the procedure, the researcher turned off her

camera to encourage participants to openly communicate with each other, not the

researcher. With her camera off, the researcher provided the group with the definition of

marriageability as defined by the study, as well as a short introduction to the topic (See

Appendix D for Introduction Message). After reading the Introduction Message,

participants were posed the Research Questions from Appendix E in the listed order.

When necessary, follow up questions included comments such as "Does anyone have a

different opinion?" and "Can you build on that point?" As the moderator, the researcher also took a not-knowing stance and asked questions such as "what do you mean by 'a good person'?"

Participants were encouraged to answer the research questions in a conversational format and to discuss the questions amongst themselves. Each focus group lasted about 90 minutes. At the end of each focus group, participants were provided with a link to the demographic survey that collected the following information: birthplace, current city of residence, age, gender, education level, income level, and relationship status. Focus group data was collected and stored in video and audio format. Both sessions were recorded using Zoom and automatically transcribed using Otter (Voice Meeting Notes & Real-time Transcription, n.d.). Transcripts were reviewed and edited for accuracy, then de-identified. Transcripts and memos are stored securely in a password protected folder on a flash drive that is stored at the Marriage and Family Institute, where the data will remain for three years.

Content Analysis

During the focus group, I took note of emergent key phrases and themes. I also completed the Matrix for Assessing the Level of Consensus in the Focus Group by observing participant verbal and nonverbal responses (see Appendix F) (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). After each focus group, I wrote memos for specific phrasing, themes, and client attitudes that occurred during the discussion. These memos were used to inform the coding process. During coding, I continued to memo, reflecting on identifiable themes and how those themes compare to current studies and data collected in the other group. I also took note of any significant reactions or non-verbal responses from the participants.

All memos were handwritten on printed copies of the transcripts and saved to the password protected flash drive for the study.

Transcription and coding began after each focus group had finished. Once the focus group meeting was transcribed, I began coding the data. First, I read through the transcripts to familiarize myself with the data. During the first phase of coding, I coded each paragraph for identified characteristics, followed by the level of importance assigned to each characteristic and any significant feelings associated with each characteristic. After coding, I identified and labeled recurrent categories of marriageability characteristics present in the data and then coded the data again using these categories. Finally, using the participants' language, I constructed thick descriptions of each category to explain its meaning.

Self-of-the-Researcher

I am an African American woman within the age range of modern marriages that is being reviewed in the study. The idea behind pursuing this research is a result of the pervasive gender war on social media, especially in African American online communities. I have come across multiple self-proclaimed relationship "experts" with opinions on the opposite sex, many of whom believe Black women have unrealistic expectations and that Black men unreasonably expect submission. According to the online rhetoric, the Strong Black Woman, a phenomenon describing Black women's involuntary need to be hyper-independent and resilient, directly clashes with the described emasculation of Black men and their desire for a submissive partner. Combine these factors with the presented intermarriage rates and common references to Black women being too loud, too angry, or simply too much, the question of marital

expectations and marriageability forms quite easily. Further inquiry into the current literature on African American marriages prompted my specific interest into the educated African American woman's struggle to marry, especially as it relates to their male counterparts' increase in intermarriage.

During the design and development of the study, I was engaged and later married; therefore, I was not seeking a spouse at that time. However, I recognize my relationship to the broader scope of this topic. As the researcher, I understand my position as a Black woman allows me to more easily relate to the experiences of female participants. However, in order to be mindful of and minimize my bias, the questions were reviewed by third parties to eliminate any leading language. Additionally, the questions were presented to each group in the same manner, both by word choice and in order. Also, during the focus groups, I took on a not-knowing stance and requested direct interpretations of participant language.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the study produced a trustworthy result, multiple methods for validity were used, including triangulation, reflexivity, external audits, thick descriptions and member-checking. Throughout this study, I utilized these strategies for validating the results from the lens of the reader, the participant, and myself as the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Considering the reader, external audits with my thesis chair and generating thick descriptions grant the reader access to accurate, peer-reviewed information and thorough detail from the focus groups. The thick descriptions include direct quotes from the participants so that readers are able to connect the data to the results without my interpretations. For the participants, member checking during the

focus groups, in addition to my not-knowing stance, contributed to obtaining credible,

unbiased findings and interpretations. Asking participants about their language use and

any interpretations also contributed to researcher validity in that I was able triangulate

information during the meeting from multiple participants, as well as practice reflexivity

by seeking clarification for meanings and attitudes. I also created memos after each

meeting and during the coding process to monitor my personal opinions and biases, so

that I did not allow these feelings to affect the data. These strategies verify that my results

and conclusions are as accurate as possible and that readers and future researchers are

able to see how those conclusions were made and, if necessary, make their own.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

During the focus groups, the participants reflected on their experiences and preferences related to what does or does not make a potential partner marriageable. After analyzing the data from both focus groups, 105 primary codes, 16 subcategories, and six main categories were extracted, from which the following themes best explained the two areas within which the expectations of African American men and women differ: *Thinking of the Future* and *Treating Others with Care*. The theme of *Thinking of the Future* includes a subtheme of *Growth Mindset* for men and a subtheme of *Maturity* for women as shown in Table 2. The theme of *Treating Others with Care* includes the subthemes of *Respect* and *Companionship* for men and *Respect of Personhood* and *Family Dynamics* for women as shown in Table 3.

Table 2

Table of Theme: Thinking of the Future

Men	Women
Growth Mindset	*Maturity*
Great Communication	Emotional Intelligence
Getting Through the Struggle	Mindset about Marriage & Commitment
	Striving (Making active moves toward goals)

Table 3

Table of Theme: Treating Others with Care

Men	Women
Respect	*Respect of Personhood*
Respect of Personhood	Thoughtfulness
Respect of Honor	Effort
Companionship	Respect
Love & Support	*Family Dynamics*
Acceptance	How He Treats His Family
Trust	Proper Order of Family
Fun	

Theme 1: Thinking of the Future

Although never overtly expressed in the women's group, this theme was heavily implied in many of the descriptions provided by both groups. In the men's focus group, they often spoke about the idea of a "Growth Mindset"—being able to grow together and support each other during the process. On the other hand, the conversations in the women's focus group revolved around the idea of present ability to see a future with their partner, which is best summarized under the subtheme of *Maturity*.

Subtheme 1: Growth Mindset

This subtheme included great communication and getting through the struggle. The participants in the men's focus group described an expectation for a partner who is willing to go and grow through the tough times. They also emphasized the requirement for great communication in order to continue to grow. One of the men defined "great communication" in the following manner:

When I say great communication, I don't mean... we have a good conversation or

that we're able to talk about anything. It's the times when we don't want to talk.

That's communicating. Being able to talk to your partner when you're upset and

when you're serious… If you feel like you can't communicate to me what's going

on and work through it, then I don't think you're the person for me.

Another participant described growing in communication as a strategic journey in

which one learns to "create feelings of motivation or love or passion" as opposed to

resentment. He continued:

I think we should be on [this journey in order] to make ourselves marriageable,

because people are going to be constantly changing in relationships and you're

going to have to constantly learn how to communicate to this new person who is

not the same person in year one as they are in year eleven.

Another participant spoke more specifically about getting through the unexpected

changes as opposed to growth in a specific area. Still, he emphasized the importance of

being understanding in order to grow through the challenges.

At this point in time, I see how we are and I see how you are and we have a pretty

good relationship. But then, you know, along the way, seasons change, something

happens and now okay, how do you respond during these bad times when things

might be a little tougher than what we're used to and now we have to do things a

little different for a while, you know? …Or just when situations are going on in

your life as far as like...with family struggles...and your partner might not be

feeling their best?

He continued on to describe relationships as requiring constant upkeep and that they do not "stay steady." He added, "...it's a constant upkeep continuing to do what you can do to get better. That growth mentality, you know. Not staying constant." Later in the discussion, the same participant described what made one of his previous partners marriageable in his eyes:

> ...That was just one thing of others that she did that really made me see I can really, like, we're both going to continue to grow together. We're both going to continue to try to do everything we can to move forward and support that person, the other, in whatever need of support they may [have].

In discussing one of his previous relationships, another participant described his previous partner as "goal oriented," which was one of the things that made him want to propose to her. However, her unwillingness to grow with the participant is what made her less marriageable. He described her as follows:

> She had a certain idea of what she wanted her man to be or wanted her man to look like and I guess I didn't fit that mold of what she wanted… She wasn't willing to compromise or to understand the qualities that I had that would be beneficial to her.

For the participants in the men's focus group, *Thinking of the Future* entailed a desire for growth, especially through life's challenges. The men define a marriageable partner as someone who recognizes that challenges can be overcome through intentional growth and a willingness to work together in order to get through the struggle. Support is also described as a necessary element on this journey and will be further explored in the theme of *Treating Others with Care*.

Subtheme 2: Maturity

In the women's focus group, the theme of Thinking of the Future was greatly implied in their descriptions of a marriageable partner. This subtheme, maturity, included emotional intelligence, mindset about marriage and commitment, and striving. Striving represents the women's desire to see their partner actively pursuing their goals or becoming the man that they want to become. Similar to the men's group, they expressed an openness to growing together in pursuit of a better future, however, their comments emphasized a more present way of being. Although one of the participants had never been in a serious relationship in the past, the two who had described their ability to see a future with their previous partner based on their present behaviors at the time. One of the women stated the following:

> We were broke and we had no money yet. We were still very much solid. Just spending the time together and [being] very intentional with words and everything that was being said. I was like, 'Yeah, this is real. I can see this for sure happening. Like, for sure, in a few years, when I get out of this... I just could see this being my type of partner'... I definitely saw a future, then things happened.

The other participant who had also been in a serious relationship is currently a single mother. She shared the following:

> He did give the illusion that he did care for me, did care for my son... He had kids of his own and he had stepped up for a kid that wasn't necessarily his and the kid was still a part of his life. And so, that was like, you know, he was a family man... [so] I thought he was marriage material. And I thought we were gonna go there.

Both of these relationships ended as a result of their partner's lies and what one of the women described as "manipulation." This manipulation she described was related to the partner's lack of respect for her sexual boundaries, which sparked a lively discussion amongst the women about sexual boundaries and its relationship to men's readiness for commitment or marriage. One participant described her trouble with dating as revolving around sex. "Every time, like going on dates and different things like that. It's like, everything is always about sex. Like sex sex sex sex. And it's like, I'm not on that type of time yet." She continued on to describe an encounter she had with a man at a work-related event and an invitation to his hotel room. For the women, these behaviors are very revealing of someone's mindset about marriage and commitment. In fact, one of the women described the respect for sexual boundaries as "something [that's] very intentional that can help weed out some of these fools."

Lies or a lack of respect for someone else's boundaries can be signs of a lack of emotional intelligence, one of the first and most often cited desires of the women in the focus group. One element of emotional intelligence that has not yet been examined is communication, which was stated a total of eighteen times during the discussion. According to the women in the group, emotional intelligence and communication skills can encourage a deeper connection and understanding of each other, as well as help the couple to plan for their future. In discussing their initial ideas about Black women's struggle to find husbands, one participant stated the following:

It can be a struggle, especially when you want somebody to have intellectual conversations with and think outside of the box instead of them just texting

34

everyday like "Hey, how you doing?" ...They would need to go more in depth and

talk about like feelings and different things like that.

The participants also expressed a strong desire to have discussed multiple topics

related to their future before their partners propose. One participant asked, "Have we had

a conversation about death? How [do] you manage your finances? …Are we on the same

page?" Another participant chimed in, asking "Have you spoken with my family about

this?" She continued:

Do we know how to communicate? Communication is a thing. Do we know how

to talk to each other? Do you know like, if I say I'm fine, but my face is looking

at you like this, do you know what that means?

Each participant in the group expressed strong feelings related to being able to

communicate in order to achieve the desired future. One participant added, "If you don't

have those conversations and you go and get married, then those issues come up… that

can cause an issue and lead to divorce." These discussions can create a sense of peace of

mind. Communication's role in developing a deeper understanding of each other and

forming a deeper connection will be further explored in the theme of *Treating Others*

with Care.

Still, although the group's comments suggested that they desire to see their

partner presently hold these qualities, one participant expressed a belief that people can

change. However, she highlighted that an openness to that change is necessary and the

partner must want to change. Another participant strongly supported that belief,

commenting, "That's what I was about to say—don't change that belief for me. Change it

for you, because that can come back up." Earlier in the discussion, this participant

emphasized the importance of self-led change even more, stating the following:

Thinking you could build somebody—I feel like that's the thing that I've seen a

lot with Black women especially—seeing something 'It may not be exactly what

we want, but I could change him. I could fix him. I could mold him.' And 'He's

just not working right now, but I can help do some job applications.' But you

can't make him go out to the store and do the job and application and you can't

bring him. 'Oh man, he doesn't have a car right now' but yet he's still eating out

every other day.

Another participant chimed in to describe this process as what she has realized is

the "women's version of the Build-a-Bear workshop." Despite the original commenter's

statement that she has seen this a lot with Black women, the educated Black women in

this group appeared to reject this mindset and are moving away from "building" a

partner. Instead, they measure a potential partner's maturity by observing his present

behaviors, including his perceived level of emotional intelligence, his mindset about

marriage and commitment, and whether or not he is taking self-motivated steps toward

growth or change.

Theme 2: Treating Others with Care

This theme integrates each participant's desire for a sense of care from their

partner in how they are treated, and, in the case of the women, how they treat their

families, as well. Participants in the men's focus group expressed a desire for respect and

companionship, creating categories within this theme of the same names. Participants in

the women's focus group shared the men's desire for respect, but specifically a respect

for personhood, in addition to a level of care shown to their partner's family. Respect of personhood and family dynamics are categories that explore these expectations.

Subtheme 1: Respect

This subtheme is divided into two forms of respect for men: Respect of Personhood and Respect of Honor. Although each participant expressed a desire for respect in a partner, two of the participants provided differing definitions. The third participant only provided "respectful" in a list of desired traits but did not expand on the meaning of the word. Unfortunately, by the time the two other participants provided definitions, the third experienced technical difficulties and was not able to provide any insight into his meaning of respect. Still, despite the differences in definitions, both of the responding participants demonstrated either non-verbal or significant verbal agreement with the other's definitions. Realizing that the group had not yet mentioned respect, one participant shared the following comment, suggesting that respect is even more important than the more loving behaviors:

> One thing that was not mentioned and one thing that I value—I can't speak for all men—but this is one thing that I value is feelings of respect and honor. And although I do appreciate loving the soft, nurturing love, I do appreciate that. What I appreciate even more than that is respect. And you can't tell nobody or demand that anybody respects you. You just got to live a certain way and it engenders respect.

This comment received significant agreement from the other responding participant, who replied, "Yeah, seconding that. Definitely." When asked to explain what respect looks like, the first participant responded:

A public sense of regard and respect is important. And it's, you know, if I say or do something wrong, which I probably will say or do something wrong at some point in time in public, unless it's just absolutely effing disgusting, I don't expect my partner to address that situation when we're right there in front of people, which essentially says to people that he's wrong. I don't want that. Because in general, in the general public and society, I do want to maintain a sense of respect and honor amongst other people.

He continued on to repeat that respect cannot be demanded but must be earned. According to this participant, being worthy of respect is a trait of marriageability for men. He also explained how he would know that he is respected by his partner:

A sign of respect to me is to see that level of hard work or genius within me and admire it so much that it becomes a part of who you are. That's an active sign of respect to me, because it clearly says I admire something about you, without ever having to say, "I admire something about you." And that goes both ways. As a partner, I feel like it's my job to find genius in my partner and say, "I admire that thing…tell me more about that, go deeper into that… so I can apply it to what my world looks like."

A major consensus between the two provided definitions is a sense of public respect. Both respondents provided significant detail about being respected in front of others. In addition to his definition, the other participant shared:

…and also respecting the other person in front of others, as well. You know, like don't disrespect nobody in front of nobody else… You know, respect them and

show everybody else that you respect them, because you want everybody else to

respect them, as well.

In addition to that sense of public respect, he defined respect as it relates to respecting

oneself, acting as a representation of their partner, and generally respecting boundaries

and differences between partners in a relationship. He explained:

It's respecting oneself, you know. How you carry yourself or how you present

yourself, because, keep in mind… when you're with somebody… mainly from a

marriage standpoint, when each of you walk out of the house, you're both a

representation of each other…

He continued:

Respecting one another, boundaries… Respect for likes and dislikes… Respecting

one another's boundaries and never belittling that person, because nothing, well,

in a proper relationship…. In a proper marriage, nothing that anyone does is

greater or lesser than what the other person does. Everybody has their own aspects

or their own role that they play in that relationship… Nothing that nobody does is

insignificant.

The exact meaning of *respect* may vary depending on the relationship, but overall,

the men in the group agree that both partners should respect and feel respected in the

relationship.

Subtheme 2: Companionship

This subtheme includes the men's desires for feeling loved, supported, and

accepted, as well as being able to trust and have fun with their partner. For the men,

companionship means having someone in their lives to provide consistent motivation,

care, and partnership. In describing their ideal partner or a partner that they considered marriageable in the past, each of the men described this person as someone who is "loveable" or "fun-loving." One participant described a marriageable partner as "just an overall good person," which he sees as being giving, and, of course, loving. Another participant, who is now divorced, described his ex-wife in the following way:

So I had a previous Black partner, and I was married. So what made her marriageable was she had a very fun-loving personality… Her personality was just, she was bubbly. She was a lovable person. Everybody loved her. That also made me love her.

Another participant shared similar sentiments, describing his ideal partner as someone who is a friend first:

I feel that the best foundation for any relationship first is a friendship, because, at the end of the day, it starts with a friendship… You have to be able to be their friend in order to be able to be around them, you know, because just like we go hang out with our friends… and we get lost in time, the same thing goes for a partner, because, like I said, you're going to be with each other damn near majority of the time. So it's like, they have to be your friend. You have to enjoy wanting to be around them…

This participant also moved beyond having a partner that is loveable, but also someone who is loving. He continued on to define *love* as "random acts of kindness" and described his appreciation for the initiative and thoughtfulness. Another participant strongly agreed with his definition of love, stating the following:

I've learned through my journey that… love can be a feeling, but more than anything, loving is an action. Love is something that you do. It's not something that is always natural to you. You actually love people, because that's what you choose to do.

The third participant took this assessment a bit further, suggesting that Black women do not understand that these acts are valuable to men. In response to the cited explanations for the marriage gap, he suggested that this misunderstanding of men is an additional factor to consider.

I don't know if Black women fully understand what educated Black men value and I think what educated Black men actually value, it has nothing to do with a woman's education. It has more to do with her ability to be a loving and nurturing person. Her ability to speak life, her ability to create a space of absolute freedom for her partner and allow the partner to control themselves and decide what direction they want to move in.

In the end, these men desire not to simply feel loved, but to be actively loved. Even more, however, they desire to be supported on their journey. Speaking life into a partner, as one of the participants put it, means to be encouraging or uplifting. As briefly mentioned in the growth mindset theme, men desire a spouse who is willing to be a supportive partner in order to get through any challenges or struggles that may come their way, but also just to manage everyday life as a Black man. One of the participants in the group mentioned this concept in his description of what made one of his previous partners marriageable:

One of the things I can say that…she did that really, you know, [it] really made

me want to go forward was the fact that I had, you know, I always knew how, you

know, how great I can be or my potential… and what she allowed me to do is she,

and in all aspects of life, she pushed me to continue to, you know, keep pushing

my limits or try to achieve my full [potential].

This amount of support also requires that a marriageable partner be someone who

is understanding and accepting. As mentioned before in the growth mindset theme, one of

the men described one of his previous partners as someone who was not marriageable,

because "she wasn't willing to compromise or to understand the qualities that [he] had

that would be beneficial to her." In other words, she struggled with accepting him and

supporting him to become even greater. Another participant provided an example of

feeling unable to be himself in a previous relationship, which contributed to the end of

the partnership:

I feel like I had to hold back to be more appeasing to her,... [so] it didn't always

feel 100% complete, because I felt like I was holding back part of myself. And I

feel like when you feel like you can't be your complete self with somebody that

you're supposed to be with, then, you know, what is the point?

Later in the discussion, this participant added to this idea, suggesting that it is important

for relationships to be a "comfortable environment" for both partners to be their "100%

self all the time." For him and the participant whose partner was not willing to

compromise, their relationships lacked this comfortable space that would allow them to

be themselves, leading to the end of those relationships. For the third participant, he

experienced a similar lack of comfort in his marriage, which led to a more regretful

ending. He described it as follows:

> Alright, so boom. So married at 23, 24. At that time in my life—oh, to
>
> [Participant's] point, like being who you are, no matter where you are. During that
>
> point in my life, I was far less comfortable with being my authentic self... and
>
> because of that, I was very, very dishonest in the relationship. And so that made
>
> me not marriageable, in my mind.

> As evident in his assessment of himself, trust is also an essential part of

companionship and marriageability. During the discussion, trust was mentioned a total of

twenty times by the participants. Given his specific relationship to trust, this participant

continued on to describe trust as his primary desire in a relationship and to wonderfully

summarize companionship as a whole:

> The main number one quality or trait is trust…in a sense that I trust that this
>
> person has shown me a level of consistency in these XYZ areas and I trust that
>
> this person is the person that they say that they are… and I accept them for who
>
> they are. And I trust that we've had experiences that we can pull from that suggest
>
> that when we get into stuff in the future, and we will, I trust that we're going to
>
> work through this obstacle together. And we're going to use our compassion.
>
> We're going to use our self awareness…our spirituality… our communication to
>
> do so and I trust that when we partner to do it, we're gonna be able to get it done.

Subtheme 3: Respect of Personhood

Unlike the men's focus group participants, the women in the group came to

unanimous understanding of respect in a relationship, which is categorized as respect of

personhood. This subtheme was best described by the women in the group as "being seen like a human." One participant took a moment to find the definition of *respect* and shared the description with the group: "a feeling of deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievements." This definition fits well for the respect of honor as explored in the men's group but did not hit the mark for the women. After reading the definition, she continued:

> As I said earlier, you're just basically being treated as a human. Being treated as a person who has feelings, emotions, and [those] might be different from yours, but also realizing that 'hey, at the end of the day, I have a right.' I feel like respect means you have a right to something. You have a right to feel these different types of ways…

Another participant shared similar beliefs, stating that respect looks like agreeing to disagree. She explained, "We might not come to agreement on everything, [but] you gotta respect people's boundaries or people's opinions. [It] doesn't even necessarily mean you got to follow them." Another added that respect is being aware of each other's likes, dislikes, and boundaries. She attempted to provide an example of this respect in the following illustration: "If I tell you I'm not in the mood today or I need ten minutes to myself, but you continue to harp on me and feel me, do this, do that. Like just being, I don't know. What's the word…" With the help of the group, she landed on being treated like a human or the partner simply being considerate. When asked about the traits that stand out as most important, one participant described respect as her number one desire. She explained:

I would love to say love, but sometimes, love is not enough. And I feel like that's

a very important thing when realizing a lot of stuff… Love isn't everything in my

opinion. Because, one… How can you love me if you don't respect me? And so, I

think that's number one.

Respect of personhood also included the women's desire for thoughtfulness and

effort from a partner. Overall, the women in the group expressed a desire to be personally

considered or thought about in their partner's decision-making. One of the women

described this desire in the following manner:

I don't know if this necessarily falls under emotional intelligence but not being so

self-centered, [so] that is just only about 'what I want, what I need,' but also being

able to look at things like, 'Okay, this is what I need. How can we work together

to make this work so that it's not just all about what I need, but about what you

need too?'

The women suggested that this thoughtfulness would be made evident in their

partner's actions. For example, the women discussed being proposed to and the multiple

areas in which the partner could and should contribute effort and thoughtfulness,

including confirming that the woman feels ready for a proposal through an intentional

discussion, talking to the woman's family about it, if that is important to her, ensuring

that the woman is appropriately dressed for the occasion, and picking out a ring that

matches the woman to whom he is proposing. One participant described herself as very

minimal and "not a jewelry person." In discussing the idea of being proposed to with a

cluster ring, she stated:

As long as effort has been put into it. I feel like I don't want the bare minimum

effort, but at least something in that [decision]. I feel like my person would not

buy me a cluster ring, because that is big! Like, I can't function… I'm not

gonna… tell [him] no; I'm gonna probably say yes [and say] this ain't it, but I

appreciate what you've done.

Overall, the women want to know if they are truly known by their partner. One

participant emphasized this point, stating "If you know me, you know, I am the bare

minimum. If we here, we locked in, you can propose to me with a ring pop and I will be

okay."

Subtheme 4: Family Dynamics

For the women in the focus group, the way a potential partner treats their family

and how they plan to prioritize them in the future is a major factor in whether or not

someone is considered marriageable. According to the women, a marriageable partner is

someone who is able to prioritize their new family, their wife and children, over their

family of origin. Additionally, this person is someone who "treats [their family] right."

One participant battled with the idea of whether she would prefer her in-laws to live far

away or nearby and explained her personal history that influences that struggle.

They can live far away, unless they're a good family. I don't know. I'm tricky

about spouse's families. I've seen my family. My dad was very much immersed

into his family. My mom is, but not like my dad and I don't like that… his family

would come before us sometimes, like his siblings and mom and stuff… but as

long as you treat them right, I feel like that's a major thing like [Participant] said.

Another participant added the following:

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I think also on the family front, too, is that if, you know, you do have somebody

who is really, really immersed into their family, understanding that okay, now that

we're coming together, yes, you love your mama. Yes, she's always been there

for you, but I'm your wife. The Bible says you leave your father's household to

come find me.

One participant echoed the Biblical nature of this belief, stating that regardless of

how healthy or negative a relationship is between a spouse and their family of origin, "as

long as the end result is wife, children before the family…the Bible literally says it… as

long as they're above regardless of [the relationship's closeness], I feel like you can make

it work… there's a respect factor…." However, one participant provided a different

viewpoint on the closeness to the family. She described a stance in which she takes on the

role of mending the distance between her spouse and his family.

I also feel like even if they don't have, like, a strong connection with their family,

I feel like as a spouse, as a wife, you can aid in that and kind of help bridge that, if

that's something that you will be up to.

While two of the participants showed more of an indifference towards whether or

not their partner is close to their family or not and one expressed a desire for that

closeness, all participants agreed that the way their partner treats their family is a

significant factor in determining whether or not they are marriageable. According to the

women in the group, "you have to consider the daily dynamics, because you're taking

that on." The same concept applies to a marriageable partner, as well. According to the

women in the group, a man who is considered marriageable will be made evident by his

present way of being toward himself, his goals, his partner, and his family. A man who

demonstrates maturity, respect, and a healthy understanding of family dynamics is

marriageable.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to identify individual factors that contribute to the educated Black woman's struggle to find a spouse, especially as it relates to the marriage gap in African American communities. The results of the study identified two themes that best explain individual traits that differ between Black men and women's marital expectations: *Thinking of the Future* and *Treating Others with Care. Thinking of the Future* included two subthemes: *Growth Mindset* and *Maturity. Treating Others* with *Care* included four subthemes: *Respect, Companionship, Respect of Personhood,* and *Family Dynamics.* These characteristics, including how they differ between Black men and women's expectations, is unique to the study and has not been identified in previous research.

Individual compatibility is a significant factor in forming and maintaining most relationships, especially those of high quality and lifelong duration. Previous research focused on matters outside of the couple's control that negatively impact their ability to connect, while neglecting to provide any alternatives or strengths to counter this effect. Understanding these expectations and how they differ between groups opens the door for Black men and women, as well as clinicians, to better understand each other in order to move toward marriageability and partnership.

According to the Pew Research Center, it is estimated that, as of 2022, 32% of Black Americans are married. Split by gender, 36% of Black men and 29% of Black

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women make up the population of married Blacks (Pew Research Center, 2024b). Additionally, as of 2022, it is estimated that 26.1% of Black Americans aged 25 and older have a bachelor's degree. Split by gender, 22.8% of Black men and 28.9% of Black women make up the population (Pew Research Center, 2024a). As expressed by all of the participants in the study, the systemic factors proposed by the previous research definitely contribute to, but do not fully explain, the marriage gap.

Six out of six participants felt that specific dynamics between Black men and women negatively impact the marriage rate. The women spoke about how the mindset of some men often clash with that of women in that men may not be "ready to settle down" when women are or that a woman might be planning to abstain from sex until marriage and her partner might not be in agreement. The men spoke about the necessity of self-awareness and self-growth for both Black men and women in order to make themselves more suitable for partnership, which strongly correlates with the results from one of few, more recent qualitative studies on marriageable Black men, emphasizing the importance of maturity and a willingness to grow in modern marriageability (Evans, 2021).

None of the women in the study described a man's marriageability by his ability to financially support a family, despite it being the most common definition of marriageability in previous studies. Interestingly, only one out three of the men referenced his own financial stability as a consideration before proposing. In relation to the characteristics of female marriageability as referenced in Graefe and Lichter's (2007) study, the men did not describe a woman's marriageability by her ability to bear children. However, in relation to her human capital and economic self-sufficiency, the results were mixed. One of the men described a previous partner as marriageable in part due to her

education and stated that if a woman desires a partner who is making six figures, she should be doing the same, supporting the research that some men are moving toward egalitarian partnerships and that a woman's human capital should be considered (Graefe & Lichter, 2007; Hill, 2022). On the other hand, a different participant in the men's group suggested that Black women are misguided in their belief that their education is a factor in their marriageability.

Still, for the most part, aspects of a person's character appear to be more important in determining a person's marriageability as opposed to the traditional view of what makes a man or woman marriageable, which has not been adequately examined in the previous research. Giving these men and women a voice in the research uncovered more personal as opposed to functional grounds for marriage, including connection and support.

The results of the present study revealed that educated Black men and women, despite the systemic factors working against their partnership, desire to marry, but the rate in which they successfully do so is limited by their abilities to be compassionately patient with the other in the task of overcoming decades of forced and uncontrollable messages about themselves and the world around them. When asked about the ability of a same-race spouse to meet their marital expectations, six out of six participants responded in the affirmative, with Black women responding in a manner that is aligned with the results of previous research that stated that Black women prefer spouses of the same race (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000; Livingston & Brown, 2017; Rudder, 2015). Each of the women, including one who happens to be mixed-race, agreed that the historical trauma as well as personally experienced "passive-aggressive" interactions with non-Black

Americans make interracial dating a more daunting task. However, one of the three stated that she is not opposed to it due to her own racial makeup. One of the women also expressed a preference for Afrocentric features, countering the messages received about the sole Eurocentric standard of beauty.

Two of the men had a similar discussion, after one of the participants disconnected, and expressed fondness for Afrocentric beauty. One participant suggested that African American beauty, especially when one has taken great care of themselves in order to "age well," is a strength worth leveraging toward marriageability, again, moving against the historical messages about beauty. Before the third member disconnected, the men also discussed the additional work that comes with partnering with someone of the same race. One of the participants talked about how single parent households, due to factors related to systemic and structural racism, impact the way young Black boys and girls are raised. He explained, culturally, Black women have had to take on multiple roles, including the protector, provider, and nurturer, as mothers, but also the additional roles of lover and confidant, if they seek romantic partnership. He went on to express understanding toward the difficult task of balancing these roles and how keeping the children alive often supersedes the importance of being nurturing. He concluded the following: "The most important [role] might be to keep your babies alive…, but that also might mean that you might not be the most loving and nurturing person. And if you're not, that's going to affect that [child's] relationship with future partners."

Another one of the men commented about the woman's power in a relationship. He stated that, as the product of an educated Black woman, he believed, "it's the woman's job to understand what she's willing to accept,... because there's not a lot of

good men out there, if you listen to social media or… look around." One of the women in the group might strongly agree with his sentiment, because she mentioned multiple times that many of her decisions in her previous relationship might have gone differently, had she "[found] her own self-worth." However, Bowen's Multigenerational Family Systems Theory would posit that the historical messages passed from previous generations and society has both a vast and an invisible effect on the decisions of and interactions between Black men and women (Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

In the field of marriage and family therapy, especially as it relates to multigenerational patterns, the disconnect between Black men and women is easily explained. After generations of negative messaging about the Black identity, decades of systemic battles for peace and equality, and centuries of surviving in the absence of true living, many Black Americans have not had the mental space or patience to relearn or to rebuild. Rebuilding takes vulnerability that African Americans have not historically had the privilege of being able to showcase, in favor of staying strong in the face of adversity. Today, we, as marriage and family therapists, understand that the family unit is where patterns repeat but it is also where change happens. In the wake of societal changes, I hope that there is space being created for the Black family to recommit to learning and nurturing in order to begin closing the marriage gap.

Returning to the framework of social exchange theory, it is quite evident that both Black men and women have struggled to strike a balance and find an ideal solution to an unfair equation. From having to choose between being nurturing and protective, being single or settling, or dating interracially to avoid the hard work of dating intraracially, not to say that some men and women do not willingly make these decisions, Black people in

America fully embrace the principles of social exchange theory. During the women's group, the women consciously spoke about turning away from old ways of doing things like building their partner and accepting below the standard. However, many of the comments expressed during the group carried a subconscious undercurrent of settling. For example, during the women's focus group, two of the participants, while discussing their standards for a marriageable partner, described asking themselves, "Am I delusional," or "Do I settle for men with kids?" Another, when describing her desire for her and her partner to be "in the same book," she added, "at least in the same series, at this point."

Black women are desperately seeking companionship, potentially in the same way as described by the men in the group. However, unlike the men, they have given up on dreaming of love and instead dream of the function of a partner, someone who provides a sense of stability in their ever-changing worlds. In other words, these women weigh the pros and cons of being partnered with someone who may or may not meet their expectations while the men are doing the same, measuring what he or she may gain or lose from the relationship.

The results of this study indicate that marriage serves an important and emotional role in the lives of Black Americans. In seeking partnership, Black men are afforded more options than Black women due to their willingness to grow with a partner. On the other hand, Black women face more limited options due to their preference for and safety within intraracial relationships as well as their desire for later stages of maturity in their partner. Additionally, considering the emotional climate of the marriage, Black men continue to hold onto hope that they will find a loving and nurturing partner, while the

women have become more negative in that area, making them less likely to expect anything more than respect, which potentially diminishes their ability to readily provide the desired level of loving attention to a partner.

Clinical Implications

The findings of this study provide insight into the factors influencing African American marital decisions, thereby contributing to broader discussions and future research surrounding African American relationships, family, and social dynamics. This research is significant for clinicians, especially those who work with Black couples or families, in assisting these clients to understand the factors within their control in order to create change in their lives and relationships. For example, intergenerational patterns of emotional cutoff or family disengagement can be challenged by encouraging members of the couple or family to push past the emotional barrier and practice vulnerability. Additionally, by understanding the historical context from which these individuals come, clinicians can provide culturally sensitive care. In both individual and couples therapy, bringing attention to the client's underlying desire for connection and/or stability, the clinician can guide the client to make informed decisions with those values in mind. In family therapy, clinicians who psychoeducate families on multigenerational processes and connect those processes to the historical trauma the family is likely to have experienced will be successful in creating a culturally aware environment for the family's comfort, eliminating blame amongst family members, reconnecting individuals with their deeper desires, and repairing strained relationships within the family.

Limitations

This study's generalizability is limited by the number of people and states that are represented in the results. With only three participants per group, each being from Louisiana, Georgia, or Texas, it is difficult to conclude that these results represent that of the larger African American population. However, while generalizability is impacted by these numbers and the magnitude of impact, this qualitative study focused on a small sample to focus attention and amplify the voices of participants. This is especially important because voices of African Americans continue to be sparse within mental health literature making it even more important. Additionally, one of the male participants experienced technical issues and was not able to contribute to the men's group discussion for the last 20 minutes of the research process.

Another limitation of note is the researcher's African American background. As a member of the studied population, the researcher's own beliefs or biases may have been introduced into the research, despite the use of triangulation and member-checking during the research process and external audits during the data analysis. However, this background also allowed the researcher to more personally connect with the participants' responses in order to accurately tell their stories.

Although a major strength of this research is that the focus group research method allows members of the population to provide personal insight on the studied experience, it is also a major limitation. Focus groups generally carry the risk of groupthink and time constraints.

Future Research

Future research could examine the dating experiences of educated African American men in order to understand the effect of the presence or absence of the desired traits in a pre-marital context. The participants in both groups placed high importance on respect in a partnership, but definitions varied in the men's group. The meaning of respect as well as indicators of respect or disrespect could be further explored in additional qualitative studies in order to continue to allow Black voices into the body of literature on African American dating and marital experiences. Future research may also address the effects of the presence or absence of the identified factors in Black marriages and in Black families.

It is recommended that future studies qualitatively analyze the individual factors that influence the marriage between African American men and women, regardless of education level, in order to determine whether or not education level impacts the couple's desires or expectations. Researchers could ask additional questions about how the individual's romantic expectations relate to their childhood experiences with their primary caregivers.

These studies should be repeated with larger samples in order to increase the generalizability of the study. Understanding that Black culture varies by region, researchers should consider utilizing regional demographic areas for their research.

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APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board Approval

The Institutional Review Board at Abilene Christian University states that Ashley

Miller's project titled "Expectations and Marriageability in African Americans: A

Qualitative Content Analysis," which is IRB #2023-75, is approved as expedited under

Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects. This approval is dated September

12, 2023. Please contact the ACU Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at

orsp@acu.edu with any questions.

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent

This form provides important information about the above study, including the risks and benefits to you as a potential participant. Please read this form carefully and ask the researcher any questions that you may have about the study. You can ask about research activities and any risks or benefits you may experience.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or stop your participation at any time and for any reason without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

PURPOSE AND DESCRIPTION: This study examines marriageability in educated, middle-class African American men and women. As it stands today, Black men and women with similar, high levels of education are not likely to marry, despite the historical pattern to marry within one's race and social class. The purpose of this qualitative research is to identify qualities that African American men and women consider marriageable traits and whether these traits are perceived as realistic to the opposite sex.

If selected for participation, you will attend 1 or 2 virtual focus groups. The first focus group will last 90 to 120 minutes. The second focus group will last 45-60 minutes.

RISKS & BENEFITS: There are risks to taking part in this research study. Below is a list of the foreseeable risks, including the seriousness of those risks and how likely they are to occur:

1. *Informational risk* may be associated with participation if information (e.g. responses, data, identifiers, etc.) is accidentally lost or stolen, resulting in your participation in the study becoming known to others. However, this risk is unlikely and not serious. Due to the individual freedoms of each participant, **the researcher cannot guarantee your confidentiality outside of the focus group.** More detail below.
2. *Emotional risk* may be associated with participation if a participant experiences distressful emotions. However, this risk is unlikely and not serious.

Participants may gain a new perspective about their position as an African American.

PARTICIPATION PROCEDURES: Using a video and audio-enabled device, please log into the virtual conference at least five minutes before the start time. All participants will be allowed entry into the meeting at one time.

Four questions will be posed to the group for discussion. All participants are encouraged to answer each question in a conversational format. Answer all questions to the best of your ability while being mindful of the need for other participants to answer the question, as well.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES: No other participation options available.

PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY: Any information you provide will be confidential to the extent allowable by law. Some identifiable data may have to be shared with individuals outside of the study team, such as members of the ACU Institutional Review Board. Otherwise, your confidentiality will be protected by changing your name and any other identifying information on all collected data.

The researchers cannot guarantee your confidentiality outside of this focus group. While the researchers will take measures to protect your identity and responses as outlined above, we cannot guarantee that other focus group participants will do the same. It is recommended that you clear the Display Name field within Zoom to protect your identity or use an alias. We also encourage all participants to maintain the confidentiality of other participants in the group. The researchers request that you do not share any private information obtained during your participation or any other information that may identify the other participants unless you are legally required to do so.

Participants are encouraged to consider the limitations of confidentiality in the focus group setting. Participation is voluntary. At any time, you may decide not to share information or you may discontinue participating in the group altogether.

COLLECTION OF IDENTIFIABLE PRIVATE INFORMATION OR BIOSPECIMENS:
After identifying information is removed, your responses may be used for future research, including by other researchers, without contacting you again.

CONTACTS: If you have questions about the research study, the lead researcher is Ashley Miller, MMFT Intern and may be contacted by phone at (225)-333-2720 or by email as asm22a@acu.edu. If you are unable to reach the lead researcher, or wish to speak to someone other than the lead researcher, you may contact Dr. Lisa Merchant, MMFT at lvm02b@acu.edu. If you have concerns about this study, believe you may have been injured because of this study, or have general questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact ACU's Chair of the Institutional Review Board and Executive Director of Research, Qi Hang, who may be reached at

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Additional Information

Abilene, TX 79699
A maximum of 18 participants are expected to be enrolled in the study. No more than six participants will meet for a focus group at one time.

Your participation may be ended early by the researchers for certain reasons. For example, we may end your participation if you no longer meet study requirements, the researchers believe it is no longer in your best interest to continue participating, you do not follow the instructions provided by the researchers, or the study is ended. You will be contacted by the researchers and given further instructions in the event that you are removed from the study.

Consent Signature Section

Please click the button below if you voluntarily agree to participate in this study. Click only after you have read all of the information provided and your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. If you wish to have a copy of this consent form, you may print it now. You do not waive any legal rights by consenting to this study.

APPENDIX C

Screening Questionnaire

Q1 Do you identify as Black or African American?

 o Yes (1)

 o No (2)

Skip To: Q3 If "Do you identify as Black or African American?" = Yes

Q2 What is your race?

 o Caucasian (1)

 o African American (2)

 o Native American or Native Alaskan (3)

 o Asian (4)

 o Pacific Islander (5)

 o Other (6)

Q3 How old are you?

 o Younger than 21 (1)

 o Between 21 and 24 (2)

 o Between 25 and 35 (3)

 o Older than 35 (4)

Q4 What is the highest level of education that you have received?

 o Doctorate (1)

 o Masters (2)

 o 4 year degree (3)

 o 2 year degree (4)

 o Some college (5)

 o High school graduate (6)

 o Less than high school (7)

Q5 Did you attend a Historically Black College/University (HBCU)?

    o Yes (1)

    o No (2)

Q6 What is your marital status?

    o Single or Unmarried (1)

    o Married (2)

    o Divorced (3)

    o Widowed (4)

Q7 Do you consider yourself to be…

    o Heterosexual or Straight (1)

    o Gay or Lesbian (2)

    o Bisexual (3)

    o Something Else (4)

Q8 Which of the following best describes your interest in marriage?

    o I do not want to get married. (1)

    o I want to get married, but I do not think I will find a suitable partner.(2)

    o I want to get married, but I am not actively looking for a partner.(3)

    o I hope to get married in the next few years.(4)

Q13 Please enter your name and phone number to be contacted about participation.

APPENDIX D

Focus Group Introduction Message

What is Marriageability? Marriageability is a person's perceived suitability or attractiveness for marriage.

In this study, I am researching factors related to individual marriageability due to a present gap in the literature on the topic of educated Black women struggling to find spouses. Currently, most research related to this topic examines structural factors related to systemic racism. These factors include (a) the shortage of Black men compared to Black women in America (due to factors like incarceration or crime-related death), (b) the educational imbalance between Black men and women, and (c) the intermarriage of Black men to non-black women. While these factors play a definite role in the marriage gap, this study aims to identify any individual traits or characteristics that may play a role as well.

APPENDIX E

Research Questions

1. What do you think of this phenomenon? Does it fully explain the difference?

2. What thoughts, behaviors, or attributes come to mind when considering a person's marriageability?

3. What are traits that would impact whether or not you would propose/say yes to a proposal?

4. Think back to a previous relationship with a Black partner. What personality or character traits made him/her marriageable? What made him/her not?

5. Would a same-race spouse meet your expectations in marriage?

6. Of all the things discussed today, which is most important to you?

APPENDIX F

Matrix for Assessing the Level of Consensus in the Focus Group

Focus Group Question	Member 1	Member 2	Member 3	Member 4	Member 5
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					

A = Indicated agreement (i.e., verbal or nonverbal)
D = Indicated dissent (i.e., verbal or nonverbal)
SE = Provided significant statement or example suggesting agreement
SD = Provided significant statement or example suggesting dissent
NR = Did not indicate agreement or dissent (i.e., nonresponse)

APPENDIX G

Recruitment Flyer

SEEKING FOCUS GROUP PARTICPANTS

YOUR VOICE MATTERS

Seeking unmarried African American graduates between age 25 and 35 to provide insight on "marriageability" and the qualities that educated AA men and women look for in a spouse.

If you are interested, please scan the QR code to complete a survey to see if you fit full criteria.