SUSTAINABLE AFRICAN AMERICAN MARRIAGES: EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF CLOSENESS TO GOD AND RELIGIOSITY ON MARITAL SATISFACTION AND LONGEVITY

by

Kimberly A. Gregory

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

School of Behavioral Sciences

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ABSTRACT

Religion and religious involvement extend beyond individual satisfaction to also include influencing marital and family relationships. In spite of the research supporting the perceived benefits of marriage, including overall emotional and physical health, decrease in stress, alcohol and drug use, and increase in lifespan, African Americans marriage rates are lower compared to White Americans. Consequently, African Americans have the highest divorce rate and the highest incidences of single-parent homes. Religiosity is often overlooked as an important component that contributes to satisfaction and enduring relationships. There is also a perceived relationship between closeness to God and romantic attachment that leads to stable, sustaining relationships characterized by secure bonds that protect against marital dissolution. This quantitative research examined the linear relationship between two independent variables closeness to God and religiosity and two dependent variables marital satisfaction and longevity for married individuals from a sample of 65 African American and 280 White participants. An analysis of covariance assessed the interaction between closeness to God and religiosity and marital satisfaction and longevity using scores obtained from the Religious Commitment Inventory and the one question adaptation of the Religiosity Salience-Cognition Scale that measures religiosity and closeness to God in African Americans and Whites. This research did not support a linear relationship between religiosity and satisfaction, religiosity and longevity, and closeness to God and longevity. The presence of neuroticism interacted with the correlation in each simple regression analyses. A weak correlation was identified between closeness to God and satisfaction and identifies African Americans have higher religiosity than Whites.

Keywords: marriage, longevity, closeness, religion, satisfaction

Dedication

This is dedicated in memory of my grandmother, Dora Ella Bracey. As a child, you encouraged me to read, study, and stay in school. Although heaven gained an angel many years ago, I still feel your sweet spirit and the love you showed me remains in my heart.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my Chair, Dr. Frederick Volk whose encouragement and support remained constant throughout this process. I am grateful God allowed our paths to cross. Your understanding and support gave me strength. I believe you will continue to enhance the lives of others. This expression of gratitude is also extended to my Reader, Dr. Daphne Washington. Your insight and feedback throughout this process was invaluable. Your brainstorming ignited a process of critical thought that has contributed to my research agenda. To my family, thank you for your patience, prayers, understanding, and support throughout my educational journey. More importantly, without you, I would not be where I am today.

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Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA)

Attachment to God Inventory (AGI)

Couples Satisfaction Index-16 (CSI-16)

Dyadic Adjustment Scale-7 (DAS-7)

Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (EFCT)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Mechanical Turk (MTurk)

Promoting Strong African American Families (ProSAAF)

Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (RCI-10)

Temporal Adult Romantic Attachment Model (TARA)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

African Americans, when compared to non-Hispanic Whites, are less likely to marry, tend to marry later, spend less time married, and are more likely to divorce (Phillips, Wilmoth, & Marks, 2012). These marriage relationship disparities suggest that further research, focusing on understanding the unique dynamics of African American marriages, may yield some improvement in African American relationship outcomes. Religiosity, one of the most prominent characteristics of many strong African American families, i.e., African Americans are the most religious racial/ethnic group in the United States, is often overlooked as a re-enforcer of positive relationships (Millett, Cook, Skipper, Chaney, Marks, & Dolahite, 2018). Prayer, church attendance, and participation in other religious groups are coping mechanisms African Americans use to increase their spiritual substance and a resource to sustain during difficult times. However, research offering insight into how and why religion is meaningful remains limited (Marks, Tanner, Nestruk, Chaney, & Baumgartner, 2012). What is known is that African Americans tend to view marriage as a covenant (Goodman, Dollahite, Marks, & Layton, 2013; Marks, Tanner, Nestruk, Chaney, & Baumgartner, 2012; Phillips, Wilmoth, & Marks, 2012; Vaterlaus, Skogrand, Chaney, & Gahagan, 2016). Covenant marriage is indicative of the covenant that God has with the church (Lambert & Dollahite, 2008).

Marriage as a covenant is a mutual legal agreement between God and man that extends to the wife through the oneness of covenant marriage. The satisfaction and love experienced through covenant marriage also reflect the oneness of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Endara, 2015). God created marriage as an institution that reflects the model of covenant relationship

with Jesus Christ and the church (Du Plessis, 2012); and as an active part of the marriage, God yields a sacred relationship with equitable submission, mutual respect, and care. Marriages that are considered sacred receive greater effort by the spouses to protect its sanctity. Marital sanctity, viewing marriage as a manifestation of God, is related to marital satisfaction in that it promotes feelings of love, forgiveness, and self-sacrifice that can contribute to satisfaction (Stafford, 2016). Curran, Utley, and Muraco (2010), posit that African Americans view marriage as a covenant under God, a reflection of a person's relationship with God, and a connection of love that two individuals want to share in a sacred event. Additional qualitative research completed by Taylor, Mattis, and Chatters (1999) found that 79% of African Americans report that religion is very important in their everyday lives with spirituality and religion influencing virtually all areas of African Americans being. The benefits of religion and religious involvement are believed to extend beyond individual satisfaction, influencing marital and family relationships. Yet, it is the covenant relationship between God and humans that serves as the fundamental building block in marriage that creates a fervent union and intimacy that allows the marriage to grow both spiritually and emotionally (Du Plessis, 2012). This represents the covenant marriage designed by God that is mirrored after God's covenant relationship between God and the church.

Background

African Americans divorce rate exceeds 50% (Long, 2010) for first marriages, and 60% (Falke & Larson, 2007) for second marriages with rates increasing for each subsequent marriage. In addition to the low marital rate and highest divorce rate, African Americans have the highest occurrence of single-parent homes. The dissolution of African American marriages in the United

States is more than those in other Western countries (McGoldrick, Preto, & Carter, 2016), and consequently exceeds that for any race and the United States as a whole, yielding a marital rate that is declining each year. The complexity of factors that contribute to the low marital rate has lead researchers Chambers and Kravitz (2011), to describe African Americans' 42% marriage rate as abysmal when compared to the 61% marriage rate for Whites. Moreover, since 1970, in the United States, the overall rate of marriage declined by 17 percent, but for African Americans, it has declined by 34 percent (McGoldrick, Preto, & Carter, 2016).

Daily, couples are faced with interpersonal stressors, such as relationship conflicts and intrapersonal stressors, including managing emotional regulation, that contributes to the frailty of marital unions. Research frequently highlights the negative reasons for marital dissolution, but fails to adopt a strength-focused approach to marital longevity for African Americans, especially the significant role religion plays in marital success (Bulanda & Brown, 2007; Chaney, 2014; Chaney, Mitchell, & Barker, 2014; Johnson & Loscocco, 2015; Kim, 2012; Kumar, 2007; Putnam, 1999). Furthermore, interviews and surveys completed by Marks, Tanner, Nesteruk, Chaney, & Baumgartner (2012), Marks, Hopkins, Chaney, Monroe, Mesteruk, & Sasser, (2008), Marks, Tanner, Nesteruk, Chaney, & Baumgartner, (2012) and Goodman, Dollahite, Marks, & Layton (2013) that examined African American marriages yield qualitative data that falls short in delivering specific, proactive interventions that prepare couples for marriage and the test and trials that are bound to occur.

Problem Statement

African Americans have a greater risk of divorce than other racial and ethnic groups. Multiple variables such as cohabitation (Barr, Simons, & Simons, 2015; Chambers & Kravitz,

2017), socioeconomic factors (Johnson and Loscocco, 2015), educational level (Holland, 2009; Quirk et al., 2014; Tinsley, 2016), and slavery (Birditt et al., 2010; Phillips, Wilmoth, & Marks, 2012) are identified as having a negative causal impact on African American marriages. Although religion, spirituality, and the Black church are believed to serve as protective factors that stabilize African American marriages and decrease the possibility of divorce, African Americans still have the highest divorce rate in the United States (Chaney, Shirisia, & Skogrand, 2016). Cultural differences, values, and socioeconomic factors are a few examples that influence the formation and structure of relationships that sway the value of religion, spirituality and religious practices toward advantage for some African American marriages and a negative causal effect for others (Owen, Quirk, Bergen, Inch, & France, 2012). The Black church is an additional paradox that for some African American marriages, represents a place of solidarity against racism and economic injustice, focusing more on the political and social realities within the Black community while for others, the Black church fulfills a religious and spiritual role and focuses on the importance of having a satisfying and sustaining marriage (Chaney, Shirisia, & Skogrand, 2016). Interpersonal and intrapersonal challenges such as premarital resources, education, and tools that are developed from research on White, middle-class Americans create additional barriers to longevity for African Americans (Phillips, Wilmoth, & Marks, 2012). Such Eurocentric norms of marriage and courtship that are offered for African Americans to emulate, those models ignore culturally specific norms and expectations about African American marriage (Bryant, Wicrama, Bolland, Bryant, Cutrona, & Stanick, 2010). The economic hardship caused by financial strain, inequalities from racial discrimination, and the psychological stress and negative attitudes attached to being labeled a minority create unique circumstances for

African Americans that influence interpersonal interactions, problem-solving skills, and emotional distress. With the majority of research focusing on the negative perils of divorce, remarriage and remarriage rates, single parenting, and children born out of wedlock, the strengths or need for resources to counteract the current upward trend in divorce is overlooked (Owen, Quirk, Bergen, Inch, & France, 2012). Overcoming such challenges cannot be accomplished without considering a strength-focused approach to African American marriage, and this may include investigating the influence of religiosity and attachment to God as factors that could increase marital satisfaction and longevity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to investigate the importance of religiosity and closeness to God in marital relationships, and its effect on marital satisfaction and longevity among races, specifically married African American and White adults. Religiosity and closeness to God are often viewed synonymously; however, for this research, religiosity is more than belief, it is active involvement, belonging, and practicing of religion (Parise, Gatti, & Iafrate, 2017), while closeness to God is the conceptualization of attachment to God as the secure base that is the foundation of belief (Murunga, Limke-McClean, & Wright, 2017). Religiosity is often overlooked as an important component that contributes to satisfaction and enduring relationships. Marriage is losing its significance among African Americans more rapidly than other groups in society (Long, 2010). Of all races, African Americans have the highest occurrence of divorce after four years of marriage. For both African Americans and Whites married at least fourteen years, the presence of conflict, withdrawal, or the inability to problem-solve increased their prevalence of divorce. While there is a plethora of literature on the relationship between

religiosity and the quality of marital relationships (Bryant, Wickrama, Bolland, Bryant, Cutrona, & Stanik, 2010; Bulanda and Brown, 2007; Chaney, Shirishia, & Skogrand, 2016; Gillum and Dodd, 2016; Marks, Hopkins, Chaney, Monroe, Nesteruk & Sasser, 2008; Phillips, Wilmoth, & Marks, 2012; Vaterlaus, Skogrand, Chaney, & Gahagan, 2016; Wilmoth and Blane, 2014), gaps remain in examining the role religiosity plays in sustaining such relationships among African Americans.

This research will include closeness to God as a proxy for attachment to God and religiosity as predictors of marital longevity and satisfaction. Closeness to God is measured using the one question adaptation of the Religiosity Salience-Cognition Scale. Religiosity is measured using the Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI-10). As outcome or dependent variables, longevity is measured through demographic information, and satisfaction is measured by the Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI-16). Race will be included as moderator of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

Significance of the Study

Marriage can be one of the most prominent, fulfilling relationships experienced. Vaterlaus, Skogrand, Chaney, and Gahagan (2016), identify commitment, love, friendship, partnership, trust, and covenant as realistic expectations of marriage. However, when compared to Whites, the elevated divorce rate, low marital rate, and even lower remarital rate for African Americans create a disparity in sustainable marriages specifically among African American couples. Research has historically reviewed the racial divide in marital longevity through the deficit perspective, emphasizing the problems and pathology that contribute to marital dissolution instead of gleaning from a strength-focused approach toward sustainability.

Additionally, barriers such as cohabitation, single-parent homes, and single parenting create economic challenges while culturally specific strengths such as religion, church attendance, and faith offer hope and satisfaction, serving as protectives factor in marriage (Gillum & Dodd, 2016). This research, therefore, seeks to explore the significance of religiosity and closeness to God in marital longevity and satisfaction among African Americans and if this significance varies when compared to Whites.

Research Questions

The following research examining the relationship between religiosity and closeness to God with marital longevity and satisfaction among married African Americans seeks to determine the following:

RQ1: What is the relationship between religiosity (X) and marital satisfaction (Y), and how is that relationship influenced by race (M: African American vs White)?

H1a: Religiosity is positively related to marital satisfaction.

H1b: The relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction is stronger for African Americans than Whites.

RQ2: What is the relationship between religiosity (X) and marital longevity (Y), and how is that relationship influenced by race (M: African American vs White)?

H2a: Religiosity is positively related to marital longevity.

H2b: The relationship between religiosity and marital longevity is stronger for African Americans than Whites.

RQ3: What is the relationship between closeness to God (X) and marital satisfaction (Y), and how is that relationship influenced by race (M: African American vs White)?

H3a: Closeness to God is positively related to marital satisfaction.

H3b: The relationship between closeness to God and marital satisfaction is stronger for African Americans than Whites.

RQ4: What is the relationship between closeness to God (X) and marital longevity (Y), and how is that relationship influenced by race (M: African American vs White)?

H4a: Closeness to God is positively related to marital longevity.

H4b: The relationship between closeness to God and marital longevity is stronger for African Americans than Whites.

Definitions

1. *Anxious Attachment* –Characterized by feelings of uncertainty and confusion (Bradshaw and Kent, 2018). Those with an anxious attachment style are often worried and reluctant about having a close relationship and dependency on others (Tinsley, 2016).
2. *Attachment* – The process by which infants engage in behavior that promotes mental and physical well-being (Bradshaw and Kent, 2018).
3. *Avoidant Attachment* – Characterized by a cold, distant, and unsupportive relationship that lacks warmth, approval, closeness, trust, and reliability (Bradshaw and Kent, 2018). Those with avoidant attachment style feel uncomfortable getting close and depending on others (Tinsley, 2016).

4. *Cohesiveness* – Support between parents, at an emotional and instrumental level as a core dimension (Favez, Widmer, Doan, & Tissot, 2015).
5. *Constructive Behavior* – Overtly positive reactions such as saying nice things, calmly discussing the problem, and active listening (Birditt, Brown, Orbuch, & McIlvane, 2010).
6. *Covenant* – A cardinal concept to describe the nature of the relationship between God and humans, to describe the covenant relationship between God and His church, or a cardinal concept to describe the nature of the marital relationship between husband and wife (DuPlessis, 2012). A binding agreement between two people. God's covenants with man are reminders of His gracious promises (1 Peter 3:8-9; New American Standard Version).
7. *Covenant Marriage* – From God's perspective, a covenant between a man and a woman that binds them together for life (Matthew 19:6; New American Standard Version). It allows the man and woman the opportunity and supports them to grow towards spiritual and emotional healing in God through Jesus Christ (DuPlessis, 2012).
8. *Culture* – The frame for viewing biological adaptations (Szocik, 2017).
9. *Destructive Behavior* – Patterns of behaviors between people that include criticism, defensiveness, and contempt (Birditt, Brow, Orbuch, & McIlvane, 2017).
10. *Divorce* – End of a marriage (Birditt, Brown, & Orbuch, 2017).
11. *God* – A secure base. Infallible, and not subject to human foibles (Murunga, Limke-McLean, & Wright, 2017).

12. *God Attachment* – Conceptualizing God as a secure base (Murunga, Limke-McLean, & Wright, 2017).
13. *Insecure Attachment* – Negatively associated with relationship satisfaction, a heightened perceived risk associated with relying on others, characterized by avoidant and anxious attachment (Hadden, Smith, & Webster, 2014).
14. *Life Satisfaction* – A cognitive evaluation of one's life satisfaction, either globally or with respect to specific life domains, such as work, family, leisure, health, finances, self, and one's group, with criteria determined by the individual (Neto and Pinto, 2015).
15. *Marriage* – Marriage is the union of a man and a woman who make a permanent and exclusive commitment to each other of the type that is naturally (inherently) fulfilled by bearing and rearing children together. The spouses seal (consummate) and renew their union by conjugal acts – acts that constitute the behavioral part of the process of reproduction, thus uniting them as a reproductive unit. Marriage is valuable in itself, but its inherent orientation to the bearing and rearing of children contributes to its distinctive structure, including norms of monogamy and fidelity (Girgis, George, & Anderson, 2011).
16. *Neuroticism* – Characterized by negative affect, emotional instability, and indicates the use of more ineffective emotion regulation strategies (Vater and Schröder-Abé, 2015).
17. *Premarital Cohabitation* – When a couple lives together prior to marriage (Bulanda and Brown, 2006).
18. *Relationship Commitment* – The intention to remain in one's relationship (Pope, 2013).

19. *Religion* – A core set of beliefs and the formal practice of those beliefs through membership in a church or other faith-based institution (Boyd-Franklin, 2010).
20. *Religiosity* – Religiosity is more than belief; it is active involvement, belonging, and practicing of religion (Parise, Gatti, & Iafrate, 2017).
21. *Religious Commitment* – Viewing religion as the primary motivating factor in life, making a sincere effort to incorporate the basic tenets of their faith in all they do (Krause and Hayward, 2014).
22. *Remarriage* – Those that are not in their first marriage (Bulanda and Brown, 2006).
23. *Secure Attachment* – Those with secure attachment feel comfortable in forming close relationships and being able to depend on others (Tinsley, 2016).
24. *Trinity* – The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in its whole-being unity (Endara, 2015).

Summary

The United States has the highest divorce rate in the Western world and the greatest number of cohabitating relationships that break up more rapidly than those in other Western countries (McGoldrick, Preto, & Carter, 2016). Sixty percent of remarriages end in divorce (Falke & Larson, 2007), with thirty-nine percent of remarriages ending within the first year (Whitton, Stanley, Markham, & Johnson, 2013). Although marriage affords many the opportunity to experience emotionally satisfying interactions and relationships, 40-50% of new marriages among the younger generation will eventually end in divorce (Stanley, 2001), and with the high incidence of divorce for African American marriages, they are the least likely among races to get married and stay married (Koball, Moiduddin, Henderson, Goesling, & Besculides, 2010). The guarantee of commitment that a covenant marriage offers provides clear guidance on

expected parameters of the marital relationship and commitment. African Americans, like other ethnic groups, view marriage as a lifelong goal, and their desire to marry is stronger than any ethnic group (Chaney, Shirishia, & Skogrand, 2016). In spite of the research supporting the perceived benefits of marriage, including overall emotional and physical health, decrease in stress, alcohol and drug use, and life longevity, African Americans marriage rates are lower in comparison to White Americans and have continually declined over the past few decades (Dixon, 2009). Gaining an understanding of the perceived disparities between African American and White American marriage rates requires insight into the factors that create relationship distress, an understanding of cultural factors that develop disadvantages in relationship success, and positive, strength-focused factors to mitigate the possibility of divorce.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Biblically, covenant marriage symbolically represents oneness and is indicative of holiness. Oneness is symbolically described as the joining of hearts and lives that begin at the conception of marriage, when the man leaves his parents' home, to love and promise himself to his wife. The oneness of marriage is first seen when God created Eve from Adam's breastbone and is indicative of caring for your spouse just as you care for yourself, anticipating their needs, wants, desires, and supporting them through life to become the closest reflection of God (Genesis 2:18-24). Oneness also symbolizes the man and woman assuming responsibility for one another's welfare, loving the spouse above all others in one union through life-long commitment with two becoming one flesh in intimacy, commitment, and copulation and mirrors the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Endara, 2015). The conjugal view of marriage overlaps with the biblical view in its relationship permanence, commitment, and exclusivity that occurs in the union between a man and woman. The conjugal bond of marriage is valuable in itself, but its inherent orientation to the bearing and rearing of children contributes to its distinctive structure, including norms of monogamy and fidelity (Girgis, George, & Anderson, 2011). Other interpretations of marriage broadly extend to romantic relationships, same-sex unions, and domestic partnerships and lack the union of two people of the opposite sex and the commitment and devotion indicative of covenant marriage or the conjugal view of marriage.

This perichoresis unity, representing the covenant marriage designed by God, is mirrored after the covenant relationship between God and the church (Endara, 2015). God designed marriage as a gift for Adam and Eve with the intention of a life-long commitment (Endara,

2015). Holiness is total commitment and devotion, and in a covenant marriage, the total devotion a husband and wife have for each other is a reflection of the total devotion to God. Holiness cannot be achieved independently of God, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, obedience within marriage can be achieved. As a foundation of marriage, religiosity is believed to strengthen bonds, increasing commitment, love, friendship, partnership, trust, and covenant. In Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, Solomon writes, "Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together, they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart." (New American Standard Version) The metaphorical cord of three strands referenced in the scripture represents the bond or covenant between a husband, wife, and God that is strengthened by their religious practices and beliefs. The connection between religiosity and commitment is perceived through wedding vows that unite a couple in covenant with each other and God (Lambert and Dollahite, 2008). However, the strength of the bond within the relationship is pressured by the differing religious beliefs and practices among the couple, lack of communication, and the high rate of single parenting (Vaterlus, Skogrand, Chaney, & Gahagan, 2016).

Cohabitation, along with lower income, and having children outside of the marital union are some risk factors that increase the stress and challenges for African American marriages. White Americans are less likely to have a lower income, cohabitate before marriage, or have premarital children than African Americans. Among married couples in which only the father was employed, 23% of African American families were considered poor versus 8% of White

families (Bulanda and Brown, 2007). Since the 1960s, over 70% of African American children were born outside of marriage, with only 25% of African Americans aged 20-54 married and 69% of White children born to married couples (Gillum and Dodd, 2016). Government marriage penalties in programs such as Medicaid and a decrease in aid for low-income couples have further deterred African Americans from marrying, that although marriage remains a major life goal, further contributed to the low marriage rate. Such trends are synonymous with minority cultures that have low socioeconomic status, experienced discrimination, and high unemployment. Socioeconomic status not only affects marital satisfaction, but it can also influence the man's decision to marry. The barrier socioeconomic status create for marital satisfaction leaves African Americans at a greater disadvantage than Whites or non-White Hispanics. A collectivistic orientation, the belief that African Americans have higher negative feelings toward marriage than Whites or Mexican Americans, assimilates this with a lower level of marital quality and stability, and few rewards to marriage (Bulanda & Brown, 2007). Women can, therefore, be persuaded to rear their children independently of a man, decreasing the likelihood of marriage or remarriage and increasing the likelihood of divorce. In their roles as leaders of the household, women have to assume the roles that conflict with their sensitivity, sensuality, and strength, all characteristics that impact a woman's decision to marry (Chaney, 2011). This is a stark contrast from the covenant marriage between a man and woman that allows spouses the opportunity to support each other as they grow spiritually and emotionally within the marital relationship (DuPlessis, 2012), incorporating egalitarian family values that focus on family togetherness (Bryant, Taylor, Lincoln, Chatters, & Jackson, 2008), strong kinship bonds, religion and spirituality (Vaterlaus, Skogrand, Chaney, & Gahagan, 2016), and

giving and receiving family support (Marks, Hopkins, Chaney, Monroe, Nesteruk, & Sasser, 2008.

White marriages represent the dominant ideal, setting a standard against which marriages are compared without regard to the culture of racism and oppression that perpetuated unequal marital roles for African Americans (Johnson and Loscocco, 2014). The economic system of slavery placed African Americans as the lowest level of the racial hierarchy, increasing their financial vulnerability and barriers to providing emotional and financial support to meet the immediate needs of the relationship. Economic opportunities for women removed them from their homes into the homes of White families to perform domestic work while neglecting their homes and family. Slave trade removed men from home, denying them the opportunity to provide the most basic resources for their family or fulfill marital roles. The destruction of partner and parental ties that occurred as a result of the separation created obstacles to marital stability (Phillips, Wilmoth, & Marks, 2012).

The unique barriers associated with African American marriages were studied in Chaney, Mitchell, and Barker (2014), detailing research on engaged and non-engaged, cohabitating African Americans according to the four dimensions of relationship quality: love, intimacy, commitment, and satisfaction. Although love, intimacy, commitment, and satisfaction are important in both engaged and cohabitating and non-engaged couples, it does not impact either positively or negatively as African Americans remain less likely than any racial group to marry. Moreover, economic problems, a desire to complete their education before marriage, children under the age of eighteen, and cohabitation before the engagement was associated with worse

marital satisfaction, dedication, and communication scores, increasing the potential for divorce, particularly when compared to those couples that did not cohabitate.

Conceptual Framework

The research is grounded in a conceptual structure that focuses on the influence of closeness, attachment, and emotional frameworks that impact marital behaviors, commitment, and attitudes. The theory guiding this study is Susan Johnson's Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (EFCT). Along with Leslie Greenberg, Susan Johnson (1999), developed Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy to focus on the importance of dual role emotions play in both relationship distress and as a motivator for change. A systems theory that incorporates a humanistic-experiential approach, EFCT, incorporates adult attachment theory and attachment/bonding to create a more secure bond, develop trusting relationships, and maintain a healthy, positive marriage for African Americans. Systemic, humanistic-experiential, attachment, and emotion are the four concepts of EFCT. Systemically, closeness to God as a proxy for attachment to God and religiosity in African American marriages will be examined on the individual level.

Bowlby's Attachment Theory explains the connections established between the primary caregiver and child that develops cognitive schemas that carry across the lifespan. Maladaptive schemas result if the caregiver fails to meet the primary needs of the child, creating an insecure attachment, but if the caregiver adequately responds to the child's needs or threat, a secure attachment is produced. Research supports that secure attachment in childhood transitions into socially competent secure adult relationships with close friends and romantic partners while insecure attachment may contribute to a heightened level of distress that, when used, is less

efficient when recovering from negative emotions such as anger during interpersonal interactions (Schoebi & Randall, 2015). Insecure attachment responses include high anxiety and avoidance, plagued with insecurity and greater emotional reactions. Schoebi and Randall (2015) assert high-anxious attachment contributes to emotional reactivity to potential relationship threats, whereas secure attachment fosters emotional stability. The attachment also influences emotional connectedness or closeness, in that someone with an insecure attachment will have difficulty establishing close emotional relationships, while those with secure attachment utilize less avoidant behavior in interpersonal interactions.

The disparities identified in research between race and attachment styles, and their link is believed to be directly related to the high divorce or separation rate, differences in family structure, and socioeconomic status (Whitton, Stanley, Markman, & Johnson, 2013). Managing destructive and constructive behavior is influenced by the basic humanistic tenants of unconditional positive regard, empathy, and self-actualization that is processed through individual experiences and distorted processing of experiences. Dixon (2017) purports that individual emotional health and trust are indicators of marital satisfaction. As a foundation for building a sustainable marriage, developing an emotionally close relationship develops emotionally satisfying couple interactions. The continued variability within emotionally close relationships requires communication and successful negotiation of differences to navigate the periods of change, growth, and retreat (Chaney, 2014). Successful navigation of these periods of flux depends on the relationship dynamics during childhood, including delineation of roles and responsibilities, the parental relationship, and development (Kumar, 2017), self-acceptance, a sense of autonomy, and the ability to manage complex environments to suit personal needs and

values, a sense of purpose in life and continued growth within the relationship (Idemudia & Ndlovu, 2013). Albeit an important component of a satisfying marriage, the emotional health and success in African American marriage tend to be the responsibility of the woman (Johnson & Loscocco, 2015). The legacy of slavery and the degradation and abusive practices used by slave owners that is believed to increase susceptibility to family instability, low self-esteem (Gillum & Dodd, 2016), minimizes the possibility of actively and consciously developing emotional closeness and commitment within the relationship (Chaney, 2014). Therefore, negative emotional stress leads to hostility, anger, and sadness, with the possibility of anxiety being displayed within the relationship instead of warmth and support (Bryant, Wickrama, Bolland, Bryant, Cutrona, & Stanik, 2010).

Religiosity as a Context of Marital Longevity and Satisfaction

The Black Church has served as a haven for African Americans since slavery. Albeit a physical building, the church serves as the place of worship where religious services take place. Religion signifies a lifestyle that reflects a particular faith and its beliefs that are influenced not only by culture but by personal and vicarious experiences, including the impact of slavery. Historically, enslaved African Americans were forbidden to marry, and those that did marry were often separated from their families. To survive the separation, African American marriages focused on building family bonds, addressing family togetherness, couple growth, and more attendance to religious services than other European American couples (Dew, Anderson, Skogrand, & Chaney, 2017). African Americans' survival response is indicative of the diversity in beliefs and attitudes that yield behaviors and experiences that are separated by culture. King and Hunt's (1975) original study on religiosity was premised on White, mainstream Protestants,

and examined the basic dimensions of creedal assent, religious devotion, church attendance, organizational activity, financial support, religious knowledge, orientation to growth and striving, extrinsic orientation, salience-behavior, and salience cognition. However, for this study, religiosity is examined as a factor that influences marital satisfaction yielding longer, satisfying marriages for African Americans and is illustrated in the conceptual model, Figure 1: the perceived relationship between religiosity and satisfaction, moderated by race.

Research on three ethnic minority groups: African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics, consistently shows that spousal religiosity is positively associated with higher marital quality and stability (Perry, 2016). Religion as a multi-dimensional belief and behavioral system that could influence satisfaction is often overlooked as a coping mechanism to manage tough times or as a protective factor for increasing relational strength. For example, Millett, Cook, Skipper, Chaney, Marks, and Dollahit's (2018) research on marriage and family among African Americans found couples that are actively engaged in their faith communities report higher-quality relationships with religiosity shaping perceptions about marriage, especially for men. Cohesiveness in family and marital relationships is believed to be an outcome of religious influence.

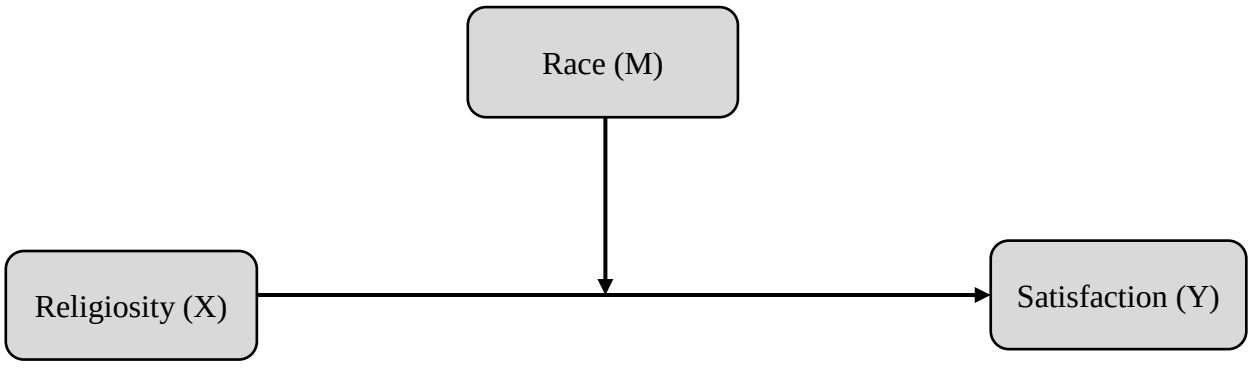

Figure 1. A proposed conceptual model explaining the perceived relationship between religiosity and satisfaction moderated by race.

Life satisfaction, an unintended outcome of religiosity and love, is determined by the individual and also positively influences relational bonds. Life satisfaction is a conditional variable that fluctuates in moments of happiness, sadness, success, failure, or disappointment and is more responsive to traditional and enduring markers of life quality and well-being (Carr, Freedman, Cornman, & Schwarz, 2014). Marital satisfaction is specific to the development of a partnership in the marital relationship that yields life-long, sustaining relationships. Therefore, for this research, relationship satisfaction instead of life satisfaction will be used as a variable.

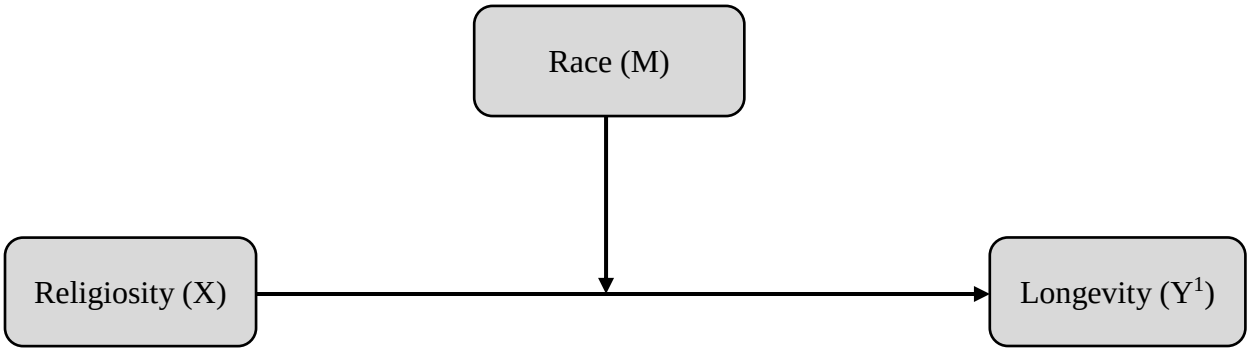

Figure 2. A proposed conceptual model explaining the perceived relationship between religiosity and marital longevity moderated by race.

For African Americans, religiosity appears to shape perceptions about marriage, and couples that are actively engaged in their faith communities are believed to report higher-quality relationships, increasing cohesiveness and marital longevity (Millett, Cook, Skipper, Chaney, Marks, & Dollahite, 2018). Therefore, the potential positive correlation between religiosity and marital longevity for African American marriages cannot be ignored. This potential positive relationship is shown in Figure 2, and further suggests that the strength of the relationship between religiosity and longevity depends on the race of the individual.

Closeness to God as a Context of Longevity and Satisfaction

Relationships with God are attachment-based relationships that correspond with one's parental attachment. Thus securely attached individuals tend to view God as more loving, less remote from them and gave religion more importance in their relationship (Cirhinlioglu, Cirhinlioglu, & Tepe, 2018); and insecurely attached individuals have a disinterest in religion and view God as distant, seeking relationships with God to compensate for the lacking relationship with their parents (Murunga, Limke-McLean, & Wright, 2017). Prayer, a widely practiced religious behavior, is perceived to increase closeness to God (Hatch, Marks, Bitah, Lawrence, Lambert, Dollahite, & Hardy, 2016). God, as an attachment figure, is perceived to be associated with higher levels of life satisfaction, lower levels of depressed affect, psychological distress, and feelings of loneliness that can be deleterious to relationships (Ellison, Bradshaw, Flannelly, & Galek, 2014). Essentially, a secure attachment to God that is established through prayer and other religious practices further develops faith, and it is the faith that increases relational bonds. The relationship with God that transcends within the marriage is visible through shared religious practices and is perceived to increase marital satisfaction. This concept is signified in Figure 3, the perceived relationship between closeness to God and satisfaction and believed to be moderated by race. Specifically, the relationship between closeness to God and satisfaction is stronger for African Americans than Whites.

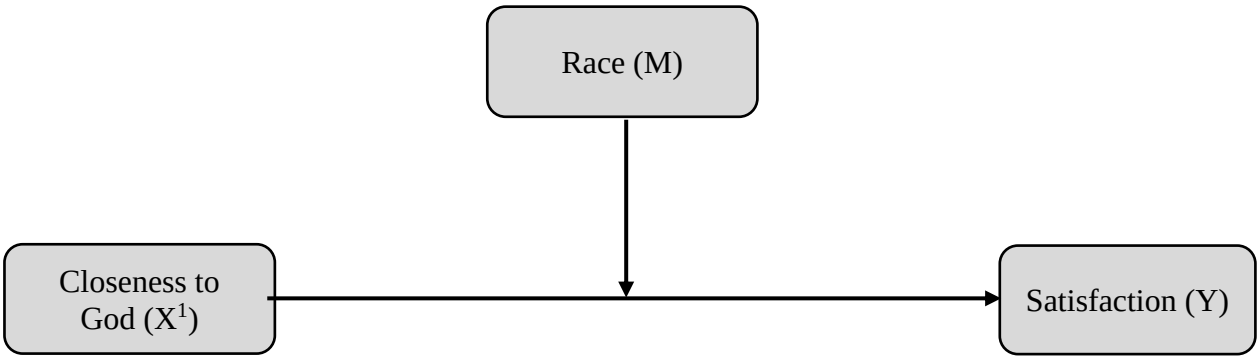

Figure 3. A proposed conceptual model explaining the perceived relationship between closeness to God and satisfaction moderated by race.

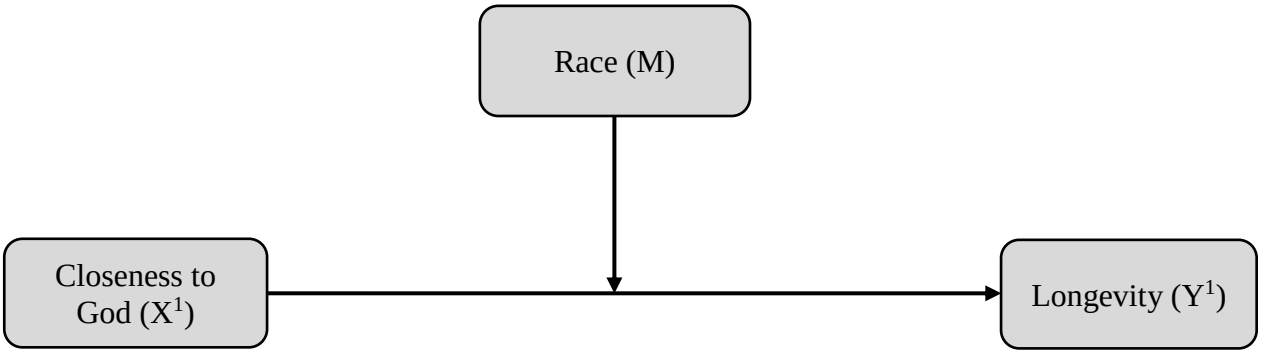

Figure 4. A proposed conceptual model explaining the perceived relationship between closeness to God and longevity moderated by race.

The perceived relationship between closeness to God and romantic attachment that leads to stable, sustaining relationships are characterized by secure bonds that protect against marital dissolution. Further, if individuals with secure attachments consider God as more loving, less remote from them, and give religion more importance, then a positive relationship exists between increased closeness to God and marital longevity. This perceived relationship is illustrated in

Figure 4 and further suggests the strength of the relationship between closeness to God and marital longevity is different among races, specifically African American and White individuals.

Related Literature

In a longitudinal study of married couples, Birditt, Brown, Orbuch, and McIlvane (2010) examined the destructive and constructive behaviors of 33 Black and White newlywed couples and their implications for divorce. The word Black is used interchangeably with African American. Destructive behaviors, which result in negative evaluations of marriage and a decline in marital satisfaction and stability, were used more often in conflict with African American couples. Such negative interactions constituting destructive behaviors tend to have a greater influence on one's perception of marriage. This aligns with research completed by McNulty (2016) that shows marriages characterized by higher levels of destructive behavior were negatively associated with satisfaction. For African American marriages, something occurs over time resulting in a decrease in the use of destructive behaviors, increasing marital satisfaction and decreasing the possibility of marital dissolution. Rauer, Williams, and Jensen (2017) suggest that as couples age, their approach to disagreements is replaced with problem-solving. The active, destructive conflict strategies used by younger adults in marriages are replaced with a more passive, constructive approach used by older adults. However, since African American marriages begin with greater risk factors than White American marriages, African Americans' failure to work through the challenges experienced in the early years of marriage pose as barriers to achieving long-term, satisfying marital relationships.

African American Marriage

The fragility of African American marriages has yielded the lowest rate of marriage of any ethnic or racial group in the United States. Risks, including cohabitation, religion and spirituality, socioeconomic factors, education, and slavery, that are present at the beginning of the marriage can become destructive behaviors that lead to a negative evaluation of marriage and decline in marital satisfaction and stability (Birditt, Brown, Orbuch, & McIlvane, 2010). African Americans desire to marry is stronger than any ethnic group (Chaney, Shirishia, & Skogrand, 2016). The research that supports the perceived benefits of overall emotional and physical health, decrease in stress, alcohol and drug use, and life longevity for married couples; the reverse for those who are single. However, in spite of the benefits, African American marriage rates are lower in comparison to White Americans, and have continually declined over the past few decades (Dixon, 2009).

Barriers to Marriage

To understand the sociological factors such as cohabitation, educational level, and mate availability that present as barriers for African American marriages, one must examine them along with cultural factors, including interdependence and racial and ethnic minority disparities associated with slavery. Although the right to marry is considered a fundamental right under the substantive component of the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment (May, 2006), colonial and antebellum legislation and jurisprudence prohibited marriages between bonded slaves with recognition of marriage between emancipated African slaves with the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment (Goring, 2006). The African American race was viewed as subordinate and inferior to White Americans, and the prohibition of the right to marry within the African

American race increased non-marital cohabitation arrangements. States such as Florida viewed cohabitation as a form of adultery and imposed severe penalties, further denying protections under the Constitution (May, 2006). Eventually, enslaved African Americans' marriages were deemed lawful and the desire to live together as husband and wife was granted and legally recognized as marriage, yet the infringement of slavery manifests unresolved issues that limit equal access to the full range of resources to participate in society on the same level as others (Walters, 2012).

Psychological factors such as forgiveness, trust, and commitment must also be considered as barriers, especially as African Americans consider marriage, remarriage and sustaining the marital union over time. Criminalization confines African Americans in jail for minor offenses, producing injustices that encourage struggles and limitations for life success and low availability of marriageable men (Walters, 2012). This adds to the population of singleness as women work to increase their education to secure sustainable jobs. Whisman and Li (2015), in their study of the positive and negative relationship adjustment, studied 2,071 married individuals and identified two dimensions of marital quality: marital happiness and interaction and marital disagreement problems and instability. Not surprisingly, positive interactions can cause negative exchanges to dissipate and as a result, serve as a protective factor for marital happiness.

Cohabitation. The increase in cohabitation among African Americans reflects a socially accepted marriage-like arrangement. This arrangement is motivated by socioeconomic factors, emotional and tangible support, love and commitment (Chaney, 2014), and the appearance that through cohabitation, such romantic commitment will strengthen and promote the institution of a healthy marriage. Much like commitment, emotional closeness cannot be ignored as a

contributor to the marriage-like cohabitating relationships that for African Americans, often fail to lead to marriage. However, whether cohabitating, married, with children or without, relationships can experience emotional closeness and commitment. Moreover, the devotion to remaining invested in the relationship enhances emotional closeness for married and cohabitating couples thus creating a form of psychological permanence and mutual behaviors that contribute to a sustainable relationship (Chaney, 2014). These disparities occur in the way African Americans conceptualize the behaviors such as sharing time, financial resources, displays of affection and sexual relationships that sustain emotional closeness experienced in cohabitating relationships with supportive behaviors, including commitment continues to develop as the marriage matures (Chaney, 2014).

Research on the benefits, disadvantages, and perception of cohabitation in romantic relationships vary. In their research, Barr, Simons, and Simons (2015) examined four marital beliefs: cost, benefits, general importance, and salience as it relates to cohabitation and the changing perception of marriage among African Americans. Although romantic relationships can positively impact the perception of marital importance, cohabitation was believed to highlight the benefits of marriage and positively change beliefs about marriage. Beliefs can, however, vary among genders with women placing a higher value on cohabitation and its symbolism to marriage than men. Instead of cohabitation highlighting the benefits of marriage, Chambers and Kravitz (2017) view cohabitation as merely a stage in relationship development that for African Americans, serves as an alternative to singleness. Additionally, if pregnant, cohabitating African American women were not likely to marry their child's father than pregnant non-cohabitating African American women (Chamers and Kravits, 2017).

Slavery. St. Vil (2014), through a secondary analysis of data from the Marriage and Cohabitating 2010 dataset, examined the impact of work-related conflict and work-family balance on African American marital satisfaction. Marriage has a tri-fold effect of economic, physical and mental health for African American couples. As the wife established a balance between work and family, the marital relationship for the wife improves. Not only does the definition of marital satisfaction vary within cultures, it is further influenced by the couple's perception of marital satisfaction which also impacts children present in the relationship. The gender differences among marital satisfaction could also be explained by considering gender roles that categorize superior-inferior roles and responsibilities according to cultural or societal influence.

The racialized unequal marital roles have its roots embedded in slavery beginning when the husband was removed from his role as husband and provider and the woman was catapulted to the role of patriarch. Slavery, therefore, caused a change in the gender roles of work and family for African American marriages. However, the egalitarian division of labor can become a strength (Johnson & Loscocco, 2014; Marks, Hopkins, Chaney, Monroe, Nesteruk, & Sasser, 2008) or cause spouses to feel gender role conflicts that are likely to lead to relationship tensions that could result in marital dissolution (Kim, 2012). Additionally, civil rights protections have fostered new opportunities for African Americans, including the right to vote, obtain decent employment, attend college, and purchase wants and needs. Such rights have contributed to an increase of women in the workforce, some of whom are a single parents or low wage-earning parents depending on government subsidies.

Socioeconomic Status. Healthy African American marriages promote financial, social, familial, and psychological well-being and appear to benefit African Americans financially more than Whites (Chambers & Kravitz, 2017). In contrast, race-related stressors such as poverty can undermine close relationships among African Americans in general and especially in men (Kogan, Yu, & Brown, 2016). This includes environmental poverty during childhood and extends into adult romantic relationships, therefore, the impact of socioeconomic stress is more than an immediate response to a temporary problem but can create circumstances that prompt a range of coping strategies and emotional responses that have the potential to impact African American mens engagement in satisfying committed relationships. Phillips, Wilmoth, and Marks (2014) identified cultural differences as the factor in the disparity; however, socioeconomic challenges, social practices and policies, and inequality affect races differently.

Gender differences, socioeconomic status, the number of children, and educational level are factors that influence the perception of marriage. First, there is a disproportionate number of African American women to men. In 1995, there were 15.7 million African American men compared to 17.8 million African American women (Holland, 2009). In 2013, there were 21.5 million African American men compared to 23.5 million African American women (U.S. Census, 2013). Census projections imply the gap within the male and female African American population will continue as the African American population grows. The sex-ratio imbalance among African American men and women creates a shortage of marriageable men and perhaps, according to King and Allen (2007), has the greatest negative impact on marital behavior among African Americans. When men are in short supply, their level of commitment to relationships diminishes and the quality of relationships suffer.

Cultural Differences

Phillips, Wilmoth, and Marks (2014) identified cultural differences as the factor in the disparity. However, although race influences scores when measuring marital stability, socioeconomic challenges, social practices and policies, and inequality affect races differently. In fact, in African American marriages, the lack of economic opportunities that determine socioeconomic status are major contributors to marital instability. Owen, Quirk, Bergen, Inch, and France (2012) also agrees that limited economic resources can harm relationship quality, stability, and coping resources. The oppression experienced by African American couples is not addressed in relationship education programs. Therefore, gaps remain in the existence of program-specific resources that address the distress, socioeconomic factors, relationship challenges, and oppression specific to the African American population (Quirk, Strokoff, Owen, France, & Bergen, 2014).

Cultural differences impact not only marital instability but have varying protective factors that are important to marital stability. For African Americans, church attendance, prayer, and faith are identified as such and influence how disagreements are resolved. This is supported by Phillips, et al. (2014) who examined the marital stability of 71 married African American couples (N=142). The outcome indicated God/religion as key protective factors in marital satisfaction. However, money was rated higher than communication, the second-highest protective factor, further supporting the different roles socioeconomics play in marriages among cultures. Although the results are strong, the sample used was gathered from African American church congregations in the Deep South. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to other African Americans as it is not representative of the African American population. It further

prohibits comparison to other research in which communication was identified as a key factor in marital satisfaction. Cultural differences in parenting also intersect with marital duration and the age of children. In their three-year study of 145 African American mother-father dyads with pre- to late-adolescent-age children, Riina and McHale (2015) found that as children age, the stress of co-parenting increases and if the marriage is new, additional stress is added, creating a risk for the marriage. Although marital love can promote satisfaction, it is not enough to overcome the general negativity in marriages that occur as a result of the marital conflict and conflicts in co-parenting.

The literature on the role children play in marriages is conflicting. Chaney, Mitchell, and Barker (2014) purport having children under the age of eighteen contributes to decreased marital happiness while in another, (Chaney, 2014) purport children can foster stability. For Whites, children were identified as a key component that increased commitment in their marriages. Therefore, it is implied that Whites who have children early in the marriage have a greater commitment not only to the marriage, but to the children. Since most African American households are managed by single women, who either by divorce, cohabitation, or the decision to be a single parent rear their children independent of the father, children in a marriage do not have the same effect on African American marriages.

Attachment

Attachment is often offered as a substantive explanation for marital failure or success. Intimate relationships are evolutionally important for survival and procreation; therefore, building relationships can be considered a fundamental need, providing a context for emotional experiences that shape the nature of interactions within the relationship. The ability to facilitate

closeness with others is grounded in one's attachment style. In Tinsley's (2016) research on adult attachment, self-esteem, and interpersonal African American relationships on 40 African American undergraduate students, attachment determined the differences in attachment styles are most notable between African American and White, but not within other African Americans. Of the 40-study participants, 58% were categorized as secure, 31.7% as avoidant and 7.3% ambivalent, not unlike the general population. Although the results did not evidence a relationship between self-esteem and relationship satisfaction, it does evidence a significant negative correlation between self-esteem and avoidant attachment, meaning the higher the avoidance, the lower self-esteem, and lower attachment. Albeit Africans Americans scored higher on avoidant attachment, this study is limited due to its use of a small convenience sample and therefore, cannot equivocally say that African American's avoidant attachment style is a contributor to their high divorce rate or low marital rate. Avoidance also signifies an uncomfortableness with closeness and dependency (Cirhinlioglu, Cirhinlioglu, & Tepe, 2018). However, positive self-esteem is related to secure attachment, supporting previous research on the importance of attachments influence on emotions, rational behavior patterns and future relationships (Tinsley, 2016) and secure attachment is indicative of closeness with God, others, and strong emotional experiences that support openness to emotional religious behavior (Cirhinlioglu, Cirhinlioglu, & Tepe, 2018).

Hadden, Smith, and Webster (2014) also examined the association between relationship quality and attachment. Using their developed Temporal Adult Romantic Attachment (TARA) model, the authors collected data from studies that measured relationship duration, attachment and relationship satisfaction, and commitment. The TARA model is used to describe and make

predictions about the dynamic interplay between adult attachment and relationship quality over time, making two key predictions: the relationships among insecure (anxious and avoidant) attachment and relationship satisfaction/commitment should be negative, becoming more negative for romantic relationships of longer duration, or the relationship between relationship duration and relationship satisfaction/commitment should become more negative over time, especially for people who are more insecurely attached (Hadden, Smith, & Webster, 2013). With romantic attachment mediating the link between family cohesion, avoidant attachment has proven more detrimental to marital satisfaction for clinically distressed couples than anxious attachment (Pedro, Riberio, & Shelton, 2015).

Using a meta-analysis, the TARA model also yielded a negative relationship between insecure attachment and relationship satisfaction. One interesting finding was that women were found to have more negative avoidant satisfaction correlations than men, suggesting that relationship duration plays a major role between anxious and avoidant attachment and relationship satisfaction. The author's main focus was to test the model they developed. In the process, additional evidence was uncovered to support relationship duration as a moderating effect on the overall quality of relationships across time. Attachment as a factor of relationship satisfaction (King & Allen, 2007), and commitment with insecure attachment (anxious-avoidant attachment) being associated with relationship satisfaction and commitment has a proven link. Cirhinlioglu, Cirhinlioglu, & Tepe (2018) contrast assimilate individuals with insecure or avoidant attachment as agnostics that avoid closeness to God and maintain their distance from others. Identifying the irrational beliefs that yield maladaptive behaviors and accompany insecure attachment that increases relationship dissatisfaction and interfere with emotional

closeness and intimacy would offer additional paths for interventions. In contrast, a couple with a secure attachment, strong family ties, and a positive relationship has greater implication for fewer psychological and physical health problems and improved emotional well-being. However, they are not the same for all, and their development is contingent upon the recollection of early relationships with caregivers rather than current perceptions of their attachment to their partner (Hadden, Smith, & Webster, 2014).

Secure attachment is synonymous with a positive view of self and others, lower anxiety and avoidance, and higher marital adjustment. The reverse is applied to insecure attachment, a negative view of self and others, high anxiety and avoidance, lower marital adjustment, and higher marital dissatisfaction. Attachment is a relationship-oriented trait that shapes emotions and behaviors in interpersonal experiences. The social competence and secure relationships with close friends in adolescence translate to more positive and less negative affective and emotional adult romantic relationships. During adolescence, romantic relationships that are plagued by incongruence between thoughts and action, begin to develop. It is during this time, youth learn to forgo their emotional needs and desires to avoid conflict and maintain close relationships but lead to poor mental health (Soller, 2015). O'Neal, Wickrama, and Bryant (2014) believe that stronger ties exist between African Americans and their families of origin than in their marital relationships. This regrettably reduces marital well-being and closeness, creating distance within the marital relationship. The emotional connectedness that is present in intimate relationships is developed when positive exchanges develop cognitive schemas and expectations that serve as intimacy, attachment security, self-esteem, emotional capital, trust, perceived social support,

relationship satisfaction and helped buffer negative emotional responses to individual and interpersonal stressors, fostering the exchange of positive emotions (Schoebi & Randall, 2015).

Weidmann, Leadermann, and Grob (2016) introduced self-esteem as a mediator between relationship satisfaction and personality, and results remained consistent in that individuals high in neuroticism had lower relationship satisfaction while those scoring high on agreeableness and conscientiousness had higher relationship satisfaction. High self-esteem also correlated with high relationship satisfaction. Neuroticism, a Big Five Personality Trait, is also associated with negative emotional responses and is consistently linked with relationship satisfaction. Although higher relationship satisfaction is believed to be synchronous with higher self-esteem, Weidmann, Ledermann, and Grob (2016) found self-esteem is and is not related to relationship satisfaction and research completed by Tinsley (2016) determined self-esteem is not a contributing factor to one's ability to be satisfied in relationships. Unfortunately, many of the assessments used by Weidmann, Lederman, and Grob (2016) to measure relationship satisfaction are self-report and such instruments always present limitations when used in studies.

Self-esteem and its peculiarity in relationship satisfaction are worth evaluating. Bale and Archer (2013) examined 187-young adults' self-perceived attractiveness together with measures of self-confidence in appearance and romantic relationships, body-esteem, and global self-esteem using the sociometer theory. Sociometer theory is interesting in that it views self-esteem as a regulator of interpersonal relationships and those with high self-esteem are believed to have higher romantic confidence leading to greater relationship satisfaction. Not surprisingly, those with higher self-esteem viewed themselves as more attractive than others. Additional mediating factors such as length of the relationship, gender, and confidence make it difficult to attribute

relationship satisfaction to a high perceived attraction that leads to increased self-esteem. Their study indicates that individuals who have a positive perception of self and others are secure in their relationships and more socially self-confident and successful. Self-esteem, however, is assumed to have a causal effect on self-perception, remaining sensitive to perceptions of self and serves as an interpersonal monitor of individual value or devaluation as a relational partner. Moreover, the satisfaction one experiences in their relationship are likely to be related to their style of attachment. Although self-esteem is not a variable that will be directly examined, it tends to correspond with neuroticism which is a characteristic of insecure attachment. In an examination of the Big Five personality traits, neuroticism is most consistently negatively linked to relationship satisfaction (Weidmann, Ledermann, & Grob, 2016). Couples high in neuroticism view ambiguity negatively, indirectly affecting marital satisfaction. For this research, neuroticism is examined on an individual level as a covariate that if present, could influence attachment.

Closeness to God. Humans are created for and were made to have relationships with God and others, experiencing greater satisfaction in their interpersonal interactions when a secure, safe, and stable attachment foundation is developed. Intimate relationships, therefore, can be considered a fundamental need. The first intimate relationship is with God. Jeremiah 1:5 states, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations." (New American Standard Bible) The ability to form secure adult relationships is therefore contingent upon the type of attachment formed in infancy. Our desire to establish close relationships through attachment is innate and can also influence our attachment in other relationships.

Closeness to God is premised after Bowlby's Attachment Theory and purports that children are predisposed to form attachments with others that are necessary for survival. These relationships are based upon a deep emotional bond that develops through proximity with the primary caregiver. If the caregiver adequately responds to the needs of the infant, the attachment is secure; however, if the caregiver fails to respond to the needs of the infant, their attachment is insecure, and behavior is anxious. Cirhinlioglu, Cirhinlioglu, & Tepe (2018) offer two hypotheses to explain the relationship between attachment and religious behaviors: direct correspondence and compensation hypothesis. Direct correspondence purports that securely attached individuals view people as caring, sensitive, and accessible, therefore, viewing God as caring, sensitive, and accessible and have both a secure attachment with their parents and God. In contrast, individuals with avoidant attachment maintain distance from others and turn away from religious doctrines and communities while anxious/ambivalent individuals seek strong emotional experiences and are more receptive to emotional religious behavior and experiences (Cirhinlioglu, Cirhinlioglu, & Tepe, 2018). The compensation hypothesis states that individuals without a secure attachment to their parents seek attachments from other places, including with God or another alternative attachment figure to provide emotional support, security, and peace (Cirhinlioglu, Cirhinlioglu, & Tepe, 2018). Additionally, insecurely attached individuals struggle with solving problems and effective communication, two necessary relationship skills.

If examining closeness to God according to parental marital status, children of married parents seemed to project attachment to their fathers and a lesser extent, their mothers onto their attachment to God (Murunga, Limke-McClean, & Wright, 2017). This could mean that children of divorced parents have lower parental attachment and seek attachment to God to compensate

for their lack of parental relationship. This further implicates marital dissolution is associated with the high anxiety and avoidant behavior seen in insecure attachments. Knabb (2014), indicates high anxious and high avoidant attachment to God predicts lower marital adjustment. This was the outcome of a study of 116 married Christians recruited from a convenience sample at a megachurch in California. In their examination of religion and marital adjustment and the role attachment to God plays in marital satisfaction, results indicate that spouses with higher anxious attachment to God were more likely to struggle to agree with their partner, feel satisfied with their partner, participate in activities together, and agree on the degree of emotional affection expressed in the marriage (Knabb, 2014). Their research adds to other literature that examines religious commitment as a moderator of the link between attachment avoidance, the relationship between religion, marriage, and attachment as a moderating variable, and attachment patterns in anxious and non-distressed relationships. However, as in the Knabb (2014) study, the research fails to address the positive relationship between religious commitment, attachment to God, and marital longevity for African American marriages.

Attachment to God recognizes that closeness between humans and God constitutes attachments and that the teachings of Christianity and other monotheistic world faiths often invoke parent-child imagery (Ellison, Bradshaw, Flannelly, & Galek 2014). Just like attachment theory, attachment to God incorporates the same distinguishing secure and anxious attachment styles. Research also suggest that secure attachment to God is correlated with higher levels of life satisfaction, and lower levels of depression, anxiety, loneliness, and psychological distress, while anxious attachment is associated with distress and neuroticism or symptoms of anxiety, depression, fear, anger, and low social support, all of which are significant predictors of life

satisfaction (Siedlecki, Salthouse, Oishi, & Jewsani, 2018). Loneliness, especially in older adults, tends to be reduced by social connectedness. As an adult transition to older adulthood, life circumstances and events contribute to the deterioration of marital quality (Hsieh & Hawkley, 2017). Inevitable social and health transitions can leave a spouse feeling lonely and isolated, increasing stress and diminishing marital quality. By maintaining cohesiveness through continued communication and emotional intimacy, older adults can minimize ambivalence and remain supportive. Stokes (2017) conducted a longitudinal study examining marital quality and loneliness in 932-older married couples in Ireland. Although married, intimate relationships failed to protect older couples against later life loneliness. However, as a subjective measure, loneliness may not persist over time potentially creating fluctuating appraisals of marital quality.

Religion

Religion represents a core set of beliefs and the formal practice of those beliefs through membership in a church or other faith-based institution (Boyd-Franklin, 2010). The diversity of religions within the African American culture includes common denominations such as Baptist, Catholic, African Methodist Episcopal (AME), Episcopal, Presbyterian, Church of God, Lutheran, and Muslim. Although not inclusive of all denominations within the African American culture, those denominations listed represent 87% of the African American population that identifies as belonging to a religious group, while others maintain no formal religious involvement (Boyd-Franklin, 2010). Despite the plethora of information available on the diversity of denominations within the African American community, this research focuses on religion according to the established definition of core beliefs and formal practice of those beliefs

through membership in a church or other faith-based institution (Boyd-Franklin, 2010), regardless of denomination.

The role religion plays in African American cultures cannot be ignored. In fact, from the days of slavery, religious institutions have played an intricate part in African American marriages and families, offering emotional and spiritual support (Chaney, 2014). Although the societal context has changed, the role of the church in African American communities has consistently remained a key source of support in the face of consistent structural disadvantages for African Americans. Even so, the church seems to have made little impact in encouraging and supporting the traditional family unit.

Religion is a valuable resource for families who look to religious organizations for moral guidance. It is positively associated with individual appraisals of relationship satisfaction and quality (Perry & Whitehead, 2016) and one's perception of overall relationship satisfaction. Goodman, Dollahite, Marks, and Layton's (2013) research on how religious couples may connect their religious beliefs and practices with commitment and coping within marriage evidence challenges are necessary to increase closeness with God and coping. Religious coping is multidimensional, encompassing comfort, stimulating personal growth, enhancing a sense of intimacy with God, offering meaning and purpose in life, and facilitates closes with God and others (Unantenne, Warren, Canaway, & Manderson, 2013). Marriages are, therefore, strengthened when couples rely on their beliefs, practices, and commitment to make difficult changes. In contrast, couples that utilize negative behaviors such as stone-walling and flooding impede the process of change, negatively impacting relationship satisfaction. Although these negative behaviors tend to dissipate with time, their use decreases marital longevity, especially

for African American couples (Hooper, Spann, McCray & Kimberly, 2017). Religion, again, can serve as guidance for couples offering support during challenges and marital crises. Greater social support leads to greater family satisfaction and a strong sense of meaning and purpose in life, which may be important to adults facing challenges in parenting and family crises (Hoverd, Atkinson, & Sibley, 2012). Implications are to obtain such support and moral guidance including nonreligious individuals considering joining a faith community. Although a deeply religious person may avoid initiating divorce, if involved in a divorce, according to Perry (2018), the shame and stigma divorce causes can result in disengaging from religious participation, regardless of the level of religiosity or support received.

The stressors African Americans are exposed to can disrupt family and marital relationships, impacting their quality of parenting than their White counterparts. Women, in particular, are impacted by psychological stress that can interfere with their willingness and ability to interact in warm supportive ways to their romantic partner (Sutton, Simons, Simons, & Cutrona, 2017). This negative appraisal of African American women's ability to effectively engage as caregivers leave more questions than answers regarding ways to mitigate the vulnerability that results from the stressful live circumstances that stretch across multiple domains. African Americans, like members of other races, desire well-educated, financially stable, affectionate, monogamous, and reliable mates (Vaterlaus, Skogrand, Chaney, & Gahagan, 2016). While commitment, love, trust, friendship, partnership, and covenant are realistic expectations of marriage, they are viewed as deficits among African American marriages. Whites, unlike African Americans, are believed to have considered divorce but used communication, turning to each other, religion, and professional help to work through their

challenges (Vertalaus, Skogrand, & Chaney, 2015). Also, religious beliefs tend to have underlying motives of the creation of marriages, families, and cooperation that consistently encourage reproduction (Szocik, 2017), that for Whites serves as a protective factor for marital satisfaction.

Scripture reading and study, family prayer, and rituals are religious practices that are linked to family satisfaction and closeness, proposing a link between family rituals and family worship and marital satisfaction. Marks, Tanner, Nesteruk, Chaney, and Baumgartner (2012) take a qualitative approach to exploring how religion influences marriage-based African American families, explaining why religious influences are meaningful. In their interview with thirty-African American couples (N=60), the authors report African Americans have lower marital satisfaction than other races, especially for women than males. Marital satisfaction tends to be higher when conflict is low, and the balance between work and home is established. They also suggest that divorce rates are lower and marital satisfaction and quality are highest among religiously involved couples of the same faith. As the most religious racial/ethnic group in the United States, African Americans rely on religion and spirituality to strengthen their marriage. Millett, Cook, Skipper, Chaney, Marks, and Dollahite (2018) ascribe Christianity as a core coping mechanism for African Americans and attributes faith as a source of coping and prayer for strength as influences of satisfaction. Although stress associated with discrimination, financial strain, poverty, early mortality, and health disparities remain challenges, the increased reliance on God in marriages not only increases African Americans' resilience when facing stress and crises, it strengthens the family, and by extension, the African American community.

Lazar (2016) examined the moderating effects of religiousness and relationship duration and its association between sexual and marital satisfaction. For religious women, sexual and marital satisfaction was moderated for shorter periods but did not change with the duration of marriage for secular women. Also, sexual and marital satisfaction tends to be stronger in the early stages of marriages, decreasing in later stages. This study offers high sexuality as a correlate of high marital satisfaction, and although the target population was Jewish women, it still signifies the importance religion plays in marital satisfaction and duration of the marriage. In a separate study conducted by Mitchell, Edwards, Hunt, and Poelstra (2015), religiosity promoted relationship stability in African American couples, with religious involvement increasing relational commitment in Christian, Jewish, and Muslim couples. Waite, Iveniuk, Laumann, and McClintock (2017) also identified sexuality as a key component of marital quality for many married couples. Those reporting high levels of sexual activity expressed greater marital happiness, high motivation, and high positivity toward sex, all necessary components for sexuality activity. Because of their commitment to one another, older adults in marital relationships have higher sexual satisfaction (Iveniuk, O'Muircheartaigh, & Cagney, 2016). It is the hurtful interactions that result from distorted cognitions and the dissolution of intimacy in relationships that lead to both spouses to increase their relationship ambivalence. This inevitably leads to both making cognitive and behavioral exits from the relationship and no longer desiring to remain committed (Hinson, Hargrave, Northrup, & Robertson, 2017).

In an examination of data previously collected from 20-Mainline Protestant families that participated in the American Families of Faith project, Moore, Hill, King, Palkovitz, Dollahite, and Marks (2018), describe praying together as a salient aspect of faith that strengthens

individual, marital and family relationships. Sacred religious beliefs that include shared religious practices are correlated with higher levels of overall marital satisfaction and commitment. When couples have access to the appropriate resources, including a relationship with God, to resolve marital conflict, they can increase marital commitment. This is consistent with Perry's (2016) finding of a perceived link between marital outcomes and religion; the more religiously committed, the greater marital stability and quality. Using data gathered from 2,610 participants in the Portraits of American Life Study, a nationally representative panel survey, Perry (2016), found a consistently shared link between religion and marital outcomes and a correlation between religious commitment and marital commitment. More religious spouses reported receiving an increased number of random acts of kindness, compliments, and affection and utilize less criticism. They are also characterized as more faithful, patient, and forgiving, promoting healthier interpersonal relationships with others and their marriage partner.

Satisfaction in African American Marriage

Men and women also have differing views on marriage and what constitutes satisfaction to sustain the marital unit over time. In a 2008 survey studying the predictors of marital satisfaction of African American and Black Caribbeans, Bryant, Taylor, Lincoln, Chatters, and Jackson (2008) posit that women view marital satisfaction according to their age, duration of the marriage, and financial strain while for men, education attainment was negatively correlated with marital satisfaction. This further supports Dixon's (2017), and Lincoln and Chae's (2010) evaluation of African American marital satisfaction that claims although marriage serves as a protective factor for African Americans, husbands of African American wives with more education and careers report lower marital satisfaction. Marriage offers the opportunity for

emotionally satisfying interactions that tend to leave couples happier with higher satisfaction of life. When examining the role emotions play in relationships, it is important to consider the impact emotions have on thoughts and behavior. Emotional stability, often referred as emotional intelligence, encompasses both ability and trait factors that when combined, provide information about the way a couple or individual expresses their emotions, perceives the emotions of others, and accurately processes these emotions to adapt to the situation, environment, or desired outcome. Emotions cannot be described as a single feeling or action but a multifaceted concept that drives behaviors, feelings, communication, and relationships. Although intangible, emotions create tangible bodily responses, thus adding to the complexity of its effect. These interactions influence intimate partner evaluations and expectancies of their relationship, ultimately setting the stage for new emotional responses in future relationship events (Schoebi & Randall, 2015).

Moreover, gender differences are present among older adults in their appraisal of marriage. Boerner, Jopp, Carr, Sosinsky, and Kim (2014) found that men were more satisfied in marriage than women. As the woman assumes the role of caregiver, men are less likely to identify and respond to marital difficulties. Older women are also more apt to rate marriages less favorable, identifying marital problems and be more confrontational. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to rate their wives as more nurturing. Later-life happiness and marital satisfaction increase after the successful launching of children. Bouchard (2018) posits spouses perceived stress level is influenced by parental satisfaction with the success of their children. The parent/child relationship is one of the most longstanding relationships one may experience in life. Polenick, Fredman, Birditt, and Zarit (2018) indicate the parent/child relationship has implications for adult relationships with negative relationship quality resulting when one's

parents are linked to lower life satisfaction. Parents that are less satisfied with their children's success are more likely to be stressed with residual negative impacts on the marital relationship.

Carr, Freedman, Cornman, and Schwarz (2014) offer a more in-depth examination of marital quality, satisfaction, and well-being in older adult marriages. Marital quality is defined according to emotional support, strain, and overall appraisal, while the negative aspects of well-being are defined as frustration, sadness, and worry (Carr, Cornman, & Freedman, 2016). Problematic marriages can be taxing on emotional well-being, and although marriage can serve as a protective factor, women and men use varying tools to maintain a positive assessment of overall life satisfaction. For women, caregiving equates to emotional well-being, which is also indicative of a rewarding life and marital quality. Men, in their passive approach, receive more emotional care and support from their wives than they provide. This results in the wife becoming increasingly frustrated and coupled with other stressful factors such as poor health, decrease marital satisfaction, and take an emotional toll on problematic marriages. High-quality couple relationships, on the other hand, are shown to have a positive impact on individual health and well-being and relationship quality, making a positive contribution to the overall well-being than relationship longevity (Chonody & Gabb, 2018).

The financial strain that results from low work opportunities add to the disproportionately impoverished African Americans and tends to lead to low marital satisfaction that can be exacerbated when entering marriage with children from previous relationships. The stress associated with the increase in responsibilities step-parenting creates additional emotional stress that can lead to anger, sadness, and hostility (Bryant, Wickrama, Bolland, Bryant, Cutrona, & Stanik, 2010). However, the couples' high levels of religiosity and collaborative interactions

tend to have stronger marriages than those with mismatched levels of religiosity. The positive relationship between relationship quality and relationship religiosity results in a lower divorce rate, higher marital rate, and commitment, further supporting the increased dedication to the romantic partner and higher levels of moral obligation to the relationship (Langlais & Schwanz, 2017). In a meta-analysis on the link between older couples' marital satisfaction over time, McCoy, Rauer, and Sabey (2017) used narratives to examine their interactional behaviors. Results indicated that satisfied couples tend to use more positive behaviors such as laughing and affection while less satisfied couples used negative behaviors such as anger and withdrawal and can wax and wane according to the couples' level of distress.

Marital Preparation

Marital preparation is a beneficial approach to increasing sustainable marriages and has been found to improve marital satisfaction, increase one's commitment to their spouse, and associated with a 31% decrease in divorce rate for Whites (Wilmoth & Blaney, 2016). One would believe African Americans could experience similar benefits; unfortunately, there are few studies on the effectiveness of marital preparation for African Americans as marital preparation is something that does not consistently occur. Instead, marital interventions that occur are a reactive approach to a recurring problem with clergy provide a majority of the interventions.

Separated by denominations, marital preparation and education are historically designed for and by the White, middle-class for the same population of couples (Barton, Futris, & Bradley, 2014). Although clergy provides more premarital education and preparation, Christian marriage preparation very often fails to give engaged couples a clear picture of the implications of marriage (Spaemann, 2014), with some couples deciding against marriage as a result of the

information they learn. In a non-experimental design of 82-engaged couples, Barton, Futris, and Bradley (2014) examined the impact of premarital education across couples with different levels of future marital risk utilizing the PREPARE program, a strength-oriented assessment designed to strengthen relationships. Categorized as either high or low risk according to couple-level information gathered from the outcome of the assessment, couple's satisfaction was contingent upon the risk of the couple. One unexpected outcome was evidenced to support the need to modify pre-marital preparation programs to match the risk of marital difficulty, including individual factors. Despite the increased focus on marital behavior among African Americans, few empirically based programs have been designed to foster marital and parenting processes specific to African American couples (Barton, Beach, Hurt, Fincham, Stanley, Kogan, & Brody, 2015). Developing a premarital education program to meet the needs of the individual would avoid a one size fits all approach to premarital education and preparation, especially since couples experiencing marital challenges may not benefit from premarital education programs at the same rate as couples without challenges. Additionally, if considering individual factors, caution should be exercised in defining and separating high-risk groups especially since a high-risk factor for one group may not apply to others, particularly since individual factors also account for the high divorce rate.

The high divorce rate has refocused the marital counselor's attention to preparing couples for successful and sustainable first marriages as well as preparing divorced couples for remarriage (Williams, 2007), thus making pre-marital preparation equally, if not more important, for those that have been previously married. Remarriages are further complicated with step-parenting, stepchildren, ex-spouses, and economic strain. While pre-marital counseling remains

a viable option for first marriages, it can reduce the prevalence of divorce by helping the couple learn to communicate more positively and less negatively, increased satisfaction and problem-solving skills, and decrease the likelihood of divorce up to five years following counseling (Stanley, 2001). In addition to addressing communication and conflict resolution, re-marital counseling must also address expectations, desires, blended families, ex-spouses, failure associated with the previous marriage, past mistakes, lessons learned, and financial struggles associated with child or spousal support.

Strengths of Marriage

African Americans who marry report greater marital satisfaction, have better emotional health and are physically healthier than those who remain single. Religious beliefs and practices can also influence marital quality. Parise, Gatti, and Iafrate (2017) purport that those with high religious involvement have higher marital quality when *we-ness* remains the central aspect of the relationship and commitment. Communication, another important characteristic, serves as the mechanism for couples to share feelings, thoughts, and offer support within the relationship. Perry (2016), in his study of 1,162 married Americans from a nationally representative sample, found that spouses with homogamous religious practices, broad religious tradition, or denominational affiliation and beliefs are less likely to separate, or divorce and their marriages are more satisfying for both partners. Therefore, spousal religiosity is positively associated with higher marital quality and stability, and a strong predictor of marital quality, especially for Asian, African American and Hispanic American, but less for White Americans. This suggests the religion-marriage link may differ across racial and ethnic groups, and its effect is associated with exposure to stigma, discrimination, and socioeconomic deprivation.

In a qualitative survey of 120-individuals (30-married couples and 30-cohabitating couples) examining emotional closeness, commitment, and relationship stability among African Americans, Chaney (2014) emphasized that African Americans think of commitment as developmental, suggesting progressive changes in commitment expectations throughout the relationship. Commitment was identified as the factor that kept African American couples in their relationships while emotions were identified as a contributor to diminishing commitment, which triggers negative thoughts that lead to decreased marital satisfaction. This factor is especially prominent among African American women. While commitment remained an important factor among all races, African Americans still have a higher divorce rate of first and subsequent marriages, and are less likely to marry. Additionally, differences in the quality of perceiving closeness among married and cohabitating couples failed to confirm married couples experience a higher level of emotional closeness than cohabitating couples, but unlike White Americans, African Americans' quality of perceived closeness is vulnerable to situations such as rearing a child out of wedlock or single parenting. Consequently, there are several limitations with Chaney's study, including a limited sample size that is neither representative of the population nor generalizable to all African Americans. Commitment, however, remained a contributing factor to marital longevity and satisfaction and is considered to increase as the relationship matures over time.

Resilience as an attribute is also another factor that can strengthen African American marriages. Resilience is not an innate factor, but develops from using a strength-focused approach to problem-solving. Margelisch, Schneewind, Violette, and Perrig-Chiello (2017) purport marital quality is stronger as couples age, not necessarily because of the duration of the

marriage, but because of an increase in their self-regulatory capacity and resilience. Psychological well-being acknowledges diversity, available support, and reliance on a higher power also build up resilience. Religion and the extent of its influence on the relationship process may be more important for some African American couples than for White couples. Dew, Anderson, Skogrand, and Chaney (2017) argue that using a strength-focused approach to study African American marriages forces the examination of resilience, unity, and building relationship bonds to predict relationship happiness. The positive role marriage has on well-being positions marriage as a benefit rather than a detriment. Compassionate love and a desire to selflessly enhance the well-being of another enables wives to obtain a level of satisfaction in their role as caregivers. Compassionate love is also linked to higher marital satisfaction for both the husband and wife. Unmarried individuals are associated with poorer health through the lifespan, having higher incidents of chronic illness, disability, and mortality (Rauer, Sabey, & Jensen, 2014) as African Americans face significant challenges in developing and maintaining stable, satisfying romantic relationships (Barton, Hurt, Futris, Sheats, McElroy, & Landor, 2017).

In their examination of overall life satisfaction, Kim, Lee, and Ji (2018) concluded psychological distress yields higher marital dissatisfaction, especially for those adults and older adults with disabilities. The importance of leisure and social activities and support not only highlights the impact of the well-known link between emotional well-being, but it also mitigates marital dissatisfaction. Poor psychological well-being may be detrimental to marital quality simply because married couples are more likely to experience stressful situations, which consequently may lead to a decline in psychological well-being (Idemudia & Ndlovu, 2013).

This is yet another examination of marital quality fails to explore the positive qualities that consider how African American couples can achieve the point of long-term relationship happiness.

Marital Satisfaction. There are a few programs that focus on the success of African American couples. Promoting Strong African American Families (ProSAAF) promotes couples, family, and youth well-being for African Americans. ProSAAF is based on the social learning theory and cognitive-behavioral approach to enhancing relationship functioning, co-parenting, and child-parent relationships (Barton, Beach, Wells, Ingels, Corso, Speer, Anderson, & Brody, 2018). Focusing on positive relationship processes, communication, daily hassles and burdens (Barton Beach, Lavner, Bryant, Kogan, & Brody, 2017), ProSAAF explored communication, relationship satisfaction and relationship confidence in marital relationships and the possibility of communication is a mechanism of change to enhance relationship quality in 346-single, low-income parents in the rural south. The outcome of the study yielded low-income African Americans lack knowledge of the mechanisms that can promote relationship quality, with relationship satisfaction commonly predicting changes in communication (Barton et al., 2017). Moreover, Villeneuvu, Dargis, Trudel, Boyer, Préville, and Bégin (2014) identify stress-induced daily hassles and marital functioning as having an impact on psychological distress in older adults in relationships and in a later study in 2015, acknowledged the changes that occur in later life and their potential negative impact on couple functioning. Although marital satisfaction can appear as a protective factor, unsatisfactory marital satisfaction remains a risk factor for marital psychological distress.

Another study using ProSAAF indicated a lack of trust as a common barrier to Black marriages (Barton, Beach, Hurt, Fincham, Stanley, Kogan, & Brody, 2016). Both studies offer promising information about African American marriages and suggest increasing trust and communication can be mechanisms that increase relationship satisfaction in African Americans. Nicoleau, Kang, Choau, and Knudson-Martin (2014) offer a different perspective on marital satisfaction by examining flexibility, relational focus, and stability in long-term couples. With the introduction of forgiveness, emotional expression, and dependability as factors for relationship stability. Narratives of the 1 to 2 hourlong interviews were coded and compared to ensure inter-rater reliability. Mutual decision making involves shared communication about what is and is not understood. Giving of personal time in which flexibility is exercised around time spent together and apart is identified as a way of establishing and maintaining the emotional connection in the relationship, while accommodation is more of a role that individuals assume in the relationship. Moreover, collective flexibility was identified as the key factor that leads to marital stability. This is especially important for couples with children and increases the relationship bond leading to relationship satisfaction. Unfortunately, the focus of the study was only on marital stability, thus requiring further examination of marital satisfaction. Not all participants were married as some were in long-term relationships and multiple factors introduced throughout the study indicated further research of the role of flexibility, gender, race, and ethnicity on marital stability as well as the three key variables: mutual decision making, accommodation, and giving of personal time. Relationship stability takes time, effort, and work and is more important to high-quality marital relationships and less evident in those relationships that are unstable and unsatisfying (Shafer, Jensen, & Larson, 2014).

Summary

The covenant relationship between God and human beings provides security to man. The certainty that God Himself is bound to the relationship while the covenant relationship between man and woman in marriage establishes an unbreakable, permanent, bond, fulfilling a lifelong relationship with constant unconditional love, reconciliation, and sexual purity (Du Plessis, 2012). Marriages that are considered sacred receive greater effort by the spouses to protect its sanctity. Marital sanctity, viewing marriage as a manifestation of God, is related to marital satisfaction in that it promotes feelings of love, forgiveness, and self-sacrifice that can contribute to satisfaction (Stafford, 2016). Many divorced couples will decide to remain single and date or cohabitate while others may decide to remarry. Much of the research on socioeconomic status and its impact on African American men establishing happy, healthy long-term committed relationships are a result of evaluating the socioeconomic status and low marital rate for African Americans. However, variables such as crime, specific cultural and environmental barriers that are isolated to a particular demographic area, and the link of slavery to the socioeconomic status of African Americans, cannot be ignored.

Over the past forty years, the expectation of marriage being a long-term permanent commitment has decreased while attitudes toward divorce have become accepted as the legal system is increasingly accommodating. Society's image of marriage is glorified in the media with sex, infidelity, and divorce by portraying it as favorable and exciting when in fact, divorce can have a drastic negative impact on the physical health, socioeconomic status, and emotional and mental well-being of the couple and their children (Stanley, 2001). Trivializing the decision to marry supposes couples' lack education, modeling, preparation, and knowledge needed to

sustain the marriage (Long, 2010). In contrast, there are interpersonal standards in achieving a personally fulfilling relationship. Higher interpersonal standards motivate people to exert higher levels of effort required to achieve more optimal relationship outcomes, leading to successful relationship maintenance efforts and higher overall relationship satisfaction (McNulty, 2016). This factor includes sexual satisfaction and is evidenced in a bi-directional relationship between higher sexual satisfaction positively predicting changes in marital satisfaction (McNulty, Wenner, & Fisher, 2016).

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

Overview

This quantitative survey examined the relationship between religiosity and closeness to God with marital satisfaction and longevity for married African American and White individuals. Multiple simple regression analysis was used to analyze data, using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the numerical data in terms of the central tendency of the distribution. Inferential statistics provided information on the data collected from the sample population. Caution was exercised in controlling for nuisance, confounding variables. Nuisance, confounding variables are uncontrolled, extraneous variables that create weaknesses in the study through their interaction with either the independent or dependent variable. Such interaction can change the outcome of the study, leading to meaningless results.

Data gathered in the study will aid in accepting or rejecting the null hypothesis; therefore, it is important to minimize both Type I and Type II errors. A Type I error occurs when the research rejects the null hypothesis when it is true. A Type II error occurs when the researcher fails to reject the null hypothesis when it is false. Failure to control for confound variables can result in a Type I or Type II error as well as threaten the internal validity of the study. Decreased internal validity will result if manipulation or another nuisance, confound variable occurs, making it difficult to determine if the change occurred in the independent variable. This is especially important as research suggests multiple variables contribute to African Americans' lack of marital stability. Failure to identify the primary variable not only decreases internal validity, but it also creates difficulties in determining if the change in the independent variable

was the result of manipulation or another nuisance, confounding variable. Not only could this result in the development of interventions and preventative methods that are not effective over time and cannot be generalized, but it could also yield results that are misleading and false.

Research Design

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the impact of religiosity and closeness to God, a proxy for attachment to God, in both White and African American couples on marital satisfaction and longevity. Multiple simple regression analysis is a statistical model for estimating relationships among two or more predictor or independent variables and one outcome or dependent variable. This study will include two independent variables, religiosity and closeness to God, separately examining their relationship with marital satisfaction and longevity, the two dependent variables, moderated by race, African American and White. The multiple outcome variables required multiple simple linear regression analysis to analyze the numerical data received from a sample of 65-African American participants and 280-White participants. Throughout the research, the length of the marriage is measured continuously, but longevity is defined as marriages that remain intact ten-years or more.

Independent Variable

The independent variables used in this research will be religiosity and closeness to God. As predictor variables, religiosity, and closeness to God will be measured using the Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI-10), the one question adaptation of the Religiosity Salience-Cognition Scale by proxy, respectively. All measures utilize a Likert rating scale to rate responses.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable used in this study will be marital satisfaction and longevity. Longevity, as an outcome variable, was measured by the researcher to determine the length of marriage for those participating in the research by asking, "How long have you been married to your current spouse in years?" This question required the research participant to provide the length of marriage in years and months.

Research Question

The following research examining the relationship between religiosity and closeness to God with marital longevity and satisfaction among married African Americans seeks to determine the following:

RQ1: What is the relationship between religiosity (X) and marital satisfaction (Y), and how is that relationship influenced by race (M: African Americans vs. White)?

H1a: Religiosity is positively related to marital satisfaction.

H1b: The relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction is stronger for African Americans than Whites.

RQ2: What is the relationship between religiosity (X) and marital longevity (Y), and how is that relationship influenced by race (M: African American vs. White)?

H2a: Religiosity is positively related to marital longevity.

H2b: The relationship between religiosity and marital longevity is stronger for African Americans than Whites.

RQ3: What is the relationship between closeness to God (X) and marital satisfaction (Y), and how is that relationship influenced by race (M: African American vs. White)?

H3a: Closeness to God is positively related to marital satisfaction.

H3b: The relationship between closeness to God and marital satisfaction is stronger for African Americans than Whites.

RQ4: What is the relationship between closeness to God (X) and marital longevity (Y), and how is that relationship influenced by race (M: African American vs. White)?

H4a: Closeness to God is positively related to marital longevity.

H4b: The relationship between closeness to God and marital longevity is stronger for African Americans than Whites.

Participants and Settings

Survey participants for the study were selected from a cluster sample of archival data of African American and White individuals, legally married to a mate of the opposite sex. All survey participants were at least eighteen years old, and their race is either African American or White. Survey participants that are under 18-years of age, divorced, single, cohabitating, engaged, or in a romantic relationship without the legal commitment of marriage are excluded from the survey population. A total of 345 individuals, 65 African Americans and 280 Whites, participated in the survey. For this research, the use of the archival data does not involve interaction with the survey participants or require the survey participants congregate in a similar location or as a group to complete the survey measures. The archival data cannot be linked to the original survey participants; therefore, consent is not required. The archival data used in this

research is panel data collected from previous surveys used in dissertation projects as well as a number of other measures for consistent data collection for research. Previously collected using Mechanical Turk (MTurk), an online crowdsourcing marketplace for data collection for research, the archival data is stored at Liberty University on a secure server.

Instrumentation

The quantitative survey is comprised of a preliminary screening tool to ensure survey participation criteria are met, the collection of demographic data, and four assessment tools. The preliminary screening tool will rule out individuals with a current relationship status of divorced, single, cohabitating, engaged, or in a romantic relationship without the legal commitment of marriage, and any individual under 18-years of age. Demographic data collected will include educational level, income, age, and length of the current marriage.

Careful, thoughtful attention was paid when selecting instruments used for data collection. Of concern was ensuring instruments collected met the objective of the research, provided relevant information specific to the research questions, ease in scoring, available within the archival data pool, and aligned with quantitative data of measurement, numerical comparisons and statistical inferences, and the discovery of facts. Additionally, assessment instruments were selected for their high internal consistency, validity, and reliability. Therefore, in addition to selecting archival data that met the criteria outlined in the preliminary screening tool and demographic data, this research will use the following instruments: Couples Satisfaction Index, Religious Commitment Inventory, and the one question adaptation of the Religiosity Salience-Cognition Scale.

Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI-16)

The Couples Satisfaction Index was originally designed as a 32-item scale to measure one's satisfaction in a relationship. A self-report measure using different response scales and formats, the Couples Satisfaction Index in either its original 32-item or reduced 16-or 4-item format (CSI-16) demonstrates excellent internal consistency, strong convergent validity with existing measures of relationship satisfaction, and correlates well with the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Funk & Rogge, 2007). For this research, the reduced 16-item index was used. Ratings range from 0-6, 5-0, and 0-5 responses that include "not at all true, a little true, somewhat true, mostly true, almost completely true, or completely true", "not at all, a little, somewhat, mostly, almost completely, or completely" or "extremely unhappy, fairly unhappy, a little unhappy, happy, very happy, extremely happy or perfect." Although research on diverse subgroups, including White and non-White participants is limited, the current research on the reliability and validity of the index does not indicate differences across subgroups that would prevent identifying distressed and non-distressed relationships.

Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI-10)

The Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI-10) is a ten-item brief screening instrument that measures one's daily involvement and adherence to religious beliefs, values, and practices. It is divided into two subscales, Intrapersonal Religious Commitment and Interpersonal Religious Commitment. Using a 5-point Likert Scale, research participants are asked to provide a response to statements according to their personal application of truth by selecting "Not at all true of me," "Somewhat true of me," "Moderately true of me," "Mostly true of me," and "Totally true of me" with "Not at all true of me" being one and "Totally true of me" being five.

Statements 1, 3, 4, 5, and 7 assess the Intrapersonal Religious Commitment subscale, while statements 2, 6, 9, and 10 assess the Interpersonal Religious Commitment subscale.

Religiosity Salience-Cognition Scale (one question adaptation)

The Religiosity Salience-Cognition Scale was developed by King and Hunt in 1975 to assess the prominence of religion in everyday thoughts and feelings. The original version of the scale was an 8-item Likert Scale that rated items from 1-7 with 1 meaning strongly disagree, and 7-strongly agree. Questions included:

- Religion is especially important to me because it answers many questions about the meaning of life;
- I try hard to grow in understandings of what it means to live as a child of God;
- My religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life;
- I frequently feel very close to God in prayer, during public worship, or at important moments in my daily life;
- I often experience the joy and peace which come from knowing I am a forgiven sinner;
- When you have decisions to make in your everyday life, how often do you try to find out what God wants you to do?;
- I believe in God as a Heavenly Father who watches over me and to whom I am accountable; and
- I try hard to carry my religion over into all my other dealings in life (King & Hunt, 1975, p.21).

Blaine and Crocker (1995), in their study of religious belief and well-being, removed three of the original items from the Religiosity Salience-Cognition Scale that reflected specific

belief content and yielding an adapted version using the same 7-point Likert Scale that rated items from 1-7 with 1-indicating strongly disagree and 7-indicating strongly agree. Questions include, "My religious beliefs are what lie behind my whole approach to life, my religious beliefs provide meaning and purpose to life, I am frequently aware of God in a personal way, I allow my religious beliefs to influence other areas of my life, and being a religious person is important to me." The internal consistency for their study was .94 (Blaine and Cocker, 1995), aligning with the .95 internal consistency for the original scale (King & Hunt, 1975). The Religiosity Salience-Cognition Scale was not administered for this study, but results from archival data collected in previous studies with identical sample populations to measure closeness to God through religious belief strength are available by proxy using the one-question adaptation, “To what degree does religion or faith affect your everyday life and decision-making.” Survey participants were asked to choose the best answer that describes their belief in God.

Procedures

A cluster sample selected from archival data was used to select heterosexual, married individuals over the age of eighteen. Consents reviewing the limits of confidentiality, the anonymity of research participants, and the overall goal of the survey are not necessary as the archival data cannot be linked to the participant. Individuals that are under the age of 18-years, divorced, single, cohabitating, engaged, or in a romantic relationship without the legal commitment of marriage are omitted from the archival data as participates in the study population. All participants identified through the preliminary selection participated in a survey via electronic means and were administered the following assessments: Couples Satisfaction

Index, Religious Commitment Inventory, and the one question adaptation of the Religiosity Salience-Cognition Scale.

The demographic data collected is viewed as nominal. Responses to the survey questionnaires was be measured as ordinal data; therefore, parametric statistics were used to analyze the means and variance of results. An independent samples *t*-test was used to evaluate the statistical significance of the scores according to the normal distribution. The *t*-test ratio wsbe used to view the difference between the means of scores for African Americans and Whites. The null hypothesis will be rejected if the difference between the means is statistically significant by determining if the calculated *t* exceeds the critical value for *t* at the .05 alpha. Using an alpha level of .05, the researcher will have a 5% risk of committing a Type I error (rejecting the null hypothesis when it should be accepted). Although 5% seems small, it is important to remember that additional nuisance variables will present when examining the data, including educational level and income, two identified barriers to marriage for African Americans. Each identified nuisance variable will be stated, and their presence identified in the study. Statistical power is improved when using a parametric test, thus increasing the possibility of obtaining a statistically significant outcome. Studies specific to African Americans tend to have smaller sample sizes. This study attempts to examine a larger number of participants while decreasing the possibility of a Type I or Type II error.

Protection of Participants

Archival data will be used for this research, therefore, all survey participants will be protected through anonymous data collection with no more than minimal risk, meaning the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater than

those ordinarily encountered in everyday life or during the performance of routine physical and psychological examinations or tests. The use of archival data does not qualify as human subject research and, therefore, does not require additional informed consent, recruitment, or submission for review and approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Data Collection

Archival data collected prior to the initiation of this research through web-based questionnaires and surveys using Mechanical Turk, an electronic survey platform used to conduct data validation, research, and survey tasks. This archival data served as the primary source, requiring analysis to answer the proposed research questions. Although not publicly available, the archival data can be linked to individuals by age, race, and marital status, but not disclose the identity of any participants. This will increase the convenience and ease of data collection and further ensure anonymity for survey participants and data accessed is for the sole purpose of this research. Additionally, the use of archival data increases the likelihood of obtaining a viable and significant sample population of African American participants. Viability and significance are important since one barrier in gathering research data is African American's lack of participation in research. All instruments were previously administered online using an online survey platform for administration. Originally collected for research purposes, the archival data is maintained in electronic storage for use by Liberty University students.

Data Analysis

Results from the quantitative research were analyzed and summarized using descriptive statistics via the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and PROCESS to estimate the direct effects in the two-way interaction. Descriptive statistics will be completed to examine

the relationship between closeness to God and religiosity and satisfaction and marital longevity. Correlations will seek to describe the nature of the relationship between closeness to God and religiosity and marital longevity and satisfaction. Multiple simple regression analyses will be completed to determine if either closeness to God, religiosity or both variables are predictors of marital longevity and satisfaction. Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) will further compare scores obtained from the Religious Commitment Inventory and the one question adaptation of the Religiosity Salience-Cognition Scale that measures religiosity and closeness to God in African Americans and Whites survey participants, offering additional explanations of the interaction between the predictor and outcome variables. Two, two-by-two factorial analysis of covariance will determine whether the interaction between closeness to God and religiosity and marital longevity and satisfaction is statistically significant and if so, indicate the strength of the effect. Use of the ANCOVA will also control for covariates such as neuroticism, a Big Five personality trait representing a negative link with relationship satisfaction, marital longevity and satisfaction, and maladaptive personality traits. However, lower neuroticism is concurrently linked to higher self-esteem which has positive effects on relationship satisfaction (Weidmann, Ledermann, & Grob, 2016). As a predictor of relationship outcomes, personality traits emphasize vulnerabilities that, if mal-adaptive, intensify relationship stress and negatively impact relationship satisfaction. Controlling for neuroticism and personality traits would decrease the possibility of error variance within scores. Results are displayed using graphs, tables, and charts.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

Few quantitative studies focus on African American marriage, especially those that assume a strength-focused stance toward satisfaction and longevity. Instead, the qualitative research that exists highlights divorce as the outcome for more than 50% of African Americans married for the first time (Long, 2010), an increased divorce rate of 60% for second and subsequent marriages (Falke and Larson, 2007), and socioeconomic status (Johnson and Loscocco, 2015), cohabitation (Barr, Simons, & Simons, 2015; Chambers & Kravitz, 2017), educational level (Holland, 2009, Quirk et al., 2014; Tinsley, 2016) and slavery (Birditt et al., 2010; Phillips, Wilmoth, & Marks, 2012) as barriers that negatively impact relationship quality, stability, satisfaction, and longevity. Slavery and its lingering deleterious influence on African American marriages restrict social and economic opportunities and maintain a risk for the destruction of partner and parental ties (Phillips et al., 2012). However, the continual rise in the divorce rate, declining marriage, and lack of resources to counteract the factors that increase marital dissolution for African Americans presents an opportunity to change the focus toward characteristics that achieve sustainability in African American marriages.

The purpose of this research is to explore religiosity and closeness to God, as a proxy for attachment to God, as strengths that increase marital satisfaction and longevity in African American marriages. Religiosity is more than a measurement of religion; it is the concept of God that extends to one's individual religious beliefs, behavior, and practices. Closeness to God is used as a proxy for attachment to God and represents an individual's relationship with God. Established in the theory of attachment, closeness to God represents the intimate relationship an

individual has with the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God (Bradshaw and Kent, 2018).

The sample population for this research included 65 African Americans and 280 Whites for a total survey sample of 345 participants. As previously explained, the archival sample was separated into two clusters according to their race. This enabled the examination of race, as a moderating variable that influences the strength of the causal relationship between religiosity and satisfaction, religiosity and longevity, closeness to God and satisfaction and closeness to God and longevity. Although religious beliefs and practices shape relationships differently across racial groups, few studies examine the moderating effects of race on marital outcomes especially across racial groups (Perry, 2016). This is important since African Americans have the highest divorce rate, and race is associated with socioeconomic disadvantages, discriminate life experiences such as those associated with slavery, and related attitudes and beliefs that endorse marriage-like arrangements such as cohabitation, all barriers to sustainability.

Research Questions

This research was grounded in the Emotional Focused Couple's Theory that assumes emotional responses and interactional patterns are reciprocally determining. Emotion is a key element in the definition and the redefinition of close relationships, and intimacy is best viewed through a process of attachment (Johnson, Hunsley, Greenberg, & Schindler, 1999); therefore, individuals that fail to receive the emotional responsiveness necessary for securing bonding with their parent figure during infancy become stuck in negative patterns that prevent emotional bonding in adult relationship. Further reference is gathered from Bowlby's Attachment Theory

that offers a normative framework for understanding close relationships through their function and how and why they dissolve (Heffernan, Fraley, Vicary, & Brumbaugh, 2012).

Attachment shapes interpersonal relationship such that securely attached individuals tend to have higher levels of life satisfaction and secure, close, nurturing relationships with others. Insecurely attached individuals have difficulty developing and maintaining close relationships. Proximity and religiosity in relationships have important implications for sustaining, satisfying African American marriages. For that reason, four major research questions were explored:

RQ1: What is the relationship between religiosity (X) and marital satisfaction (Y), and how is that relationship influenced by race (M: African Americans vs. Whites)?

RQ2: What is the relationship between religiosity (X) and marital longevity (Y^1), and how is that relationship influenced by race (M: African Americans vs. Whites)?

RQ3: What is the relationship between closeness to God (X^1) and marital satisfaction (Y), and how is that relationship influenced by race (M: African Americans vs. Whites)?

RQ4: What is the relationship between closeness to God (X^1) and marital longevity (Y^1), and how is that relationship influenced by race (M: African Americans vs. Whites)?

Independent variables religiosity and closeness to God as a proxy for attachment to God were measured by the Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI-10) and the one question adaptation of the Religiosity Salience-Cognition Scale, respectively. Dependent variables, satisfaction, and longevity were measured using the Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI-16) and by asking one question, “How long have you been married to your current spouse in years?”, respectively.

The strength of the relationship between closeness to God and religiosity and satisfaction and longevity is believed to be stronger for African Americans than Whites; thus, the influence race has on satisfaction and longevity was also examined.

Neuroticism, a personality trait, is a strong predictor of relationship satisfaction and, individuals that possess this personality trait have a greater sensitivity to negative events, experience less positive social interactions, and have few positive social interactions (Schaffhuser, Allemand, & Martin, 2014). The possibility of individuals participating in this study endorsed neuroticism, and as a result, negatively affecting the outcome of the study requires steps are taken to minimize the possibility of Type I or Type II error; therefore, neuroticism was treated as a covariate and was controlled throughout the study.

Hypotheses

Religiosity as the Independent Variable

Two of the major research questions are related to religiosity, specifically examining the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction and religiosity and marital longevity. Each research question is also moderated by race as a variable that affects the strength of the relationship between religiosity and satisfaction and religiosity and marital longevity. For that reason, the following hypotheses were developed:

Hypothesis 1a: Religiosity is positively related to marital satisfaction.

Hypothesis 1b: The relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction is stronger for African Americans than Whites.

Hypothesis 2a: Religiosity is positively related to marital longevity.

Hypothesis 2b: The relationship between religiosity and marital longevity is stronger for African Americans than Whites.

Closeness to God as the Independent Variable

There are two major research questions related to closeness to God: Is there a relationship between closeness to God and marital satisfaction? Is there a relationship between closeness to God and marital longevity? Data collected from the CSI-16 and length of the current marriage were used to address the two questions specific to closeness to God and individual responses for the length of marriage were captured for the total sample of 345 participants (N = 345) to address the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3a: Closeness to God is positively related to marital satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3b: The relationship between closeness to God and marital satisfaction is stronger for African Americans than Whites.

Hypothesis 4a: Closeness to God is associated with marital longevity.

Hypothesis 4b: The relationship between closeness to God and marital longevity is stronger for African Americans than Whites.

Descriptive Statistics

The archival dataset used in this study was comprised of one sample in a series of independent samples collected as part of a research effort that explores a wide range of issues including relationship satisfaction, sexual behavior, religiosity, and a large number of other measures depending on the focus of each particular sample. The sample population used in this survey included only those that had completed all measures in this survey. The following demographic data were collected: age, sex, income, and educational level. Once the data

screening was complete, a total sample of 345 survey participants over the age of 18 participated in this survey. Of the total sample population, 65 (19%) identified as African Americans, and 280 (81%) identified as White. The average age for African Americans was 33.98 and 38.25 for Whites. Educational level and socioeconomic status were examined as potential covariates, interacting as a confounding variable on satisfaction and marital longevity. However, education and income did not significantly influence the results. In fact, for this survey, African Americans had a higher educational level than Whites.

Data received from the archival dataset was screened to ensure the data was usable, reliable and relevant. Survey participants were excluded if they did not answer any of the study items, for any participant who took less than 1.5 seconds per item, and individuals who responded with the same response successively more than 20-times. One survey participant was removed because they indicated 216-years as the length of the marriage. All survey participants in this study answered the Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI-10), Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI-16), the one question adaptation of the Religiosity Salience-Cognition Scale and provided the length of marriage. Of the 65 African Americans, 65% were male, and 35% were female, and of the 280 Whites participating in the survey, 38% were male, and 62% were female. The average length of marriage for African Americans participating in this survey was 7.4 years versus an average of 10.4 years for Whites.

Results

The individual responses of the survey questions were used to create an electronic dataset in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), data analysis software. Hayes (2018) PROCESS (v3.4) was used to compute the conditional process analysis. The results are

displayed in tables. A two by two-factor analysis of covariance was performed to determine if the relationship between religiosity and satisfaction, closeness to God and satisfaction, religiosity and longevity, and closeness to God and longevity was stronger for African Americans than Whites. Neuroticism was treated as a covariate and the nature of the relationship neuroticism had across each factor was also examined.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Version 26 with PROCESS macro for SPSS, (v3.4). The Couple's Satisfaction Index (CSI-16) was completed by all survey participants. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of reliability was calculated yielding a raw reliability score of .681 and a standardized score of .736 for African Americans and a raw reliability score of .766 and a standardized score of .802 for Whites; thus, indicating the CSI-16 is a reliable measure of relationship satisfaction among married African American and White individuals. The Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI-10) excluded 8-survey participants as a result of a list-wise deletion to remove missing data for a total administration of 337 survey participants. Although the implication is that deleting missing data would improve Cronbach's Alpha of reliability, including the missing items would not significantly reduce the reliability of the measure. Therefore, the zero proportion of variance between the raw score (.973) and the standardized score (.973) for Whites and the raw score (.936) and standardized score (.936) for African Americans supports the RCI-10 as a reliable measure of one's daily involvement and adherence to religious beliefs, values, and practices. Because Cronbach's Alpha of reliability measures how closely a group of items is related, no measurement is offered on the one question adaptation of the Religious Salience-Cognition Scale or the duration of the marriage, as both are

single-item measurements. For this survey, a Cronbach's Alpha of .61 or below would indicate poor reliability.

Pearson Correlation Coefficient. Pearson correlations were completed to examine the relationship between religiosity and satisfaction, religiosity and marital longevity, closeness to God and satisfaction and closeness to God and marital longevity. The correlations and significance levels are shown in Table 1. The analysis showed no correlation between religiosity and satisfaction ($r = .050$; $p < .005$) and no correlation between religiosity and longevity ($r = -.007$; $p < .05$), therefore, there is no evidence of a positive relationship between religiosity and marital longevity as indicated in H1a and H2a.

Regarding closeness to God and satisfaction and closeness to God and marital longevity, the analysis showed a positively correlated relationship between closeness to God and satisfaction ($r = .112$; $p < .05$), but no correlation between closeness to God and longevity ($r = .008$; *ns*). There is evidence to support individuals that scored high in closeness to God also scored high in satisfaction, as indicated in H3a. Evidence does not support a positive relationship between closeness to God and longevity as indicated in H4a.

Table 1
Pearson's r, Means, and Standard Deviations

	1	2	3	4	5
Religiosity	1				
Satisfaction	.050	1			
Closeness to God	.709**	.112*	1		
Longevity	-.077	-.014	.008	1	
Neuroticism	.008	-.286**	-.058	.110	1
Mean	2.61	59.17	2.80	9.84	11.03
SD	1.349	15.381	1.505	8.298	3.364
Cronbach's α	.973	.764			.618

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Simple Regression Analysis. The result of the simple regression analysis are shown in Table 2 and detail the relationship between religiosity and satisfaction and religiosity and satisfaction moderated by race, religiosity and longevity and religiosity and longevity moderated by race, closeness to God and satisfaction and closeness to God and satisfaction moderated by race, and closeness to God and longevity and closeness to God and longevity moderated by race. Neuroticism is also included as a covariate.

Religiosity. The first research question inquired whether the relationship between religiosity and satisfaction, and if a relationship exists, the relationship is positive and stronger for African Americans than Whites. Figure 5 represents the hypothesized conceptual model, and Figure 6 represents the statistical model of the interaction between religiosity and satisfaction moderated by race.

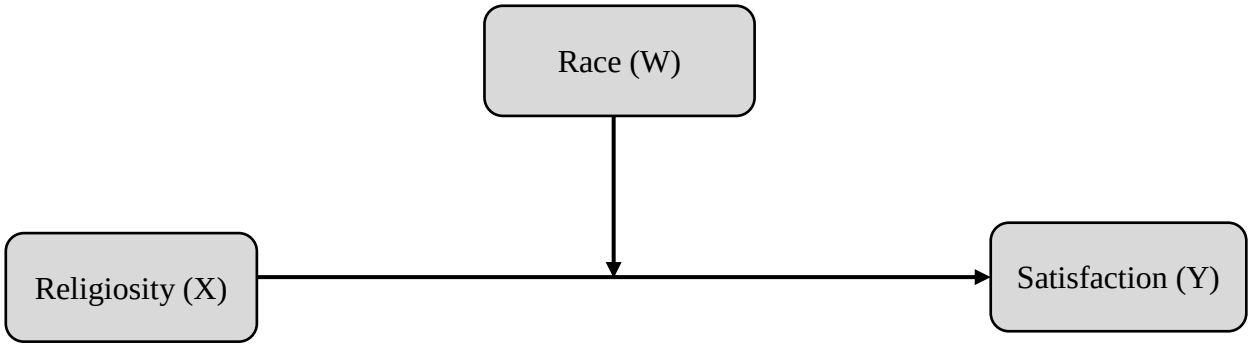

Figure 5. Hypothesized conceptual model explaining the perceived relationship between religiosity and satisfaction moderated by race.

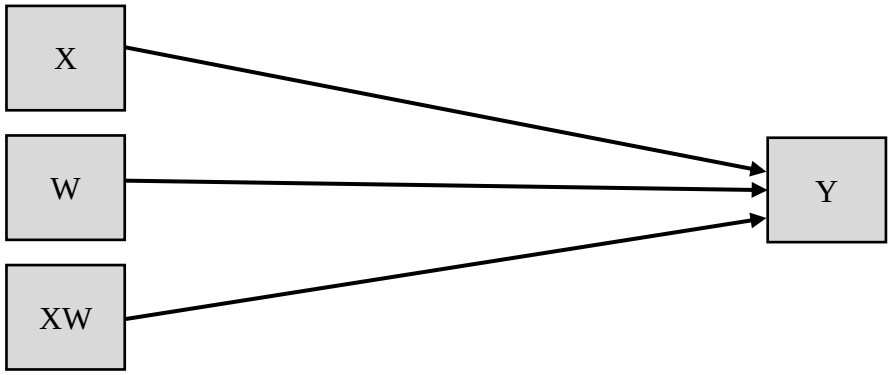

Figure 6. The hypothesized statistical diagram explaining the perceived relationship between religiosity and satisfaction moderated by race.

Religiosity and satisfaction. Hypothesis 1a states there is a positive relationship between religiosity and satisfaction; however, the zero-order correlation between religiosity and relationship satisfaction was not statistically significant (see Table 1), and as shown in Table 2 while controlling for race, neuroticism, and the interaction between race and religiosity, religiosity did not account for a significant amount of variance in relationship satisfaction. Hypothesis 1a was not supported. Hypothesis 1b states the relationship between religiosity and satisfaction would be stronger for African Americans than Whites. Table 2 shows the interaction

of race and religiosity is not statistically significant predictor of relationship satisfaction (*p* = .138*)*. Hypothesis 1b is not supported.

The second research question asks about the relationship between religiosity and marital longevity, and if a relationship exists, the relationship is positive and stronger for African Americans than Whites. Figure 7 represents the hypothesized conceptual model, and Figure 8 represents the statistical diagram of the interaction between religiosity and marital longevity that is moderated by race.

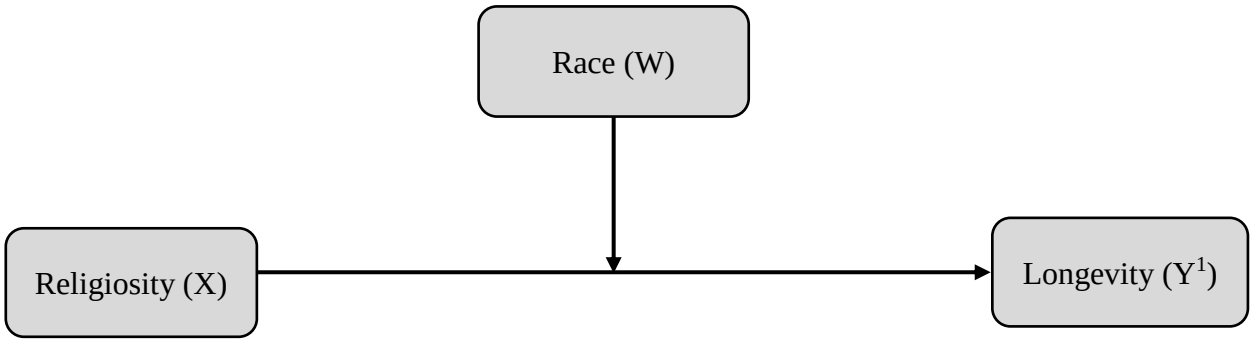

Figure 7. Hypothesized conceptual model explaining the perceived relationship between religiosity and longevity moderated by race.

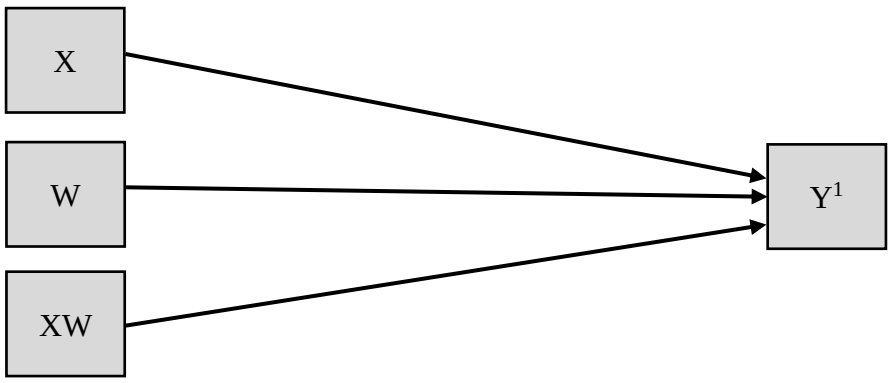

Figure 8. The hypothesized statistical diagram explaining the perceived relationship between religiosity and longevity moderated by race.

Religiosity and longevity. Hypothesis 2a states a positive relationship exists between individual scores in religiosity and marital longevity; however, the zero-order correlation between religiosity and longevity was not statistically significant (see Table 1), and as shown in Table 2, while controlling for race, neuroticism, and the interaction between race and religiosity, religiosity did not account for a significant amount of variance in longevity. Hypothesis 2a was not supported. Hypothesis 2b states the relationship between religiosity and longevity would be stronger for African Americans than Whites. Table 2 shows the interaction of race and religiosity is not a statistically significant predictor of longevity (*p = .896)*. Hypothesis 2b is not supported.

Closeness to God. The third research question asked about the relationship between closeness to God and satisfaction, and if a relationship exists, the relationship is positive and stronger for African Americans than Whites. Figure 9 represents the hypothesized conceptual model, and Figure 10 represents the statistical model of the interaction between religiosity and satisfaction moderated by race.

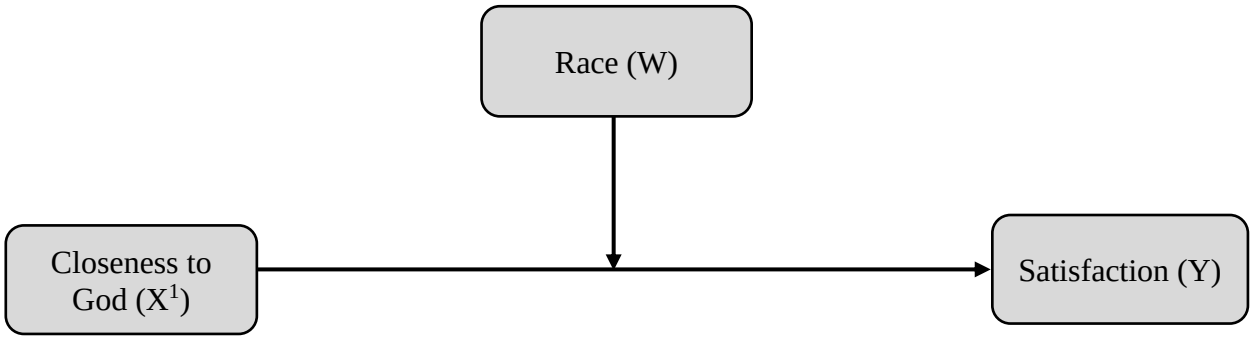

Figure 9. Hypothesized conceptual model explaining the perceived relationship between closeness to God and satisfaction moderated by race.

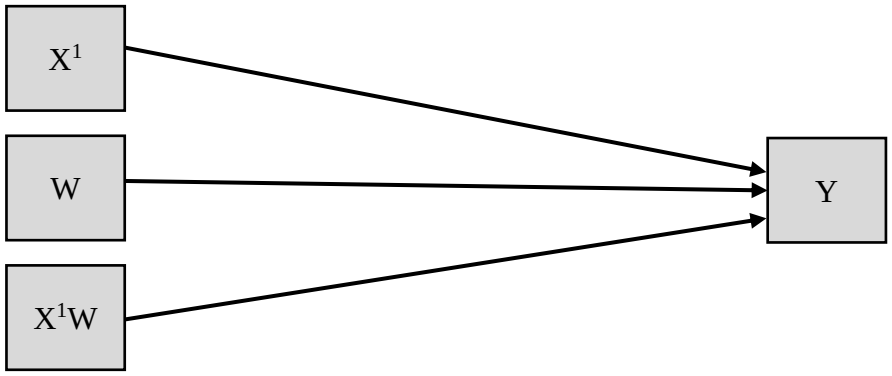

Figure 10. The hypothesized statistical diagram explaining the perceived relationship between closeness to God and satisfaction moderated by race.

Closeness to God and Satisfaction. Hypothesis 3a states there is a positive relationship between closeness to God and marital satisfaction. The zero-order correlation between closeness to God and relationship satisfaction was statistically significant; the correlation coefficient was relatively weak, accounting for just over 1% of the variance in relationship satisfaction (see Table 1). However, as shown in Table 2 while controlling for race, neuroticism, and the interaction between race and closeness to God, closeness to God did not account for a significant amount of variance in longevity. Hypothesis 3a was partially supported. Hypothesis 3b states the relationship between closeness to God and marital satisfaction is stronger for African Americans than Whites. Table 2 shows the interaction of race and closeness to God is not statistically significant predictor of relationship satisfaction (p = .985*)*. Hypothesis 3b is not supported.

The fourth research question asks about the relationship between closeness to God and marital longevity, and if a relationship exists, the relationship is positive and stronger for African Americans than Whites. Figure 11 represents the hypothesized conceptual model, and Figure 12

represents the statistical diagram of the interaction between closeness to God and marital longevity that is moderated by race.

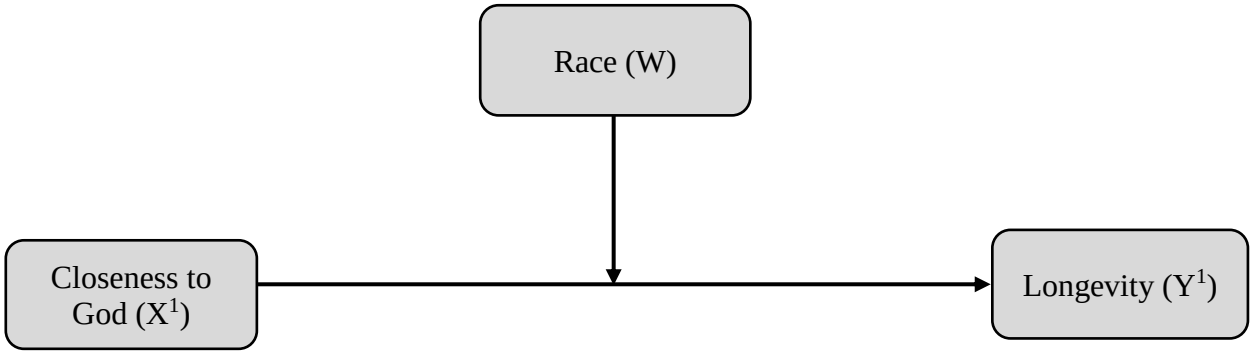

Figure 11. Hypothesized conceptual model explaining the perceived relationship between closeness to God and marital longevity moderated by race.

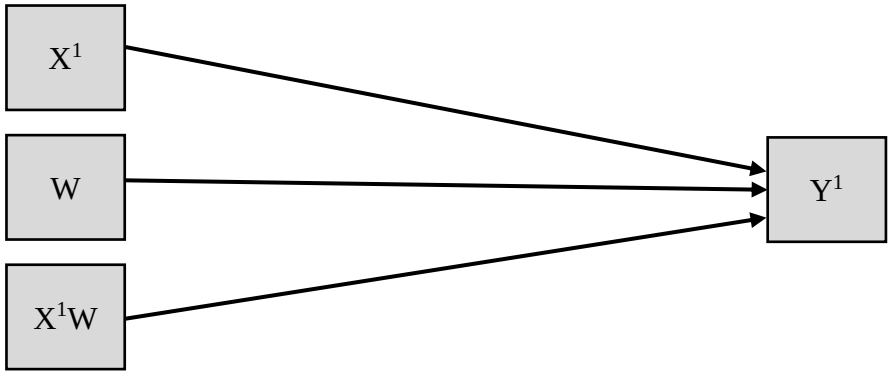

Figure 12. The hypothesized statistical diagram explaining the perceived relationship between closeness to God and marital longevity moderated by race.

Closeness to God and longevity. Hypothesis 4a states there is a positive relationship between closeness to God and marital longevity; however, the zero-order correlation between closeness to God and longevity was not statistically significant (see Table 1), and as shown in Table 2, while controlling for race, neuroticism, and the interaction between race and closeness to God, closeness to God did not account for a significant amount of variance in longevity.

Hypothesis 4a was not supported. Hypothesis 4b states the relationship between closeness to God and longevity would be stronger for African Americans than Whites. Table 2 shows the interaction of race and closeness to God is not a statistically significant predictor of longevity (*p* = .826*)*. Hypothesis 4b is not supported.

Table 2

Conditional Process Analysis for Simple Regression Analysis

Source	*b*	*se*	*t*	*p*	*LLCI*	*ULCI*
Couples Satisfaction Index: R =.311; R^2 = .097, *MSE* = 216.211; F = 9.112; p < .001						
Religiosity	4.302	2.334	1.843	.066	-.288	8.892
Race	7.111	7.423	9.58	.339	-7.490	21.713
Religiosity X Race	-3.007	2.022	-1.487	.138	-6.985	.971
Neuroticism	-1.278	.236	-5.414	<.001	-1.743	-.814
Longevity: R = .180; R^2 = .033; *MSE* = 67.404; F = 2.861; p < .024						
Religiosity	-.170	1.303	-.131	.896	-2.733	2.392
Race	-2.689	4.145	-.649	.517	-10.842	5.463
Religiosity X Race	-.005	1.129	-.004	.997	-2.226	2.216
Neuroticism	-.270	.132	-2.048	.041	-.529	-.011
Couples Satisfaction Index: R = .309; R^2 = .095; *MSE* = 216.576; F = 8.953; p < .001						
Closeness to God	-1.024	1.743	-5.87	.557	-4.453	2.405
Race	-2/592	4.627	-5.60	.576	-11.693	6.509
Closeness to God X Race	-.027	1.423	-.019	.985	-2.825	2.771
Neuroticism	-1.271	.236	-5.379	<.001	-1.736	-.806
Longevity: R = .180; R^2 = .032; *MSE* = 67.423; F = 2.837; p < .024						
Closeness to God	.107	.973	.110	.913	-1.807	2.020
Race	-2.467	2.582	-.955	.340	-7.544	2.622
Closeness to God X Race	-.174	.794	-.219	.826	-1.735	1.387
Neuroticism	-.267	.132	-2.027	.043	-.527	-.008

Neuroticism. As an individual characteristic that is often negatively correlated with attachment and relationship satisfaction, neuroticism is treated as a covariate that if present,

could change the relationship between religiosity and satisfaction, religiosity and longevity, closeness to God and satisfaction, and closeness to God and longevity. Weidmann, Leadermann, and Grob (2016) assert that individuals high in neuroticism had lower relationship satisfaction, and as a characteristic of insecure attachment, those high in neuroticism would have difficulty establishing close relationships with others and God. As expected for a covariate, neuroticism was a significant predictor in all four of the models examined.

Means, Standard Deviation, and *t*-test. To further understand the results, two-tailed *t*-tests were conducted to examine the differences between African Americans and Whites. As shown in Table 3, the results are consistent with the literature indicating the average duration of marriage for African Americans is 7.415 years (SD = 5.49), almost 3-years less than Whites (M = 10.403; SD = 8.73). The difference between the mean longevity scores was significant (t = 2.638; $p = .009$). The independent *t*-test also compared the difference between the mean scores of religiosity, closeness to God and satisfaction.

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviation, t-ratio, and p-value

Variable	African Americans *M*(SD)	Whites *M*(SD)	*t*	p
Religiosity	3.651(.96)	2.369(1.31)	-7.426	<.001
Closeness to God	2.85(1.41)	3.28(1.51)	2.115	.035
Longevity	7.415 (5.49)	10.403(8.73)	2.638	.009
Satisfaction	57.169(10.65)	59.642(16.26)	1.169	.243

African Americans scored significantly higher on religiosity than Whites. These results are consistent with the research literature that suggests that religiousness is more important to African Americans than Whites.

Summary

Religiosity and closeness to God, and the positive relationship with marital satisfaction and longevity was explored in a sample of 345 married adults, comprised of 65 African Americans and 280 Whites. This survey used four measures: Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (RCI-10) to measure religiosity, one question adaptation of the Religiosity Salience-Cognition Scale to measure closeness to God, Couples Satisfaction Index-16 (CSI-16) to measure satisfaction, and the one question "How long have you been married to your current spouse in years?" to determine longevity. Pearson Coefficient Correlations examined the relationships among religiosity, closeness to God, satisfaction and longevity. Multiple regression analysis examined the impact of predictor variables religiosity and closeness to God on the outcome variables, satisfaction and marital longevity to answer research questions: What is the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction and how is that relationship influenced by race (African Americans versus Whites)?; What is the relationship between religiosity and marital longevity and how is that relationship influenced by race (African Americans versus Whites)?; What is the relationship between closeness to God and marital satisfaction, and how is that relationship influenced by race (African Americans versus Whites)?; and What are the relationship between closeness to God and marital longevity and how is that relationship influenced by race (African Americans versus Whites)?

The outcome of hypothesized relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction, religiosity and longevity, closeness to God and satisfaction and closeness to God and longevity determined if a difference in scores in satisfaction and longevity between racial groups was present and if so, did African Americans score higher than Whites. Therefore, all research questions sought to uncover statistical evidence of a positive relationship between religiosity and closeness to God and marital satisfaction and longevity, particularly for African Americans. Although African Americans average mean score on religiosity was higher than Whites, the hypothesized relationship between religiosity and satisfaction and religiosity and longevity and moderated by race was not found. Furthermore, the relationship between closeness to God and satisfaction showed a weak correlation. but no relationship was found between closeness to God and longevity. No interaction was supported in the moderation of race, specifically, African Americans high scores in religiosity and closeness to God was not positively correlated with higher scores in satisfaction and marital longevity. The continuous presence of neuroticism influenced all models examined in this study. A detailed discussion of these results is included in Chapter Five, Conclusions.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

Historically, studies exploring the barriers of enduring African American marriages assume a deficit perspective by focusing on the problems that result in marital dissolution. African Americans have the highest divorce rate in the United States (Chaney, Shirisia, & Skogrand, 2016), but they are also the most religious racial/ethnic group (Millett, Cook, Skipper, Chaney, Marks, & Dollahite, 2018). Religiosity, defined as the beliefs and practices of religion, and closeness to God, viewed as the conceptualization of secure attachment, influence family interactions, perceptions about marriage, beliefs, marital quality and satisfaction. Since religion is one of the most prominent characteristics of many strong African Americans families (Millett, Cook, Skipper, Chaney, Marks, & Dollahite, 2018), continuing to focus on the negative perils of divorce seems counterintuitive to sustainable African American marriages.

The purpose of this quantitative study was to investigate the importance of religiosity and closeness to God in marital relationships, and its effect on marital satisfaction and longevity among races, specifically married African American and White adults. As an alternative to the qualitative research on the challenges of African American marriages, this quantitative research hypothesizes that Religiosity and closeness to God predict greater marital satisfaction and longevity for African Americans than Whites. Using an archival dataset, 345 married individuals were identified as adults at least 18-years old, married, and completed the Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (RCI-10), Couples Satisfaction Index, the one question adaptation of the Religious Salience-Cognition Scale, the general question “How long have you been married to your current spouse in years?” Of the 345 selected for the sample, there were 65 African

Americans and 280 Whites. The RCI-10 was administered to measure religiosity, CSI-16 was administered to measure satisfaction, one question adaptation of the Religious Salience-Cognition Scale to measure closeness to God and a general question asking the length of marriage to assess for the longevity.

Discussion

This research is grounded in two main theories: Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy, a systems theory that combines a humanistic-experiential approach and incorporates adult attachment and attachment and bonding and Bowlby's Attachment Theory. Research shows both theories offer evidence of attachment, emotional response and positive relational interactions in satisfying relationships. Research on Emotional Focus Couples Therapy states the lack of emotional investment precludes establishing and maintaining close bonds in relationships and with women traditionally assuming the responsibility for such bonds, a level of faith is necessary to survive the fluctuating emotional and intimacy levels experienced in close relationships (Johnson, Hunsley, Greenberg, & Schindler, 1999). Bowlby's Attachment Theory not only offers insight into secure attachment and insecure attachment, it describes affectional bonds developed between children and their care-givers as the impetus for bonds in adult relationships, indicating securely attached children become securely attached adults with significantly greater relationship satisfaction and insecurely attached children, without a viable attachment figure, become adults with avoidant or anxious attachment styles with lower levels of satisfaction and intimacy (Pereira, Taysi, Orcan, & Finchman, 2014).

An additional theory that is often viewed along with Bowlby's Attachment Theory and attachment to God is the Compensation Theory. The Compensation Theory states that when

secure attachment between the child and primary caregiver is not formed in childhood, a secure attachment may form with God as an alternative attachment figure (Pereira, Taysi, Orcan, & Finchman, 2014). Further, activities such as religious behavior, practices, activities, and beliefs may positively affect romantic relationships and the ability to form and maintain close relationships.

Summary of Findings and Implications

The analysis of data from the sample recruited from MTurk, an electronic crowdsourcing website, used in this survey was reported in Chapter Four. The desired sample for both African Americans and Whites was a minimum of 75. However, the desired minimum to meet the research requirements for African Americans fell short. Historically, African Americans have maintained minimal participation in surveys. Research offers various explanations, including distrust, fear, or the belief the results would have no direct benefit to the African American race (Hughes, Varma, Pettigrew, & Albert, 2017). Another belief for this low participation rate which has carried over from slavery, is that you do not talk about problems, especially to people outside the household, including professionals, or the best person to talk to about your problems is God (Varterlaus, Skogrand, & Chaney, 2015). Although a sample of 65 African American survey participants is considered sufficient, a larger sample would offer more accurate information about the target population for data analysis as well as the identification of confounding variables.

The unique characteristics of the sample used in this survey are not indicative of most samples used in examining African American marriages. Considering the challenges with obtaining an adequate research sample of African American participants, previous research used

convenience samples from African American churches and religious organizations in rural areas in the south or made general implications about marital satisfaction and longevity that were not applicable to the African American race. This research hoped to capture a diverse population of African Americans with varying socioeconomic statuses and educational levels that represented the general population instead of a smaller sample that would yield unreliable results.

There are several interesting facts about the sample used in this survey. First, the sample of African Americans had income and educational levels that exceeded the sample of Whites. This could be an unexpected consequence of using archival data. Bulanda and Brown (2007) described the socioeconomic disadvantages between Blacks and Whites as pronounced, stating Blacks in two-parent households where at the least the father is employed, are 23% poorer than Whites, Blacks education attainment is 5% lower than the 85% educational attainment of Whites, and Blacks have lower income levels than Whites, having an average income for full-time work of $32,686 compared to $42,707 for their White counterparts. Also, 65% of the African American survey participants were male. This might falsely suggest African American survey participation is higher for males than females, and income and educational levels exceeding Whites are indicative of an upward trend in socioeconomic status and educational attainment for African American males. Further evaluation of the income and educational levels of African Americans and Whites is needed to definitively support an upward trend in socioeconomic status and educational level that has African Americans surpassing Whites. The sample of Whites (280) in this study was considerably larger than the sample of African Americans. Whereas equal sample size may yield different mean scores and variance among scores to determine if the outcome is statically significant, unequal sample sizes create challenges in accurately identifying

confounding variables, effects the assumptions for ANCOVA, impacts statistical power and increases the potential for a Type 1 error.

Research Question 1

Research question one investigated the positive relationship between religiosity and satisfaction and the influence of race. Literature supports a positive relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction. Therefore, it was hypothesized that the positive relationship between religiosity and satisfaction would be stronger for African Americans than Whites. Hypothesis 1a was not supported. Therefore, the relationship between religiosity and satisfaction is not statistically significant. Hypothesis 1b addressed the relationship between religiosity and satisfaction, suggesting the relationship was positive and stronger for African Americans. African Americans' average religiosity score on the RCI-10 was higher than Whites. The relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction does not, however, imply a positive correlation.

Religiosity represents active involvement, belonging, and practicing of religion (Parise, Gatti, & Iafrate, 2017). African Americans value religiosity and view it as a covenant with God. Given the research on the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction, it was hypothesized a high score on religiosity would also indicate a high score on marital satisfaction. This hypothesis was not supported. The relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction was not statistically significant to conclusively say a positive relationship exists. Considering the sampled used for this research is archival, survey responses of one's level of religiosity and marital satisfaction are self-report measures that reflect a point in time instead of feelings over a period of time and may impact the outcome of this measure.

Hypothesis 1b stated the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction was stronger for African Americans. Research literature supports hypotheses 1b that African Americans with high religiosity scores tend to have high appraisal of marital satisfaction, ameliorating the deleterious effects of financial strain and psychological distress (Phillips, Wilmoth, & Marks, 2012). However, hypothesis 1b was not supported in the research. In fact, Whites' mean scores for satisfaction exceeded the mean scores for African Americans. Again, the use of an archival data set cannot be ruled out as a possible reason the results are contrary to previous literature.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 examined the positive relationship between religiosity and longevity. It was hypothesized that individuals that scored high on the RCI-10 had marriages with longer durations, specifically high religiosity is positively correlated with longer marriages for African Americans than Whites. Literature supports behaviors and beliefs such as attending church and prayer as those that define religiosity and have a positive impact on marital stability, romantic relationship quality, and maintenance over time (Langlais and Schwanz, 2017; Olson, Marshall, Goddard, & Schramm, 2016; Perry, 2016). Literature also supports gender differences between religiosity and longevity for husbands and wives, identifying wives' high religiosity as more important to marital quality and stability over time than husbands, while other studies indicate the husbands' religiosity is the greater predictor of positive marital outcomes (Perry, 2016). The positive relationship between satisfaction and longevity was not supported in this research.

Hypothesis 2a indicated there is a positive correlation between religiosity and longevity. Research published by Phillips, Wilmoth, and Marks (2012) included a qualitative approach at

filling a gap in the literature by identifying prayer, church attendance, and beliefs as large role-players in marital longevity in African American marriages. Like other qualitative research, the sample sizes were small, lacked variability, and was limited to African American churches. This research assumed a quantitative approach using a sample derived from archival data. The findings were not significant in that a positive relationship between religiosity and marital longevity was not identified.

Hypothesis 2b argued the relationship between religiosity and longevity was stronger for African Americans. The simple regression analysis does not indicate a statistically significant, positive relationship between religiosity and enduring African American marriages. In this research, African Americans' mean score on religiosity was higher than Whites. This is supported in literature, however, literature also finds that factors such as slavery contribute to the differences in religiosity between African Americans and Whites. Although this study did not explore the positive and negative impact of slavery on religiosity, African Americans' reliance on religious beliefs and practices during slavery would imply resilience, especially since slavery created forced separation of fathers from their families, prohibited marriage, and forced modification to the gender roles within the household. This research did not discover a positive relationship between religiosity and longevity, specifically for African Americans.

The outcome of hypotheses 1a and 1b contradict literature that identifies religiosity as an individual protective factor for African American marriages. Most research used relationship measures such as spousal agreement and religiosity (Olson, Marshall, Goddard, & Schramm, 2016; Perry, 2015), religiosity and marital commitment (Goodman, Dollahite, Marks, & Layton, 2013; Moore, Hill, King, Palkovitz, Dollahite, & Marks, 2018), and religiosity and spirituality

(Vaterlaus, Skogrand, Chaney, & Gahagan, 2016) instead of religiosity as the individual measure used in this research. Therefore, future research examining religiosity as a measure of satisfaction may consider incorporating additional measures that assess the dimensions of religiosity, specifically those that focus on the beliefs, practices, and religious involvement, expanding beyond marital satisfaction to include life satisfaction. Life satisfaction is highly correlated with self-esteem, low psychological distress, and high marital satisfaction, but is susceptible to lower assessment of life satisfaction if neuroticism is present (Bradshaw & Kent, 2018). Further, church attendance has also been linked with greater levels of life satisfaction for African Americans, especially couples that share the same beliefs with more than weekly church attendance (Marks, Tanner, Nesteruk, Chaney, & Baumgartner, 2012).

African Americans' average score on the RCI-10 were higher than the mean score for Whites. The differences in scores were expected and reflected research identifying African Americans as the most religious ethnic/racial group (Millett, Cook, Skipper, Chaney, Marks, & Dollahite, 2018). Since slavery, ceremonies that incorporated religious practices and beliefs and other elements of Christianity solemnized moral marriages for African Americans at a time when marriage was prohibited. Religiosity, therefore, represents relationship permanence, fosters commitment, and increases marital longevity (Lambert and Dollahite, 2008). Thus, indicating the link between religion and relationship is reciprocal offering validation and support to African American marriages.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 asked about the relationship between closeness to God and marital satisfaction, and if a relationship exists, how is it influenced by race. Whites, when compared to

African Americans, scored higher on closeness to God. This was an unexpected outcome, especially since, although married longer, Whites scored lower on religiosity. Research supports individuals with insecure attachment use religious practices and rely on religious beliefs as coping mechanisms; thus, a causal relationship between closeness to God and religiosity is perceived, the inability to form close relationships does not preclude someone from participating in religious practices and beliefs that are indicative of religiosity (Pereira, Taysi, Orcan, & Fincham 2013).

Hypothesis 3a examined the positive relationship between closeness to God and marital satisfaction. Attachment bonds with God correspond with the attachment bonds formed with others and secure attachments correlate with couples reports of relationship happiness (Brackett, Warner, & Bosco, 2005; Pedro, Ribeiro, & Shelton, 2015). While marital satisfaction is a subjective measure of relationship functioning, research consistently supports individuals with secure attachment have higher marital satisfaction. This is supported in this research by a weak correlation between closeness to God and marital satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3b asserted the positive relationship between closeness to God and marital satisfaction is stronger for African Americans than Whites. Results do not support a positive relationship between closeness to God and marital satisfaction. Further, the difference between the mean scores on satisfaction for African Americans and White scores was not statistically different. Consequently, a weak correlation is supported between closeness to God and marital satisfaction, race does not change the strength of the relationship. Therefore, the relationship between closeness to God and satisfaction moderated by race is not supported in this research.

Research Question 4

The fourth and final research question included in this study inquired about the relationship between closeness to God and marital longevity. These interactions were examined to determine the influence of race and if the relationship was stronger for African Americans than Whites. Individuals scoring high in closeness to God are believed to have relationships that are warm, trusting, and reliable. In contrast, low closeness to God represents relationships that are distant, cold and unsupportive. Moreover, secure attachment to God is associated with higher levels of life satisfaction and lower levels of psychological distress and neuroticism (Bradshaw and Kent, 2018). Therefore, examining closeness to God as a conduit of marital longevity is worth exploring, especially if it leads to increased satisfaction and longevity and reduced marital conflict and life adversity for African Americans.

Hypothesis 4a states individuals with high closeness to God have longer durations of marriage. Marital dissolution is a negative outcome of marriage. As a lifelong commitment, covenant marriage is based on religiosity as a foundation and reflects a husband and wife's total devotion as one being. Further, establishing the level of closeness seen in covenant marriage requires the ability to develop and maintain close relationships. This is challenging for individuals who do not demonstrate the most direct and salient means such as prayer, church attendance, and other religious practices to attain closeness to God (Hatch, Marks, Bitah, Lawrence, Lambert, Dollahite, & Hardy, 2016).

Hypothesis 4b asserts if the relationship between closeness to God and longevity was stronger for African Americans than Whites. Whites' mean scores on closeness to God exceeded those of African Americans. This finding is intriguing given the importance of the Black church

and its role as a resource for the African American community. Additionally, religiosity and church attendance are viewed as coping resources for African Americans when managing difficult life events (Bryant, Wickrama, Bolland, Bryant, Cutrona, & Stanik, 2010). However, although literature supports that African Americans are more religious than other ethnic/racial groups, this does not equate to higher attachment or closeness to God. This research did not find a positive correlation between closeness to God and longevity that was stronger for African Americans. Statistically, hypothesis 4b is not supported.

Overall Findings

This research did not support a linear relationship between religiosity and satisfaction, religiosity and longevity, and closeness to God and longevity. A weak correlation was identified between closeness to God and satisfaction. As discussed in Chapter Four, the analysis of the means and standard deviations for each variable supported research that Whites have longer duration marriages than African Americans. As expected, this research supports literature that identifies African Americans have higher religiosity. From the days of slavery, religiosity has remained an important element of African American families, and as expected, the average score on religiosity was higher for African Americans than Whites. The average mean scores for closeness to God were higher for Whites than African Americans. This result was a surprise. The surprise was, if viewing closeness to God, according to Bowlby's Attachment Theory, African Americans score higher on insecure attachment, having higher levels of avoidant attachment than Whites (Tinsley, 2016). Additionally, higher religiosity does not always equate to higher scores in closeness to God, especially since religiosity is a description of beliefs and behaviors, and closeness to God focuses more on close, interpersonal relationships.

Although the outcomes of three of the four relationships examined are not statistically significant, they do raise questions about the use of archival data, selected measures, and the possibility the variables selected for this study are not the strongest predictors of marital satisfaction and longevity for African Americans. As a researcher, the challenges of archival data can outweigh the benefits. Using archival data in research is a non-intrusive, convenient and cost-effective, way to conduct research. By collecting data over a period of time, archival data can also offer a larger sample size without the concern of biased responses. It also enables flexibility in identifying ideas for research by using the same data to running multiple studies. Archival data may also be unreliable to answer a specific research question. Even with literature supporting the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction, this research yielded conflicting results. Because archival data was used, errors in data collection are eliminated. This consequence suggests problems with the sample, or the measures selected. Second, new research using archival data is limited to the measures administered in previous research. Although an adequate sample population is available through the archived data, the research question, variables used, and their measurements are contingent upon the information available in the dataset. If the desired measure is not available, an alternate measure may be selected that may require modification of the original research question.

In this research, closeness to God was examined as a proxy for attachment to God and measured by a one question adaptation of the Religiosity Salience-Cognition Scale. There is a possibility using an alternate measure to assess both anxiety and avoidance such as the Attachment to God Inventory (AGI), would yield a different outcome on the religiosity measure. A 28-item self-report measure using a Likert Scale format, the AGI assesses attachment through

a dimension of anxiety (concerning potential abandonment and lack of intrinsic lovability) and avoidance (avoidance of intimacy and compulsive self-reliance). The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS-7), a measure of perceived quality of relationship functioning and adjustment in married and cohabitating couples, is highly correlated with the CSI-16 and would offer additional insight into satisfaction, cohesion, and agreeableness in relationships.

Religiosity was viewed in terms of involvement and adherence to religious beliefs, values, and practices; however, such practices are assessed individually without consideration of spousal religiosity and its positive association with marital quality and stability (Perry, 2016). Therefore, instead of focusing on religious salience at an individual level, expanding the study to include spouses may yield more meaningful results. However, including spouses adds an additional challenge with using archival data and conducting quantitative research, especially since data was collected individually without identifiable information to connect married couples as a unit. This could also mean a qualitative study would be more appropriate to discover trends in African American couples with high marital satisfaction and longevity.

Additional Findings

The damaging effects of interdependence, the educational discrepancy between African American women, men and the nation, and the negative causal effect the Black Church can have on African American marriages were three additional findings discovered through literature and the outcome of this research. First, the interdependence that exists between a husband and wife is one of the defining elements of marital relationships (O'Neal, Wickrama, & Bryant, 2014). Particularly for African Americans, the removal of the husband from the home during slavery caused extended family and non-family members to invest time and resources to fill the gaps in

the father's absence. Catapulting the mother to the position of head of household added additional stress to the family. As a result, the forced interdependence that caused spousal separation within the African American family may also contribute to the decreased level of marital satisfaction and closeness seen within African American families.

The education discrepancy between African American men and women puts the mean educational level for African American women higher than men (U. S. Census Bureau, 2018). However, for this research, 65% of the African American sample was comprised of men, and this sample's education level exceeds that of Whites that participated in the study. This inconsistency in research is not supported by the U. S. Census Data that reflects the mean education level for African American women exceeds that of African American men and the national average.

The Black Church serves as a resource for African American families to receive spiritual, emotional, and community support. The Black church also serves as a source of spiritual sustenance, an outlet for social expression and organizational basis for the community (Bryant et al., 2010), a place of solidarity against economic injustice and racism positioning itself as a political platform, and a place that meets the religious and spiritual needs at both an individual and family level (Chaney, Shirisia, & Skogrand, 2016). Literature also supports a positive relationship between church attendance and marital satisfaction. The Black Church serves multiple functions for African Americans. It is a marital resource for African American couples that serves as a predictor of commitment in marriage (Lambert & Dollahite, 2008), imposes a hierarchy of power that supports the husband as a dominant figure within the family, placing the woman in a position of weakness, and maintains traditional family gender rules. Unfortunately,

the Black Church remains silent on subjects such as cohabitation and children born prior to marriage, identified barriers to sustainable African American marriages.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study is the lack of quantitative research that focuses on religion and assumes a strength-focused approach toward marital longevity and satisfaction for African Americans. The methodology of conducting quantitative research to examine and measure independent and dependent variables that offer an explanation of marital longevity and satisfaction as the premise to accept or reject a hypothesis seems plausible, however, the majority of literature on African American marriages is based upon qualitative research. This qualitative research is conducted in rural areas with small convenience samples that are not reflective of the general African American population. Additionally, research focuses on the demise of African American marriages and uses samples that are too small to yield reliable, generalizable results.

The archival data used in this research consisted primarily of self-report questionnaires that measure thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Each measure, except for the length of the marriage, relied on the survey participant to provide an accurate report in response to the questions. While self-report surveys collected information that is based on thoughts, feelings, and behaviors at a particular moment, archival data was also specific to a particular moment, but does not provide insight into perceptions that can occur over time. The use of archival data also means this research is unable to control the data collection process, making it impossible to ignore the possibility the previous research is unreliable, or the initial data collection process was flawed, resulting in incomplete measures. The archival dataset also provided a sample that offered variability and was sufficient for this research. As a cost-effective method of conducting

research, using archival data offers the opportunity to explore other confounding variables and consider alternate outcomes without collecting additional data. However, there is a possibility the archival dataset does not contain the desired measures suggesting qualitative research would offer additional information in the examination of religion and sustainable and satisfying African American marriages.

Recommendations for Future Research

African Americans scored higher on religious commitment and lower on closeness to God. It is unclear if these phenomena can be linked to the generational direct or indirect effects slavery has on religious commitment and the everyday beliefs, thoughts, and feelings about religion. Future research might seek to examine whether such a link exists, and if so, will religious practices associated with slavery increase religious commitment, but not beliefs, thoughts, and feelings about religion that are prominent in those with high religious salience or closeness to God.

The lack of quantitative surveys examining religiosity, closeness to God, and positive outcomes for African American marriages present as a gap in research that can be filled by continuing to examine variables that increase sustainable marriages and the discovery of protective factors that can mitigate marital dissolution. The sample size should also include African Americans that represent the diverse African American population. Narrowing the gap between qualitative and quantitative surveys in research occurs by conducting more quantitative surveys that could yield tangible statistical evidence on African American marriages and how to increase their duration.

This research did not explore family dynamics as a link between slavery and the interdependence that is seen among African Americans. Although mentioned as a barrier to sustainable marriage, slavery has both direct and indirect impacts on the family. The strong sense of injustice African Americans feel as a result of slavery creates mistrust in others, including a spouse, that increases the need to hide vulnerabilities. As a catalyst for the destruction of the family, partner, and parental bonds, slavery remains an obstacle to marital stability among African American couples. Furthermore, it is unknown whether religiosity and closeness to God can mitigate the impacts of slavery that would positively benefit the African American couple.

Summary of the Study

The Black Church particularly has been a source of support for African Americans since slavery and continues to serve as a moral compass. However, the Black Church as a structure is not responsible for preventing marital dissolution, and religious beliefs, practices, and commitment must be considered to counteract the challenges that create marital distress and eventual demise. Covenant marriage symbolizes the perichoresis unity designed by God to represent the oneness between God and the church. The conjugal marriage focuses on bearing and rearing children, but without the oneness that mirrors the Trinity and life-long commitment. Cohabitation, socioeconomic status, education, indirect effects of slavery are identified in the literature as barriers for African American marriages. These sociological factors are cultural and are derived from the perspective that African Americans are insubordinate to White Americans. This position of inferiority leaves African Americans with few opportunities, including specific programs that offer education and resources, to counteract the socioeconomic deficits that tend to contribute to marital instability.

Religiosity, church attendance, and spirituality serve as protective factors for African American marriages. In spite of the plethora of research on African American marriages, a majority focuses on African American marriages that end in divorce, children born out of wedlock, cohabitation, unmarriageable men, low socioeconomic status, economic challenges and low educational levels. This research sought to offer a positive approach to marital stability by focusing on two of the identified strengths of African American marriages: religiosity and closeness to God. In a study of 345 African American and White adults, religiosity and closeness to God were explored as having a positive relationship with marital satisfaction and marital longevity and whether or not this relationship was stronger for African Americans than Whites. The following research questions were addressed: What is the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction and is this relationship influenced by race; what is the relationship between religiosity and longevity and is this relationship influenced by race; what is the relationship between closeness to God and marital satisfaction and is this relationship influenced by race; and what is the relationship between closeness to God and longevity and is this relationship influenced by race.

Religiosity was measured by the Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (RCI-10), closeness to God was measured by the one question adaptation of the Belief Salience-Cognition Scale, marital satisfaction was measured by the Couples Satisfaction Index-16 (CSI-16), and longevity was measured by a one-question item, "how long have you been married to your current souse in years?" Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) compared scores obtained from the RCI-10 and the one question adaptation of the Religiosity Salience-Cognition Scale that measures religiosity and closeness to God in African Americans and Whites survey participants,

offering additional explanations of the interaction between the predictor and outcome variables. An analysis of covariance examined the interaction between closeness to God and religiosity and marital longevity and satisfaction.

The hypothesis 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, 3b, 4a, and 4b were rejected yielding no statistically significant results to support a positive correlation between the variables, even when moderated by race. Hypothesis 3a showed a weak correlation between closeness to God and satisfaction. Neuroticism was explored as an individual characteristic and measured across all simple regression analyses. Negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction, neuroticism is one of the most prominent predictors of relationship dissatisfaction and divorce (Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2000). For this research, the presence of neuroticism interacted with the correlation in each simple regression analyses. Awareness of the direct and indirect effects of neuroticism on marital outcomes for African American couples fosters a greater understanding of the inter-and intrapersonal factors that influence marital satisfaction and longevity and aids in the development of educational resources and tools that positively influence sustainable and satisfying African American marriages.

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