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Walden University 2023

### Abstract

Perceptions of African Americans Toward Premarital Counseling

by

Kimberly A. Brown

MA, Liberty University, 2011
BS, Old Dominion University, 2003

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Human Service

Walden University

August 2023

#### Abstract

Research regarding premarital counseling programs has shown that premarital counseling can help individuals enhance the quality of their relationship and lower the likelihood of divorce after marriage. The research problem addressed in this study was that couples who do not participate in premarital counseling have lower relationship satisfaction and higher rates of divorce, and Black couples participate in premarital counseling less often compared to White couples. Using a generic qualitative research design, data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with five African American married couples who had not participated in premarital counseling to find out their perceptions as these were the reason behind not participating. Data was analyzed through the lens of Katz's functional attitude theory using Colaizzi's seven-step process for conducting thematic content analysis. The themes discovered were that the African American couples interviewed believe that premarital counseling has benefits, there are barriers to premarital counseling for African American couples, and premarital counseling should be better marketed to African American couples. Potential social change implications of the study include providing additional knowledge that could help professionals develop educational materials for African Americans about the benefits of premarital counseling to increase participation and relationship satisfaction and decrease divorce rates.

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#### Dedication

Lord, thank you! I would like to dedicate this study to the Almighty for putting gifts in me that have definitely made room for me. Without faith and trust in God, this would not have been possible. I owe everything to Him!

To my daughter, Ebony, thank you for always being that quiet inspiration. It is because of you that I have come to this monumental moment. You encouraged me without words, and you believed in me when I did not believe in myself. I love you for life!

To my parents, Charles and Virginia Brown, who instilled in me to always work hard and complete what I start. I am thankful for your love and guidance.

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To Drs. James and Lisa King, my godsons, John-Alexander and James II, thank you all for believing in me and keeping me on track. Your prayers and belief that I could do all things through Christ held me during those moments when I wanted to give up. I am forever grateful.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

#### Introduction

African American women have the highest rate of divorce in the United States compared to women from other racial groups (Payne, 2018). Researchers who have studied premarital counseling programs have shown lower rates of premarital breakups and a lower likelihood of divorce among couples who complete such programs (Engl et al., 2019; Epozdemir et al., 2017; Randles et al., 2016). In addition, premarital counseling can help individuals enhance the quality of their relationships (Parhizgar et al., 2017; Simpson et al., 2017). Despite the high rate of divorce among African Americans and the positive impact of premarital counseling programs on lowering divorce rates, African Americans are underrepresented in the literature on premarital counseling (Wilmoth & Blaney, 2016). This study was focused on the perceptions of premarital counseling among African Americans. Findings from this study will expand the existing body of literature on the perceptions of premarital counseling among African Americans.

In this chapter, I introduce the topic of the research, then provide the background to the study and the research problem. Next, I present the purpose of the study and the research questions. A brief discussion of the theoretical framework of the study is presented, followed by a discussion of the nature of the study, definitions of terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations. This is followed by a discussion of the significance of the study and a conclusion summary.

#### **Background**

Divorce rate refers to the number of marriages that conclude in divorce per 1,000 marriages. The overall divorce rate in the United States is 16.1 divorces per 1,000 women (Schweizer, 2018). In 2017, a total of 1,075,500 women were divorced (Schweizer, 2018). Several researchers have noted that divorce rates vary by racial/ethnic groups (Clyde et al., 2019; Demir-Dagdas et al., 2017). Researchers have found that among women age 18 years or older, divorce rates per 1,000 marriages in the United States for first marriages are highest among African American women at 26.1, followed by nativeborn Hispanic women at 21.4, White women at 14.5, and Asian women at 9.2 (Payne, 2018). The high divorce rates among African Americans seem to indicate that sustaining marriage is challenging for African American couples (Clyde et al., 2019).

Some researchers have demonstrated the effectiveness of premarital counseling programs in lowering divorce rates (Epozdemir et al., 2017; Halford et al., 2018; Randles et al., 2016). The phrase *premarital counseling* is often used interchangeably with *premarital education* (Clyde et al., 2019). In general, the processes associated with premarital counseling involve providing couples with skills and knowledge in areas such as effective communication, understanding goals of their future spouse, and problem solving, which they can use to develop and sustain their marriages (Brank, 2019; Clyde et al., 2019; DeAngelis, 2017). In premarital counseling, the focus is on issues particular to individual couples, providing them with specific techniques they can use to sustain their marriage (Brank, 2019).

In addition, premarital counseling can help individuals enhance their relationship quality (Parhizgar et al., 2017; Simpson et al., 2017). Researchers have suggested that premarital counseling is associated with a higher likelihood of delayed seeking of counseling for relationship issues among couples to respond to marital challenges (Williamson et al., 2018). Focusing on African Americans in particular could be an important contribution to the general research literature on relationship counseling, as it could help African American couples build more sustainable relationships, deal with challenges more effectively, and avoid risks associated with unstable marriages.

Researchers have noted that programs for relationship education have been traditionally developed for and provided to an audience consisting of highly educated, middle-class, Caucasian couples (Clyde et al., 2019; Dixon, 2017). The underrepresentation of African American voices in the context of relationship education programs highlights a gap in the literature regarding African American couples' participation in research of relationship education programs (Payne, 2018). According to Duncan (2018), 28% of newly married couples in the United States received some type of premarital education. However, such figures are not available for African Americans, indicating a lack of literature on African Americans' perceptions of the potential benefits of premarital counseling.

#### **Problem Statement**

Researchers have found differences in outcomes for couples who participated in premarital education and couples who did not (Carlson et al., 2020; Clyde et al., 2019). For instance, participation in premarital education has been associated with a decrease in

early divorce risk. Specifically, Engl et al. (2019) found that couples who had taken part in premarital counseling program had a divorce rate of 4% after 5 years and 5% after 25 years, compared to 24% after 5 years and 26% after 25 years for couples who did not receive counseling. Further, enhanced marital satisfaction has been found among couples who participated in premarital education (Clyde et al., 2019). Carlson et al. (2020) found that communication skills were poorer for nonparticipating couples compared to couples who participated in premarital education programs. Other researchers have found that couples who did not participate in premarital education have poorer problem-solving and communication skills compared to couples who participated in premarital education (Williamson et al., 2018; Younkin et al., 2021). Some researchers have shown that couples who do not take part in premarital education tend to have irrational beliefs regarding relationships and lower commitment compared to couples who participate in premarital education (Bansiwal et al., 2017; Williamson et al., 2018). Couples who do not participate in premarital education tend to score lower on variables related to relationship satisfaction, such as intimacy, problem-solving skills, use of positive reinforcement, empathetic understanding, and relationship adjustment, compared to participating couples (Clyde et al., 2019; Younkin et al., 2021).

There is a gap in the literature regarding African Americans' perceptions of the role of premarital education in promoting relationship development and sustainability (Dixon, 2017; Moras et al., 2018). Previous researchers have revealed that African Americans perceive counseling as professional help meant only for those with mental illness (Fripp & Carlson, 2017). However, there is little information on what may

encourage or prevent African Americans from seeking premarital counseling. Premarital counseling has been associated with increased marital dissatisfaction and a decrease in the breakdown of marriages (Brank, 2019; DeAngelis, 2017; Markman et al., 2019; Mikle & Gilbert, 2019; Parhizgar et al., 2017; Williamson et al., 2018). Although there is extensive research on the effectiveness of premarital counseling in addressing challenges related to marital instability for couples, research on perceptions of premarital counseling among African Americans is lacking.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to examine African American couples' perceptions of premarital counseling. In general, researchers agree that premarital education and counseling programs can reduce divorce rates by providing tools to address challenges related to marital distress and instability (Brank, 2019; Clyde et al., 2019; DeAngelis, 2017; Demir-Dagdas et al., 2017; Markman et al., 2019). In this study, I explored the perceptions of African American couples using a sample of participants who have been married for more than a year, have never participated in premarital education program, and reside in the United States.

## **Research Question**

What are African Americans couples' perceptions of premarital counseling?

#### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was focused on participants' perceptions, which are shaped by experiences, beliefs, and ideas. As a result, attitude formation theories, which could help understand the formation of beliefs and ideas among individuals, were considered to

provide a more appropriate theoretical framework for this study. Katz's (1960) functional attitude theory was the most appropriate model aligned with the purpose of this study. Individuals form and maintain attitudes based on the value they assign to other individuals, objects, or ideas (Katz, 1960). If an individual views an activity or endeavor as beneficial, they are more likely to participate or engage in the activity (Katz, 1960). In the context of this study, premarital counseling is viewed in terms of such activity, and the perceptions of African American couples are interpreted through the functional attitude theory.

In addition to explaining attitude through function, functional attitude theory also includes the suggestion that attitudes are shaped by what that individual perceives will support their self-image or existing values (Katz, 1960). Thus, the motivational structure of the individual as it relates to attitudes and effort is taken into consideration in functional attitude theory (Katz, 1960). Attitude inspires effort because an individual is more likely to engage in a behavior if they see a reward related to an effort that is beneficial (Katz, 1960). The theoretical framework adopted in this study was used to interpret the perceptions of the participants regarding premarital counseling. If African American couples see a benefit in premarital counseling, their attitude and behavior is likely to shift toward participation. A negative perception of counseling in general could potentially be a barrier to couples seeking premarital counseling (Fripp & Carlson, 2017). Additionally, a lack of knowledge on the benefits of premarital counseling could also serve as a possible reason for negative perceptions and, consequently, a barrier to participation in premarital counseling (Wilmoth & Blaney, 2016). Katz's (1960)

functional attitude theory was appropriate for guiding this research because its premises can be used to explain the participants' knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes toward premarital counseling.

#### **Nature of the Study**

Based on the purpose of the study, I determined that a generic qualitative approach was appropriate for this study. Qualitative research involves an inductive approach to data collection and analysis, which is appropriate for studies to explore subjective experiences (Brennen, 2017). A generic qualitative approach is used when the purpose of a study is to examine attitudes, perceptions, and values of individuals with respect to an issue, topic, or event (Percy et al., 2015). Because the purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of premarital counseling among African American couples, the generic qualitative approach was deemed a suitable option.

A sample of 10 to 12 African American couples who had been married for more than a year was selected because this group has sufficient experience to answer the research question. In addition, eligible couples included those who have never participated in a premarital education program before and were African American married couples residing in the United States. Data were collected through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with African American couples. Both members of each couple were interviewed together. The semi-structured interviews included open-ended questions, which allowed the participants to share their perceptions regarding premarital counseling (see Tjora, 2018).

#### **Definition of Terms**

Counseling: Professional guidance provided (Hays, 2017).

Counselor: A trained professional who is capable of using counseling approaches of different kinds to provide professional guidance to their client (Tate et al., 2017).

*Divorce*: The legal dissolution of marriage that takes place between spouses followed judgment of a court (Houlgate, 2017).

*Premarital counseling:* Specialized category of therapy directed toward assisting couples who are in the process of considering becoming married with the goal of helping them sustain their marriage (Clyde et al., 2019).

Premarital education: A relationship education provided to couples before marriage to increase the stability and satisfaction of their marriage (Clyde et al., 2019).

*Relationship education:* The education provided to couples who are in a relationship, including those who are considering marriage, those who are already married, and those who live together in a relationship (Clyde et al., 2019).

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions refer to preconceptions held by a researcher when conducting a research study (Cho, 2018). Assumptions are aspects of the research that are assumed to be true (Grønmo, 2019). Several assumptions were made in this study. First, I assumed that participants would honestly share their perceptions in response to the interview questions and that their responses would reflect their true perceptions (see Brennen, 2017). Additionally, I assumed that participants would respond honestly to the best of their understanding of the topic of premarital counseling (see Bailey, 2017). I also

assumed that participants would be willing to make a meaningful contribution to the study through their responses to the interview questions (see Cho, 2018).

The participants were African American married couples who had been married for more than a year, reside in the United States, and had not participated in premarital education program before. The assumption that the participants who met the inclusion criteria would be able to contribute meaningful responses is relevant because ensuring that the participants recruited for a study have appropriate experiences relevant to the topic of interest is important (see Grønmo, 2019). An assumption was made that the participants who met the inclusion criteria could be trusted to provide relevant data to address the research questions.

I also assumed that new insights into the research topic could be obtained from the participants (see Brennen, 2017). This assumption was relevant because without it no information could be obtained from participant responses. I also assumed that the responses obtained from the participants would be relevant to the study because the participants were recruited based on their ability to provide information regarding their perceptions of premarital counseling.

I assumed that culturally specific attitudes toward premarital counseling would exist in the African American community (see Dixon, 2017). This study addressed the research gap in premarital counseling whereby African American voices are underrepresented (see Dixon, 2017). Such underrepresentation would be significant only if there were culturally specific attitudes among African Americans, which was assumed in this study. I assumed that I would learn from the participants perceptions among the

African American community regarding premarital counseling. I also assumed the qualitative approach would be an appropriate method of gathering information from the participants on their perceptions of premarital counseling (see Brennen, 2017).

## **Scope and Delimitations**

This study was limited to African American couples who had been married for more than a year, had not participated in premarital education program before, and resided in the United States. Consequently, the findings of the study will not be applicable to non-African American couples or couples not residing in the United States. Additionally, the findings will not be applicable to couples who have been married for less than a year or those who have previously participated in a premarital education program.

Delimitations in this study include the decision to recruit couples who had been married for more than 1 year and not participated in a premarital education program before being married. The decision to include only couples who had been married for more than 1 year was motivated by the need to ensure that the couples had some experience in the post-marital life and provide a wider scope for inclusion of potential participants. The decision to include only participants who had not participated in a premarital education program before was motivated by the need to take into account the underrepresentation of premarital education among African American couples. Another delimitation is the focus on African American couples. This choice was based on the high rates of divorce among African American couples. Another delimitation is the focus on participants' perceptions of premarital counseling. This choice was based on the need to

address the gap in the literature pertaining to the voices of African Americana regarding the benefits of premarital counseling.

Another delimitation concerns the theoretical framework of this study, which is based on Katz's (1960) functional attitude theory. The premises of Katz's (1960) functional attitude can be used to explain the participants' knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes toward premarital counseling. Based on this theory, I conjectured that participants' perceptions of premarital counseling affected their decision to seek premarital counseling (Fripp & Carlson, 2017). A lack of knowledge regarding the benefits of premarital counseling could have potentially served as a barrier to participation in premarital counseling by African American couples (Wilmoth & Blaney, 2016).

### Limitations

Limitations refer to factors beyond the control of the researcher that limit the transferability of the results (Oflazoglu, 2017). Limitations are integral to all research studies (Flick, 2018). The small sample used in this study limits the transferability of the results to all African American couples in the United States. Additionally, it may not be possible to transfer the results to couples of other racial and ethnic groups.

Another potential limitation is researcher bias. Researcher bias may manifest through misrepresentations of words and gestures of a researcher, and the bias may be unconscious or unintentional (Brennen, 2017). To mitigate the effect of researcher bias, a tape recorder was used to record the participants' interview responses (see Bailey, 2017). Additionally, I used the transcript review and member checking processes to minimize

researcher bias. The transcript review involves sending participants copies of transcribed interviews and asking them to validate the accuracy of the transcribed interviews (Mero-Jaffe, 2011). Member checking was conducted after the data had been analyzed and interpreted. During member checking, I sent a summary of the results to the participants and asked them to validate whether the summary was an accurate reflection of their perceptions of premarital counseling (Brennen, 2017). Through the transcript review and member checking processes, any researcher bias that may have been introduced when transcribing the interviews and during the data analysis was identified by the participants and corrected based on the participants' feedback.

## **Significance**

The study is important because the findings may provide information that could advance existing understanding on the perceptions of premarital counseling among African Americans. The results may potentially be used to inform practice and policy. The findings of this study may provide information about the barriers that prevent some African American couples from participating in premarital counseling based on their perceptions.

The findings of this study could contribute to the body of literature on perceptions of premarital counseling among African American couples. In addition, the results of this study could provide information regarding potential barriers to participation in premarital counseling among African Americans. Human services and other professionals could use the findings to advocate for the need to develop educational seminars and awareness campaigns that promote awareness of the benefits of premarital counseling. The findings

of this research could contribute to social change by providing useful information for promoting the benefits of premarital counseling, contributing to the stability of marital relationships, and subsequently decreasing the likelihood of marriages ending in divorce.

#### **Summary**

This chapter consisted of an introduction to the research problem, which is that, despite the high rate of divorce among African American couples (Dixon, 2017; Moras et al., 2018), there is a lack of research on premarital counseling among African Americans. The purpose of this generic qualitative research was to examine the perceptions of premarital counseling among African American couples who have been married for more than a year in the United States. Katz's (1960) functional attitude theory formed the theoretical framework for this study. Based on the research phenomenon and the purpose of the study, a qualitative research method was appropriate for this study. The qualitative method was combined with a generic qualitative study (see Liu, 2016) research design to explore the perceptions of premarital counseling among African Americans. This chapter also included a discussion of the assumptions, delimitations, and limitations. In addition to expanding the existing literature, the findings of this study will provide information about the barriers among some African American couples to participation in premarital counseling based on their perceptions. In the next chapter, a review of the literature is presented on the research phenomenon to provide a justification for conducting this study.

#### Chapter 2: Literature Review

#### Introduction

The divorce rate among African American couples is the highest in the United States (Clyde et al., 2019; Payne, 2018). The overall divorce rate among women in the United States is 16.1% (Schweizer, 2018). However, in the United States, statistics show that African American women have the highest rate of divorce, with first marriage divorce rate of 26.1 per 1,000 marriages compared to 21.4 among native-born Hispanic women, 14.5 among White women, and 9.2 among Asian women (Payne, 2018). The high divorce rate among African Americans suggests that although a significant number of individuals in the United States are in marital relationships, marriage rates are especially high among African American couples (Clyde et al., 2019).

Past researchers have revealed the effectiveness of premarital counseling in reducing marriage breakdown and marital dissatisfaction (Brank, 2019; DeAngelis, 2017; Markman et al., 2019; Mikle & Gilbert, 2019; Parhizgar et al., 2017; Williamson et al., 2018). However, I could not find literature on the usage of premarital counseling among African Americans. The underrepresentation of African Americans in the research on relationship education programs presents a gap in the research. The purpose of this generic qualitative research was to examine African American couples' perceptions of premarital counseling.

This chapter presents a review of literature on premarital counseling among African Americans. The chapter begins with details on the literature search strategy followed by a presentation of details of the theoretical framework for this study. A

literature review of the research on premarital counseling among African Americans is presented, which consists of subsections covering the themes present in extant research on the research phenomenon. These subsections include research on premarital education, marriage among African Americans, and the state of premarital education among African Americans. The chapter ends with a discussion of the relevant methodological literature and the conclusions drawn from the review.

#### **Literature Search Strategy**

I searched multiple research databases for articles that were included in the literature for the review. Databases included Google Scholar, EBSCO, Thoreau Multi-Database, Science Direct, Academic Search Complete, JSTOR, PsycArticles, and PubMed. To obtain relevant research articles, I used the following key terms, either alone or in combination: marriage, education, pre-marital, African American, Black, counseling, educational programs, therapy, family, marriage enrichment programs, and divorce. These terms represented the various aspects of the research phenomenon for this study, either individually or in combination. Furthermore, to ensure only the most recent findings were incorporated in the literature review, I limited my review to articles published between 2016 and 2020. However, to incorporate historical and seminal research on the theoretical framework and themes related to premarital education, some older studies were included.

My search for literature regarding premarital counseling in the African American community yielded limited material. Many of the articles I found on premarital counseling included research using participants from multiple ethnicities and racial

backgrounds. Additionally, in many studies, multiple races and ethnicities were compared. However, few studies were centered on the African American community. As a result, the review of literature covers broad themes on premarital education and African American marriage, and the literature is not specifically restricted only to premarital counseling among African Americans.

#### **Theoretical Foundation**

Katz's (1960) functional attitude theory was most appropriate for the particular purpose of this study. Individuals form and maintain attitudes based on the value they assign to other individuals, objects, or ideas (Katz, 1960). If an individual views an activity or endeavor as beneficial, the person is more likely to participate or engage in it (Katz, 1960). In this study, premarital counseling was viewed in terms of such activity, and the perceptions of African American couples were interpreted through the functional attitude theory.

#### **History of Attitude Theories**

Attitude theories are useful for explaining how individual attitudes affect behavior and ways of influencing individual attitudes (Albarracin et al., 2018). Scholars have noted that individuals develop attitudes with the purpose of attaining individual goals, and although two individuals may hold different attitudes with the same sincerity, these attitudes may have different function for them (Pelinka & Suedfeld, 2017). Specifically, attitude theories propose that attempts to influence attitudes are effective when directed toward individuals rather than toward groups (Pelinka & Suedfeld, 2017). Insights from research related to attitudes have revealed that attempts to influence behavior would be

more successful if communication aimed at persuasion is personalized to appeal to individual attitudes and preferences (Stiff & Mongeau, 2016).

Attitude theories originated in the 1950s, with Smith et al.'s (1956) concept on how personality differed from attitudes. The researchers conducted qualitative interviews involving 10 participants with the goal of determining the participants' personality based on their attitudes toward the Soviet Union. Based on the participants' responses, they developed their functional attitude theory, in which attitude was categorized into appraisal of object, expressiveness quality, externalization, and social adjustment.

## **Katz's Functional Attitude Theory**

Katz's (1960) functional attitude theory was the theoretical framework that guided this study. Katz (1960) developed the functional attitude theory to explain why people develop, maintain, or change attitudes. The main premise of the theory is that individuals develop attitudes based on the functions the attitudes serve and the basis for changing or altering an attitude depends on the function a given attitude serves for an individual (Katz, 1960). Therefore, to change an attitude, one must know the function the attitude serves for the person and provide information that appeals to a particular function. Katz (1960) indicated that attitudes are related to at least one of the following four functions: instrumental, ego defense, knowledge, and value expression.

#### Instrumental Function

The *instrumental function* refers to attitudes developed based on the notion of attaining rewards and avoiding punishment. The instrumental function is also called *utilitarian function* because it helps individuals enhance utility (Richardson et al., 2017).

Katz (1960) noted that individuals develop positive attitudes with respect to objects that they associate with needs satisfaction and negative attitudes with respect to objects they associate with needs satisfaction prevention. Instrumental functions are developed to help individuals satisfy particular needs. The attitudes that serve instrumental function originate in the need for individual needs satisfaction (Zunick et al., 2017). The attitudes individuals acquire for the purposes of instrumental function include tools for achieving desired goals or avoiding undesirable goals (Richardson et al., 2017). Attitudes related to the instrumental function depend on past or present perceptions associated with the perceived utility that an object may have for individuals.

### **Ego-Defensive Function**

The *ego-defensive function* is associated with attitudes that enable individuals to avoid acknowledging parts of themselves that are unpleasant (Katz, 1960). Such attitudes encourage the protection of self-esteem. Protection of self-esteem may stem from threats such as bad behavior or individual failings (Zunick et al., 2017). According to Katz (1960), ego-defensive attitudes consist of various defense mechanisms such as rationalization. Individuals with negative attitudes with respect to a group in the minority may serve as a tool for enhancing their own self-esteem (Richardson et al., 2017). Ego-defensive attitudes can be altered by assisting individuals in increasing their insights about themselves with respect to their defense mechanisms that build ego-defensive attitudes (Stotland et al., 1959).

#### **Knowledge Function**

The *knowledge function* pertains to attitudes that assist people in obtaining a better understanding of the workings and nature of the world (Katz, 1960). The knowledge function results in people developing attitudes that may not serve any goal other than learning on its own (Albarracin et al., 2018). Such an attitude may only help an individual understand some facet about the world (Katz, 1960). According to Katz (1960), given the complexities of the world individuals find themselves in, some attitudes may help understand the world, even if not serving any other purpose. One may have an attitude toward an event independent of their personal values or interests. Such an attitude may only help that individual understand some facet of the world (Stiff & Mongeau, 2016). According to Katz (1960), such attitudes are developed to alter through an explanation regarding the ways an individual's knowledge about the world is insufficient and present an alternative attitude that helps form a better understanding of the world.

#### Value-Expressive Function

Katz (1960) noted that the *value-expressive function* enables individuals to develop and express attitudes consistent with their core values and self-perceptions. For example, an individual who considers themselves to be a liberal is likely to develop and express attitudes consistent with liberal values. The value-expressive function enables individuals to develop attitudes that support their concepts of themselves and their individual self-identity. Such an attitude, as opposed to instrumental attitudes, does not render concrete and direct penalties or rewards. Further, holding such an attitude does not lead to an individual obtaining any benefit when the latter is viewed from a narrow

utilitarian perspective (Gouveia, 2019). This attitude results in a broader satisfaction associated with actions in alignment with one's values and principles (Stiff & Mongeau, 2016). The set of values that an individual holds is reinforced through attitudes that align with their self-identity. Such an attitude, as opposed to instrumental attitudes, does not render concrete and direct penalties or rewards. An individual may hold multiple values (Gouveia, 2019; Ledgerwood et al., 2018); thus, highlighting only one aspect of an individual's values may not lead to complete persuasion (Petty, 2018).

#### **Application of Theory to Research**

Most recent studies using Katz's (1960) functional attitude theory have been focused on advertisement and purchase decisions. For instance, Kobia and Liu (2017) used functional attitude theory to determine the factors that affect the use of social media and viral marketing by consumers as well as consumers' behavioral intentions for forwarding viral fashion messages. The researchers hypothesized that when being exposed to advertisement from businesses, value-expressive attitudes and functional attitudes develop among individuals toward the marketing message, influencing their intention to forward such messages. Kobia and Liu conducted pretests and posttests of interventions involving fashion clips selected from YouTube using questionnaires. The researchers adopted 13 items from Hsieh et al.'s (2012) study, including two dimensions of social media fashion marketing—namely, instrumental and value expressive. The findings showed that the intention of an individual to forward a message regarding fashion was influenced by positive instrumental and value-expressive attitudes with respect to the message.

In another qualitative study related to purchasing, Liu et al. (2017) used premises of functional attitude theory to explore purchase intentions for a state-sponsored and international event-endorsed ethnic fashion line among Chinese customers. Liu et al. (2017) specifically used the premises of instrumental function, knowledge function, and value-expressive function to examine the relationships among urchase intention, attitudes, fashion leadership, practical usefulness, and cultural pride. Liu et al. (2017) found that fashion leadership, which represented knowledge function; practical usefulness, which represented instrumental function; and cultural pride, which represented value-expressive function, all affected purchase intention. Among these factors, the most salient effect on consumer acceptance of the produce was cultural pride.

Ajitha and Sivakumar (2019) used components of the functional attitude theory to explore customer attitudes toward purchasing luxury brand products. Specifically, Ajitha and Sivakumar (2019) sought to examine the factors affecting consumer attitudes toward new luxury brands and the moderating effect of gender and age on those attitudes. Ajitha and Sivakumar (2019) included Katz's (1960) value-expressive function and examined how self-monitoring and the need for uniqueness affected value-expressive attitude toward new luxury brands. Additionally, Ajitha and Sivakumar (2019) examined whether the relationship of value-expressive attitude with self-monitoring and whether the need for uniqueness was moderated by gender and age. Ajitha and Sivakumar (2019) considered self-monitoring a trait of personality that highlighted variations regarding the degree to which individuals controlled themselves during social interactions. Ajitha and Sivakumar (2019) considered the need for uniqueness as the drive among individuals to

establish their uniqueness compared to others, realized through the development of social and personal identity and acquisition and consumption of consumer goods. Both traits were used to understand how they were affected by value-expressive attitudes in the context of functional attitude theory. The researchers' findings showed that the need for uniqueness has statistically significant positive impact on value-expressive attitude, but self-monitoring had weaker impact in comparison with value-expressive attitude.

Ngo et al. (2020) used premises of functional attitude theory to examine the condition under which value-expressive functions influence the purchase of counterfeit luxury brands. Ngo et al. (2020) noted that belonging and status were some of the reasons individuals bought counterfeit luxury goods. Previous researchers have also shown that value expressive attitudes also account for this trend. The purpose of Ngo et al.'s (2020) study was to identify a causal relation between value-expressive attitudes and intention to purchase these products. The researchers conducted a mixed-method study that involved 103 participants in an experiment and survey that gathered data from 201 participants. The findings showed that the value-expressive function positively influenced an individual's intention to purchase counterfeit luxury goods, thus establishing a causal relation.

## **Relevance of Functional Attitude Theory to the Present Study**

The functional attitude theory proposed by Katz (1960) provides an explanation of individual attitudes and their effect on individual behavior. Katz (1960) noted that people might alter their attitudes when the attitudes no longer satisfy the function for which they are held. The premises of functional attitude theory can be applied to African

American couples 'perceptions of premarital counseling and whether they view it as a beneficial activity.

Katz (1960) noted that when a person views a goal as beneficial to them, they are highly likely to engage in it. With regards premarital counseling, the theoretical framework based on Katz's (1960) theory becomes relevant when African American couples 'engagement in premarital counseling is viewed in relation to whether or not they view it as a beneficial activity. In a functionalist interpretation of attitude, Katz's (1960) theory also takes into consideration the motivational structure of a person in relation to their effort and perception. Effort is inspired by attitude, and a beneficial attitude or expectation of reward is associated with a higher likelihood that an individual will engage in an activity.

The purpose of this study is to understand not only the perceptions of African American couples regarding premarital counseling, but also the challenges that prevent them from engaging in premarital counseling. Katz's (1960) theory can be applied to the present study to interpret the reasons for the negative attitude of African Americans toward counseling. For example, attaching counseling to those who are mentally ill (Fripp & Carlson, 2017) can be understood as a barrier considering premarital counseling among African Americans. Other factors that could fall within the theoretical framework as barriers preventing African Americans from engaging in premarital counseling may include the lack of knowledge on the benefits of premarital counseling (Wilmoth & Blaney, 2016). Whatever the cause, the responses could be adequately interpreted through a theoretical framework based on Katz's (1960) functional attitude theory.

## **Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts**

The focus in this study is on premarital counseling. Premarital counseling refers to a specialized category of therapy that is directed toward assisting those couples who are in the process of considering getting married (Clyde et al., 2019). Premarital counseling is often used interchangeably with premarital education (Clyde et al., 2019), but generally the former is understood to be a sub-category within the broader concept of premarital education. In the current section, the literature on premarital education is reviewed, with sections devoted to divorce in the United States, divorce among African Americans, problems associated with divorce, premarital education, effectiveness of premarital education, barriers to premarital education, and premarital education among African Americans.

#### **Divorce in the United States**

Researchers have discussed the significant increase in the rate of divorce across the 20th century as one of the most important trends in the United States. Between the 1950s and 1970s, the divorce rate per year more than doubled (Lehrer & Son, 2017). At the start of the 20th century, the rate of divorce in the United States was approximately five per 1,000 couples (Lehrer & Son, 2017). This rate increased to 23 per 1,000 couples who were married by 1980 (Lehrer & Son, 2017). There was a relatively smaller decline in divorce rate after that, resulting in a divorce rate of 17 per 1,000 couples who were married by 2005 (Lehrer & Son, 2017). However, this rate is still very high by historical standards.

# Divorce Among African Americans

After the 1960s, research in areas such as relationship instability, decreasing rates of marriage, and increasing divorce rates among African Americans became a particular focus for researchers (Dixon, 2017; Smock & Schwartz, 2020). Researchers found that the high rate of divorce among African Americans was partly due to the same factors that caused the rise in divorce rates among other groups (Miller, 2018; Smock & Schwartz, 2020). Some of those factors included transformation in beliefs and values about divorce and marriage, the changing roles of women, and higher lifespan among people (Miller, 2018).

Despite these findings, the researchers did not explain some of the statistics that were unique to African Americans. For instance, during the 1950s, the rate of marriage among African American and Caucasian women over the age of 15 years was 64% and 67%, respectively (Dixon, 2017). However, by 1998, that rate had declined to 36% and 58%, respectively. In a span of approximately 50 years, the rate of marriage among African Americans decreased by 44% compared to only about 13% for Caucasians. In 2018, African American women were the only group with a higher rate of divorce than marriage, with only 17.3 marriages per 1,000 unmarried African American women and 31 divorces per 1,000 married African American women (Schweizer, 2019). Societal changes such as high rate of incarceration, single-parent households, poverty, and poor health have all contributed to the high rate of divorce rates and low rate of marriage among African Americans (Moras et al., 2018).

Although previous researchers have found that African Americans do consider marriage to be desirable, there has been a continual trend towards a lower marriage rate (Cole, 2019). Many marriages end in divorce and researchers have revealed that divorced or separated individuals have a lower desire to marry again (Reddy, 2016). Although the declining rate of marriage and the increasing divorce rate among African Americans has been demonstrated in studies, research on premarital education among African American couples is lacking. In particular, how premarital interventions could be used to improve marital stability among African Americans represents a research gap in the literature, which was addressed in this study.

#### Factors Related to Divorce Rates

Researchers have identified multiple factors influencing the increasing trend in divorce rate over the long term. For instance, division of labor has been highlighted as one of the factors contributing to a decline in the benefits of marriage (Brown, 2019). With the rise in the participation of women in the labor force, women's wages, and women's education, the productivity traits between men and women became less dissimilar (Fahey, 2020). Women's labor supply also increased through the advances in technology related to household as well as the higher likelihood of divorce (Lehrer & Son, 2017). With greater participation of women in the labor force, many jobs traditionally occupied by men were no longer so, resulting in a decrease in gender segregation in employment (Fahey, 2020). The resulting workplace diversity has been described as one of the factors that led to higher divorce rates. An increase in public programs, which affected the traditional role played by family in providing family

members with protection in the fact of income or health-related disruptions, may also have contributed to the rising divorce trend (Lehrer & Son, 2017). Overall, as the rate of divorce increased, it had a snowball effect, increasing the prospects of divorce individuals finding partners for another marriage but reducing the stigma associated with divorce.

#### Problems Associated With Divorce

Researchers have noted multiple negative consequences of a divorce. Women are more likely to experience poverty due to a decrease in household income (Leopold, 2018). The higher risk of poverty for women has been linked to adverse outcomes such as insufficient funds to care for children, income loss, which disproportionately affects women, limited capacity for increasing earnings, and greater economic needs associated with providing care for children (Leopold & Kalmijn, 2016).

Maintaining adequate housing is another negative outcome associated with a divorce. During a divorce, one partner may move out of the house, which may disrupt their regular connections with workplace, friends, and family (Mikolai & Kulu, 2017). A divorce also increases the risk of losing ownership of home for individuals (Mikolai & Kulu, 2018). The loss of income due to a divorce makes it difficult for one person to afford a mortgage previously afforded by two incomes. Because of greater dependence on their former partners, women may experience more difficulty obtaining secure and high-quality housing after a divorce (Leopold, 2018).

In addition to adverse financial and housing consequences, a divorce may also lead to poor mental and physical health among divorcing parties. For mental health, studies have shown that, overall, men are more likely to report lower life satisfaction after

divorce than women (Kiecolt-Glaser, 2018). Married individuals are less likely to smoke or drink compared to individuals who are divorced (Zulkarnain & Korenman, 2018). Researchers show higher rates of substance abuse, depression, mortality, and illness among divorced people compared to married people (Leopold, 2018). The incidence of heart disease and cancer is higher among divorced men than in married men (Sander et al., 2020). Extreme changes in weight have been noted in both women and men who are divorced (Leopold, 2018). Economic hardships and lower living standards experienced by divorced individuals may further worsen their mental and physical health (Zulkarnain & Korenman, 2018). Among divorced individuals, anxiety insomnia, identity crisis, and substance abuse issues occur at a higher rate (Kiecolt-Glaser, 2018). Compared to women, men have more difficulties handling emotional health after divorce because they have less extensive networks for support (Zulkarnain & Korenman, 2018).

Divorce also has effects on family ties and relationships outside of the two people engaged in the divorce. For instance, researchers have found that noncustodial parents, who are more likely to be fathers, face difficulties in remaining in touch with their children (Leopold, 2018). Children may become alienated from their noncustodial parent with the parent drifting out of their life and may come to blame themselves for it (Leopold, 2018). Custodial parents, who are more likely to be mothers, frequently experience difficulties attaining and maintaining adequate care for their children (Leopold, 2018). The reduced financial income may also pose challenges for custodial parents in providing for other basic needs such as healthcare, clothing, and adequate

housing for their children. Thus, in terms of custodial arrangements, both partners are likely to face difficulties following a divorce.

Children also experience negative consequences of a divorce. Some of the ways in which children are affected by parental divorce include poorer performance at school as a result of confusion and distraction, difficulty in relating with other people resulting in insecurity and less social activity, and difficulty in adapting to the various changes such as housing, friends and schools (Iqbal et al., 2021; Jackson & Fife, 2017). Children of divorced parents may also become more irritable and emotionally vulnerable (Lament, 2019). Some children may not be able to understand the changes taking place and may blame themselves for the separation between their parents, which results in guilt (Lament, 2019). Children may develop health problems due to stress as well as destructive behavior (Iqbal et al., 2021; Lament, 2019).

## **Premarital Counseling/Education**

Premarital counseling refers to a specialized category of therapy that is directed towards providing guidance on relationships and marriage to couples who are considering getting married (Clyde et al., 2019; Parhizgar et al., 2017). The phrase premarital counseling is often used interchangeably with the phrase premarital education (Clyde et al., 2019). Premarital counseling is generally understood to be a sub-category within the broader concept of premarital education. Premarital counseling focuses on issues that are particular to individual couples and the specific techniques for sustaining a marriage (Brank, 2019).

# Premarital Counseling/Education as a Prevention Strategy

Contrary to individual-focused relationship education programs and marriage enrichment education, which are interventional in nature, premarital education is focused on prevention (Commerford & Hunter, 2016). Premarital education programs focus on equipping couples with knowledge and skills, which they can use to enhance and sustain their relationships (Hankerson et al., 2018). Premarital education programs are usually educational, and they tend to be linked to particular content covered in a syllabus and the programs are limited by time (Porta & Brown, 2016). Premarital counseling is generally designed for couples who are in a functional and satisfactory relationship (Wang, 2017). Given the preventive nature of premarital education, the focus is on providing knowledge and awareness to couples on problems that could occur in the future following their marriage. An additional goal is equipping couples with resources and information to help prevent marital problems when they do emerge (Hankerson et al., 2018; Mohamady & Said, 2017).

Premarital education programs generally presuppose that couples are committed to a future with each other in their relationship (Markman et al., 2019). Premarital education programs typically cover topics such as the need for communication, resolving conflict, marriage roles, management of finance, commitment, families of the partner, expectations regarding parenting, and sexuality (Ballard et al., 2018; Hankerson et al., 2018; Kabbash et al., 2019). Most premarital education takes place in a religious environment and is therefore influenced by religious orientation (Clyde et al., 2019). Couples may also consider an inventory-based approach to premarital education, which

involves using a questionnaire to explore the topics relevant to marital success among couples.

Following the implementation of such an inventory, couples take part in a session to discuss those topics with a counselor or facilitator (Clyde et al., 2019). Irrespective of how it occurs, all premarital education shares some similarities (Clyde et al., 2019). These similarities include a focus on obtaining a better understanding of one's partner and oneself, evaluating expectations and ensuring both partners 'expectations are in alignment with each other, providing fundamental ideals necessary for successful marriage, and teaching effective techniques for communication (Markman et al., 2019; Wilmoth & Blaney, 2016).

# Effectiveness of Premarital Counseling/Education

Previous researchers have found that premarital education can equip couples with tools that can enhance the quality of their relationships (Clyde, 2019; Markman et al., 2019). The common topics covered in premarital education programs are communication, conflict management, and marital satisfaction. This section presents literature on the effectiveness of premarital education premarital programs in terms of helping couples improve communication, manage conflict, and enhance marital satisfaction.

Communication. Past researchers have shown that dysfunctional marriages are defined by patterns of negative communication, such as communication defined by hostility, criticism, and denial (Porta & Brown, 2016; Simpson et al., 2017). In the absence of effective communication between the partners, other skills for ensuring marital stability are less likely to be effective (Simpson et al., 2017). For a marriage to be

stable and satisfactory, it is important for couples to communicate their thoughts, emotions, desires, and expectations from each other (Kabbash et al., 2019; Mohamady & Said, 2017).

Premarital education programs focus on effective communication skills, which are critical elements of a satisfactory marriage (Hawkins, 2017). Those communication skills focus on obtaining a better understanding of one's partner and oneself, evaluating expectations and ensuring they are in alignment, provision of fundamental ideals necessary for successful marriage, and teaching effective techniques for communication (Markman et al., 2019; Wilmoth & Blaney, 2016). Researchers have shown that couples who receive premarital education report higher levels of satisfaction with their communication skills (Engl et al., 2019; Fallahchai et al., 2016; Parhizgar et al., 2017; Rajabi & Abbasi, 2020). In addition, couples who participate in premarital education programs have reported lower patterns of negative communication (Rajabi & Abbasi, 2020).

Other researchers have found that premarital education empowers partners to identify and resolve negative communication patterns, express themselves more effectively, and resolve conflicts through mutual understanding (Ballard et al., 2018; Commerford & Hunter, 2016; Hawkins, 2017; Hawkins et al., 2016). Communication skills obtained through premarital education help couples improve their emotional stability. Effective communication has also been associated with sexual satisfaction (Hankerson et al., 2018). Through equipping couples with skills for conflict management, premarital education helps improve the quality of relationships.

The Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) is one premarital education program that was formed based on the view that to ensure marital distress is minimized, couples must focus on negative elements of their relationship, especially patterns of negative communication (Engl et al., 2019; Fallahchai et al., 2016). In the PREP, couples are educated on the significant distinctions between the way women and men communicate, the skills involved in effective listening and speaking, communication styles that are constructive and destructive, beliefs and expectations, and the spiritual values of forgiveness, intimacy, respect, and honor (Engl et al., 2019; Halford & Pepping, 2017). Couples trained under PREP showed better communication skills and lower patterns of negative communication (Engl et al., 2019; Fallahchai et al., 2016; Halford & Pepping, 2017; Stanley et al., 2019).

Conflict Management. Premarital education programs can help couples develop effective conflict management skills (Fallahchai et al., 2016; Rajabi & Abbasi, 2020). Couples who completed premarital education programs reported few cases of physical violence, more desire to spend more time working on their relationship due to the program, and better skills regarding anger management (Engl et al., 2019; Parhizgar et al., 2017). Couples trained with PREP have reported higher levels of satisfaction in their relationship (Engl et al., 2019).

Marital Stability. When people decide to get married, they may have some conceptions regarding conflict management and resolving differences (Hawkins, 2017). Through premarital education, couples obtain suggestions from experts on the most effective techniques for managing conflict (Hawkins et al., 2016). Researchers have

shown that taking part in premarital education programs is associated with a lower likelihood of premarital breakup among couples and reduced rates of divorce (Bakhurst et al., 2016; Clyde et al., 2019). Engl et al. (2019) conducted a quantitative study to assess the relationship between premarital education and divorce rates five and 25 years after completing the program. At the five-year mark, the participating group had a divorce rate of 4% compared to 24% for the control group. In a 25-year follow-up period, the participating group had a divorce rate of 5% compared to 26% for the control group (Engl et al., 2019). Similar to Engl et al. (2019), Clyde (2019) also examined how federal policies promoting premarital education in the United States were linked to lower rates of divorce, and indirectly to relationship stability. The data were collected from yearly statelevel census data. The findings revealed that when federal policies promoting premarital education in the United States were effectively implemented, participation in premarital education programs was associated with a 5% reduction in the rate of divorce after other variables were controlled. Thus, the analysis conducted by Clyde (2019) highlighted the effectiveness of premarital education on reducing divorce rates.

Marital Satisfaction. Several researchers have examined the impact of premarital education on marital satisfaction. For instance, Williamson et al. (2018) conducted a quantitative study to explore the impact of premarital education on couples seeking relationship assistance after marriage. Overall, the results showed that premarital education enhanced marital satisfaction (Williamson et al., 2018). Fallahchai et al. (2016) conducted a quantitative study to examine the efficacy of the PREP on marital satisfaction and marital conflict of couples in Iran. The results from a 1-year follow-up

study showed significant differences in the marital satisfaction and marital conflict of the couples in the control group compared to the couples in the experimental group.

Specifically, completion of the PREP was associated with lower levels of marital conflict and higher levels of marital satisfaction. Engl et al. (2019) also assessed quantitatively the relationship between premarital education and marital satisfaction. The results showed that more than 98% of the participating couples recommended the program for other couples. In addition, after 25 years, the rate of happy relationships among couples in the control group was found to be 72%, compared to 83% among the couples in the participating group. Based on these findings, the researchers noted that the premarital education program resulted in long-lasting positive effects on the stability of relationships.

Managing Expectations. Rajabi and Abbasi (2020) conducted a study to explore the effectiveness of premarital counseling in decreasing the idealistic expectations about marriage among single, young adults. The participants were evenly divided into a control group and an intervention group, and data were collected in the following three stages: pretest, posttest, and at 60-day follow-up. An intervention developed by the researchers regarding idealistic expectations was provided to the intervention group. The findings showed that participation in the program reduced the participants 'idealistic expectations of marriage. By encouraging realistic expectations regarding relationships, participation in premarital education tends to reduce marital distress (Rajabi & Abbasi, 2020).

In summary, studies on premarital education programs have shown that premarital education empowers partners to identify and resolve negative communication patterns,

express themselves more effectively, and resolve conflicts through mutual understanding (Engl et al., 2019; Fallahchai et al., 2016; Williamson et al., 2018). In addition, research showed that premarital education helps enhance marital stability (Williamson et al., 2018) and could reduce divorce rates (Clyde, 2019). The review of literature in the next section focuses on marriage among African Americans.

# **Barriers to Premarital Counseling/Education**

Past researchers have noted several barriers that prevent couples from seeking premarital education. Williamson et al. (2019) sought to identify the relational, structural, and attitudinal barriers to seeking premarital education among couples. The findings showed that couples identified uncertainty about where to seek premarital education and cost as the main two barriers that prevented them from seeking premarital education.

Another barrier included one partner not desiring such education. The researchers also found that indirect and direct experience with premarital education resulted in a higher likelihood of a couple's wanting to seek premarital education.

Stewart et al. (2016) synthesized findings from studies on help-seeking behavior regarding relationship problems. The researchers found that relationship education showed efficacious impact of feedback, resulting in higher participation from couples and improvement in relationship distress, marital satisfaction, and communication improvement. However, the researchers also noted that, despite the efficacy of relationship education, few couples tended to take advantage of relationship education, especially African American couples. Stewart et al. (2016) recommended the need for expanding the literature on premarital education to broader population groups.

# **Premarital Counseling/Education Among African Americans**

The focus of this study is on exploring perceptions of premarital education among African Americans. Mikle and Gilbert (2019) pointed out the scarcity of literature on African Americans and marital education. Additionally, the researchers highlighted the need for additional research on African American marriage. Clyde et al. (2019) highlighted that, historically, programs regarding relationship education tend to be developed for and provided to an audience consisting of White, middle-class, and highly educated couples. For this reason, existing practices and programs for premarital counseling may not be equally effective among African Americans who have unique social challenges (Dixon, 2017).

During the literature search, I only found two recently published studies that focused on premarital education specifically among African Americans (Mikle & Gilbert, 2019; Wilmoth & Blaney, 2016). Importantly, only one of these studies involved primary data collection, and neither study involved data collected from African American couples. Mikle and Gilbert (2019) conducted a systematic review of literature with the intention of highlighting the research relationship and marriage education programs. The researchers found that African American couples benefited from premarital education programs when there was an inclusion of culturally relevant material in the curriculum of the programs. The inclusion of culturally relevant material resulted in couple satisfaction through improvement in communication and relationship skills. Other positive outcomes included a positive transformation of beliefs about relationships, shared expectations,

enhanced respect for communication, and profound recognition of the needs of the other partner and the benefits of constructive arguments.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

In this chapter, a review of literature has been presented on the research phenomenon to provide justification for conducting this study. The review included a discussion of the theoretical framework for the study, which was based on Katz's (1960) functional attitude theory. In addition, a literature review of the research on premarital counseling among African Americans has been presented in three sections. In the first subsection, research on premarital education was reviewed, revealing that premarital education empowers partners to identify and resolve negative communication patterns, express themselves more effectively, and resolve conflicts through mutual understanding (Ballard et al., 2018; Commerford & Hunter, 2016; Hawkins, 2017; Hawkins et al., 2016). In the second subsection, research on marriage among African Americans was reviewed, which revealed the paucity of research in African American marriage and premarital education among African American couples, representing a significant research gap. In the third subsection, research premarital education among African Americans was reviewed. In this subsection, only two recently published studies were found on the topic. However, only one of these involved primary data collections and none involved African American couples, which is in alignment with the previous literature (Abrams et al., 2017; Barton & Bryant, 2016; Henderson, 2016; Millett et al., 2018; Skipper et al., 2018). In summary, although there is research on African American marital patterns and outcomes, there is a lack of literature examining African American

couples 'perceptions of premarital counseling. The gap addressed in the present study is pertinent given the high risk of divorce among African American couples. The findings of this study may help provide information about the barriers to participating in premarital counseling for some African American couples based on their perceptions. In the next section, the details of the methodology of this study are discussed.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

#### Introduction

The purpose of this generic qualitative research was to examine African American couples' perceptions of premarital counseling. This chapter includes details on the research method, the research design, the role of the researcher, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and data analysis process. Issues related to trustworthiness and ethical procedures are also discussed.

## **Research Design and Rationale**

This study was guided by the following research question: What are African Americans couples' perceptions of premarital counseling? I used a generic qualitative approach to investigate this topic. The qualitative method is often used in research to conduct an in-depth exploration of a phenomenon (Grønmo, 2019). The qualitative research method allows an inquiry of the subjective perspectives of participants to develop appropriate themes to address research questions (Brennen, 2017).

I considered using a quantitative approach to conduct this study. However, the quantitative method is not the most appropriate design for studies that focus on exploring subjective experiences and perceptions (Green & Thorogood, 2018). Another research method I considered for the study was the mixed-method design. In a mixed-method design, researchers use aspects from both qualitative and quantitative methods (Bailey, 2017; Flick, 2018). The mixed-method approach was not selected for this study because the purpose of the study is based on subjective experiences, which is served better with the qualitative research method.

Some qualitative research methods include ethnography, phenomenology, case study, and generic qualitative approach (Holloway & Galvin, 2016). The ethnographic research design involves observing participants in their cultural milieu over a long period with the intention of examining the interrelations between culture and individual behavior (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017). I determined that ethnographic research was inappropriate for this study because I was not interested in exploring cultural interactions among participants. The phenomenological research approach involves exploring the lived experiences of individuals with the goal of understanding the meaning individuals attach to their lived experiences (Silverman, 2016). I deemed phenomenology inappropriate for this study because my focus was not on the lived experiences of African American couples regarding premarital counseling. The case study approach was also considered due to its data-rich exploration of a phenomenon from multiple sources in the form of bounded cases (Leavy, 2018). However, given that the focus of the current study was on subjective perceptions of premarital counseling among a subpopulation of African American couples, I could not use of the case study approach.

After considering several qualitative approaches, I determined that the generic qualitative approach was the most appropriate for guiding this study. Generic qualitative research is used to examine attitudes, perceptions, and values regarding an issue, topic, or event in the world (Percy et al., 2015). A generic qualitative study is not guided by an established group of philosophic assumptions like other traditional qualitative research designs (Kahlke, 2018). Because the purpose of this study was to examine the

perceptions of premarital counseling among African American couples, the generic qualitative approach was deemed the most suitable qualitative methodology.

#### Role of the Researcher

The primary role of a researcher in a qualitative study is to develop the research design and conduct the study while serving as the instrument of data collection (Flick, 2018). As the sole researcher, I was responsible for designing the study (see Lune & Berg, 2018). I was also responsible for obtaining authorization to conduct the study from the Walden University Institutional Review Board. I was responsible for recruiting the participants (see Oflazoglu, 2017) and collecting data (see Tjora, 2018). I was also responsible for ensuring the data remained private and secure and that the confidentiality of the participants was respected by following appropriate protocols. When collecting data, my role was to administer the systematic interview protocol in an impartial manner to ensure all participants could respond without discomfort or fear in communicating their perceptions (see Green & Thorogood, 2018).

As part of ethical considerations, it is important to ensure that there are no possible conflicts of interest between a researcher and the participants (Grønmo, 2019). I did not have any personal relationship or professional connection with the participants in this study. The lack of personal relationship with the participants, although challenging when forming initial contact, is useful for ensuring there is no conflict of interest due to a previous relationship (Tjora, 2018). Because of my experiences with premarital counseling inside and outside the church, it was important that I had no past previous

personal or professional relationships with participants recruited for this study to avoid conflict of interest.

Researcher bias is a concern in qualitative research. Researchers must acknowledge their personal experiences and beliefs regarding the phenomenon being investigated to manage possible researcher bias (Bailey, 2017). Due to my personal experience with premarital counseling inside and outside of church, I was familiar with the research topic. As a result of my experiences, I held two beliefs regarding premarital counseling. First, I believed that premarital counseling is, overall, a positive activity. This belief is based on findings from the existing literature that highlight positive outcomes of premarital counseling for marriages (Clyde et al., 2019; Williamson et al., 2018; Younkin et al., 2021). Additionally, the belief was informed by my personal experience in which I have witnessed improvement in relationships and lower divorce rates among couples who take part in premarital counseling. To ensure that my personal biases did not influence the research process, I used bracketing and reflexivity.

Bracketing is a strategy used in qualitative research in which a researcher puts personal beliefs and pre-existing knowledge on a research phenomenon aside before and during the research process (Dörfler & Stierand, 2020; McNarry et al., 2018). In this study, I used the following two strategies for bracketing: mental preparation and data collection planning (see Dörfler & Stierand, 2020; McNarry et al., 2018). For mental preparation, I asked and answered questions about my ability to conduct the study on the given research phenomenon (see McNarry et al., 2018). As already noted, I was familiar

with the research topic because of my personal experience with premarital counseling both inside and outside of church.

At various points during the study, I asked myself if my personal experience was affecting the ways in which the study was developing (see Dörfler & Stierand, 2020). For instance, I asked myself if my belief that premarital counseling results in benefits for couples affected the ways I designed the research problem. I answered this question negatively because the research problem is grounded in a review of literature and supported by statistics. I also asked myself if the research question developed was leading in any way. I also answered this in the negative because the research question, in alignment with the research purpose, focuses only on the perceptions of African Americans regarding premarital counseling, without assuming anything about the nature of such perceptions. Regarding data collection planning, I ensured that the questions I asked the participants during the interviews were not leading questions but allowed participants to express themselves fully (see Dörfler & Stierand, 2020). In this regard, I achieved bracketing by developing the interview questions for collecting data from the participants that were used to address the research question and the purpose of the study (Dörfler & Stierand, 2020).

Realizing that my personal beliefs about premarital counseling might not be objective enough, I also used the expertise of experienced research experts, as discussed in the next section, to review the interview questions and provide feedback, which ensured the interview questions were both feasible and relevant to the research phenomenon (see Flick, 2018; McNarry et al., 2018). Based on their feedback, I made

changes to ensure the interview questions were appropriate for the study (see Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017).

Another strategy for limiting researcher biases is reflexivity. Reflexivity includes a researchers' awareness that their interests and values may impinge on the study (Goldblatt & Band-Winterstein, 2016). In this study, I achieved reflexivity using a reflexive diary to identify potential aspects of bias and reduce their impact through bracketing (see Goldblatt & Band-Winterstein, 2016). In addition, I achieved reflexivity using a reflexive diary to note my thoughts and reflect on my practice during the study to identify potential improvements in the research process (see Dörfler & Stierand, 2020; Goldblatt & Band-Winterstein, 2016). In the reflexive diary, I noted my perceptions, feelings, and thoughts regarding the research (see Dörfler & Stierand, 2020; Goldblatt & Band-Winterstein, 2016). Through this process, I examined and re-examined my positions on African Americans and premarital counseling that could influence the research process, which helped to mitigate potential researcher bias.

## Methodology

In the current section, I discuss the details of the methodology for this study. These details include the selection of participants and instrumentation. Additionally, procedures for participant recruitment and data collection as well as the plan for data analysis are discussed.

#### **Participant Selection**

The target population for this study consisted of African American married couples residing in the United States. In 2019, there were approximately 62 million

married couples in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Among them, 4.76 million were African American married couples (Statista, 2021). All participants met the inclusion criteria, which specify the characteristics that participants must meet to participate in research (see Brennen, 2017). The inclusion criteria were as follows: (a) self-identify as African American; (b) over the age of 18 years; (c) couples must be living together at the time of their recruitment in the current study; (d) both participants must agree to take part in the study because interviews would be conducted with both partners together; (e) must not have participated in premarital education program before; (f) must be fluent in English; and (f) must be willing to take part in the study voluntarily by signing an informed consent form.

# **Sampling Strategy**

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants for this study, along with snowball sampling. The purposive sampling strategy is useful when there are specific criteria for inclusion and exclusion for participating in a study (Cassell et al., 2017). Purposive sampling includes the identification and recruitment of people with special knowledge on a research phenomenon (Cassell et al., 2017). The knowledge on the phenomenon of interest enables participants to provide information to address the research questions (Brennen, 2017). Because purposively selected participants should be knowledgeable of the research phenomenon of interest, in-depth exploration of their experiences through a generic qualitative study design helps reach saturation with a small number of participants (Brennen, 2017).

Additionally, snowball sampling facilitated the recruitment of other participants based on referrals from the participants initially recruited via purposeful sampling. In snowball sampling, participants who are part of the study are used to recruit further participants based on them suggesting participation in the study to those who have not seen the recruitment materials themselves (Cassell et al., 2017). To use snowball sampling, I asked the participants recruited through purposive sampling to refer couples they know who may meet the inclusion criteria to participate in the research. The use of snowball sampling together with purposeful sampling may increase the likelihood that a sufficient number of participants are available for recruitment (Cassell et al., 2017).

# **Sample Size**

In qualitative research, a small size sample is viewed as desirable for exploring indepth subjective perceptions to identify patterns and trends from the data, as opposed to making broad empirical predictions (Liu, 2016). The target sample for this study consisted of 10–12 married African American couples. The optimum sample size in qualitative research is often determined based on data saturation or the point in data collection when new data no longer brings additional insights into the research questions (Silverman, 2016). In qualitative research, a purposive sample size of 10 may be adequate to reach saturation (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Consequently, a sample size of 10 to 12 couples was deemed appropriate for reaching data saturation in this study.

#### Instrumentation

Data were collected with semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews, which are used frequently in qualitative studies, were used in this study because they

allowed for both flexibility and structure during the interview process, as opposed to open-ended interviews, which lack structure, and close-ended interviews, which lack flexibility. I asked participants open-ended questions and recorded their responses using a tape recorder. I used an interview protocol to guide the data collection process. A copy of the interview protocol is included in Appendix B. An interview protocol facilitates uniformity in delivering the baseline set of questions during the different interviews (Green & Thorogood, 2018). I used probing questions where necessary to seek clarity or deeper discussion from participants regarding their responses to the interview questions. I used a demographic questionnaire to collect background information to describe the participants. The demographic questionnaire is included in Appendix C.

The demographic questions were as follows:

- 1. What is your age?
- 2. In which city do you live?
- 3. What are your educational qualifications?
- 4. How long have you been married?

The interview questions were as follows:

- 1. What are your thoughts about premarital counseling?
- 2. What do you think might be some positive effects of participating in premarital counseling?
- 3. What do you think may some negative effects of participating in premarital counseling?
- 4. How do you think premarital counseling affects marriage?

- 5. What do you think are some things that might keep African American couples from participating in premarital counseling?
- 6. What prevented the two of you from participating in premarital counseling?
- 7. Do you know of anyone who has participated in premarital counseling? What information did these individuals share with you about premarital counseling?
- 8. Did anyone encourage you to seek premarital counseling? If yes,
- a. Who was that person?
- b. What was the person's reason for suggesting premarital counseling?
- 9. What suggestions do you have for encouraging African American couples to participate in premarital counseling?
- 10. What other thoughts to you have about premarital counseling that we have not yet discussed?

To ensure the interview protocol is appropriate for collecting data for addressing the research question, a panel of experts reviewed the interview questions (see Oflazoglu, 2017). For this purpose, I sought the help of two experts in the field of premarital education and counseling to review the interview questions to determine the face validity of the questions. These experts were not associated with the study. The experts were asked to review the interview protocol developed by me to ensure that it was relevant to the study and useful in exploring the research question (see Tjora, 2018). After identifying the experts then, with the help of my committee members, I presented the interview protocol to them and sought their feedback on the appropriateness of the questions in relation to the purpose of the study (see Flick, 2018). Depending on the

feedback received from the experts on the interview questions, possible changes were made to the protocol (see Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017).

# **Procedures for Recruitment and Participation**

Before recruiting participants for the study, I sought approval to conduct the study from the Walden University IRB. To recruit participants, I advertised on social media sites and groups dedicated to African Americans requesting eligible couples to participate in this study. These social media sites included Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. The advertisements specified the inclusion criteria, the purpose of the study, and my contact information for those interested in participating (see Appendix D).

For participants who responded to the advertisements, during the first contact call, I determined their eligibility for the study. I used the screening questionnaire to determine whether the participants met the eligibility criteria. I determined their eligibility based on the inclusion criteria. For those who met the eligibility criteria, I collected their email addresses, which I used to I send them a copy of the informed consent form (see Appendix E) for their review. I scheduled the interview with each couple at a time that was convenient for each member of the couple. I sent a follow-up email to both members of each couple reminding them of the date and time of the interview and made the necessary arrangements for the interview.

#### **Data Collection**

The interviews were conducted via teleconferencing at a date and time that was convenient for both partners for each couple. I conducted the interviews from my home using Zoom. The use of teleconferencing offers several advantages. First, I was able to

interview the participants without having an in-person meeting, which was advantageous due to the safety concerns, as the study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which began in 2019 and led to widespread quarantine and stay-at-home orders (see Gostin & Wiley, 2020). Second, as the participants also took part in the teleconference from their home, I was not required to obtain approval from any organization to conduct face-to-face interviews. Third, the use of teleconferencing offered an additional advantage of saving time in that neither the participants nor I incurred the expense of time and costs associated with driving to a physical meeting space (see Archibald et al., 2019). Some disadvantages of teleconferencing include lack of physical face-to-face presence and possibility of interruptions due to internet connection problems.

After both parties in the couple appeared for the teleconferencing call, I greeted them. Following a brief chat to build a rapport, I re-read the informed consent form and asked whether the couple had any question before proceeding. I obtained verbal permission from both members of the couple to record the interview. In addition to the main recorder, I also kept a backup recorder. I informed the participants that I was using a recorder before beginning to record, the permission for which was been obtained in the informed consent form. I then started the tape recorder and began the interview.

I first used a demographic form to collect demographic data (see Appendix C). I used a systematic interview protocol to conduct the interviews. Each interview lasted for 45 to 60 minutes. After the completion of each interview, I conducted a debriefing session. In the debriefing session, I informed the participants of the next stages of the research process, such as preparing the transcripts, transcript review, data analysis, and

member checking. Before parting, I thanked the couples for their contribution to the study.

As each interview was conducted, I began to transcribe the interviews through a professional transcription service (Rev.com). As part of the transcription, the names of the participants were removed and replaced with pseudonyms. After the transcription process was completed, I conducted a transcript review, which involved sending the respective transcripts to each couple to determine whether their responses were properly represented in the transcriptions (see Brennen, 2017). I sent an electronic version of the transcript as a pdf file of each interview to the respective couple via email. I asked the couple to read the transcript to ensure their responses were adequately represented. I asked the couples to provide feedback in case their transcripts did not adequately reflect their views. I asked the participants to provide feedback, if any, as a reply to the email within 2 weeks from the date the email containing the transcript was sent. I also informed the participants that if they did not respond within the specified time frame of 2 weeks, I would assume that the transcripts were accurate. For any feedback from the participants, I made corrections to the transcripts as needed.

#### **Data Analysis Plan**

I used thematic content analysis to analyze the data that were collected in this study. Thematic content analysis is used for analyzing any kind of textual data that is obtained from any source (Merriam & Grenier, 2018). In qualitative research, thematic content analysis is used for exploring how phrases, ideas, and words emerge in data (Merriam & Grenier, 2018). The use of thematic content analysis helped me describe,

rather than interpret, the words actually spoken by the individual participants. Thematic content analysis helped ensure only the perceptions shared by the participants informed the development of the themes (Merriam & Grenier, 2018). Thematic content analysis involves taking an inductive approach to analysis where themes are allowed to emerge from the data, as opposed to using a priori, predetermined set of themes for coding the data (Armat et al., 2018). In inductive analysis, which is used when there is limited or lack of previous research findings, the researcher uses research purpose, research questions, and some relevant assumptions to direct the analysis (Armat et al., 2018). As the analysis moves ahead, new categories arise and the researcher forms tentative hypotheses, which are then tested during the remainder of the analysis (Armat et al., 2018). To conduct the thematic analysis, I used the seven-step process for analysis suggested by Colaizzi (1978). The seven steps are as follows:

## Step 1: Familiarization

I began with familiarizing myself with the transcriptions developed. To do this, I read the printed transcripts of each participant multiple times to become familiar with the essence of the participants 'responses to the interview questions.

# Step 2: Identifying Significant Statements

In the second step, I highlighted phrases, words, and statements in the transcripts that first pertained to each of the interview questions. To identify significant words, statements, or key phrases across the multiple interviews, I first sorted and grouped the data by interview question. I noted recurring words, phrases, or patterns of thought by highlighting them in the printed transcripts using differently colored highlighters. The

highlighted colors represented each interview question. After I identified the recurring word, phrases, or patterns of thought across the printed transcripts, I made list of the recurring word, phrases, or patterns of thought for each interview questions using Microsoft Word. This list served as potential codes for the data.

## Step 3: Formulate Meaning

In the third step, I began to formulate meaning from the list of codes. I began by categorizing and grouping different phrases, words, and statements with similar content together. This initial process of grouping recurring patterns of words and key phrases allowed me to engage in open coding (Theron, 2015). I then identified meanings that were common among different phrases, words, and statements and associated those meanings with a descriptive name. The names or labels were noted down in a separate Word document, which became a code sheet containing a list of recurring words, phrases, and ideas. This code sheet was used to keep track of how codes are being used to make sense of the data. Next, I reviewed different interview questions in relation to statements from the highlighted document to associate them based on key phrases and words.

## Step 4: Clustering Themes

In the fourth step, I began to cluster the themes based on a second round of categorizing and grouping the open codes identified in Step 3. I clustered the open codes according to similar latent. This second grouping of codes allowed me to engage in axial coding (Theron, 2015). I provided a descriptive label to each theme. I then reviewed every interview and highlighted responses based on the codes developed so far.

Depending on the complexity of the participants 'responses to the interview questions, I

engaged in a third round of coding called selective coding, which resulted central meta themes encompassing themes identified during axial coding (Theron, 2015).

# Step 5: Exhaustive Description

In the fifth step, I used themes or meta themes to generate an exhaustive description of the participants 'perceptions of premarital counseling. I wrote an exhaustive description of participants 'responses to each of the interview questions.

## Step 6: Fundamental Structure

In the sixth step, I condensed the exhaustive description of the responses to the interview question into a description explaining the findings that answer the research question.

# Step 7: Verification of Findings

In the seventh and final step, I verified the structure developed concerning the phenomenon by conducting member checking, which is discussed in a later section.

Based on participant feedback, I edited the analysis results.

#### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in a qualitative study concerns the extent of confidence in the methods, interpretation, and data for ascertaining a study's quality. The criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative study, as identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985), are frequently used in qualitative research to establish trustworthiness. They consist of the following four elements: transferability, credibility, confirmability, and dependability (Merriam & Grenier, 2018). In the current section, the strategies that were adopted for each of the factors are discussed.

# Credibility

Credibility refers to the confidence in the accuracy of findings from a research study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Credibility is used to establish that the results of a study reflect the data collected from the participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To enhance the credibility of the findings of this study, I conducted transcript review and member checking. Member checking consists of a process in which data and interpretations developed at a point are provided to the participants for feedback regarding the plausibility of the results (Merriam, 1998). Member checking allows participants to provide feedback regarding the plausibility of the interpretation and validity of the data as presented (Silverman, 2016). I conducted member checking following the completion of the data analysis. As part of member checking, I sent a copy of the findings from the data analysis to each of the couples via email and asked them to determine how accurately the interpretation reflected their perceptions of premarital counseling. The couples were asked to provide feedback by specifying any corrections they would like to make to the interpretations of the data. Corrections were made in the final summary to reflect any feedback provided by the couples

In addition to member checking, I also practiced reflexivity to enhance credibility (Goldblatt & Band-Winterstein, 2016). The practice of reflexivity involved reducing personal bias through questioning myself during the process of data collection and analysis (Goldblatt & Band-Winterstein, 2016). Specifically, during the research process, I identified potential aspects of bias and reduced their impact through bracketing (McNarry et al., 2018). Bracketing is a process whereby potentially negative impact

resulting from preconceptions of the researcher is eliminated (McNarry et al., 2018). To conduct bracketing, I kept a diary, in which I described my thoughts during the research (McNarry et al., 2018). In the diary, I noted my perceptions, feelings, and thoughts on the research (Goldblatt & Band-Winterstein, 2016). Through this process, I examined and reexamined personal positions on topics relevant to the research phenomenon that could influence the research process (Goldblatt & Band-Winterstein, 2016).

## **Dependability**

Dependability refers to the degree to which the interpretation and findings of a study reflect the data obtained from the participants in a study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In the current study, I used an audit trail and member checking to enhance dependability of the research. Audit trail involves transparent descriptions of the research process during the different stages, beginning with the identification of the research phenomenon and ending with the final reporting (Silverman, 2016). I kept an audit trail of the record of the research decisions made during the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The audit trail allows readers to determine why certain decisions were made by the researcher to determine whether the research can be duplicated in another setting for further research (Silverman, 2016). Details included in the audit trail were methodological choices such as participant selection, development of interview questions, and choices regarding the data collection process and data analysis process. For member checking, I sent the final report to each of the couple via email and asked them to provide feedback on the representation of their perceptions in the analysis (Silverman, 2016). The couples were asked to provide feedback in response to the email

specifying any corrections they would like made in the transcript (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Based on their responses, corrections were made to the final report iteratively until the couples who provided the feedback were satisfied with the representation of their perceptions (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). By allowing participants to evaluate the recommendations, interpretation, and the findings to ensure they all were supported by the data shared, member checking enhanced the dependability of results of this study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

## **Confirmability**

Confirmability specifies the extent to which other researchers can confirm the findings of the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To ensure confirmability, I used various strategies such as member checking and audit trait (see Silverman, 2016). Through member checking, I ensured confirmability by allowing participants to confirm that the interpretations of the data obtained from them accurately reflected their perceptions (Silverman, 2016). For member checking, I sent the final report to each of the couple via email and asked them to provide feedback on the representation of their perceptions in the analysis. The couples were asked to provide feedback in response to the email specifying any correction they would like to be made (Silverman, 2016). Based on the responses, corrections were made to the final report iteratively until the couples who had provided the feedback were satisfied with the representation of their perceptions (Silverman, 2016). As participants were able to confirm the findings of the study based on their review and feedback to ensure the interpretations accurately reflected their perceptions, member checking ensured confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Another strategy to ensure confirmability was the audit trail (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Based on methodological description provided in the audit trail, readers were able to determine the extent to which the themes emerging from the data could be confirmed as coming from interpretations of the data (Cassell et al., 2017). Audit trail involves transparent descriptions of the research process during its different stages, beginning with the identification of the research phenomenon to the final reporting (Cassell et al., 2017). I kept an audit trail of the record of the research paths followed during the study. Through a review of the audit trail, a reader can trace the logic of the researcher to determine whether other researchers can confirm the findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I also provided thick descriptions of themes, which were supported by the quotes from the participants, to enhance confirmability.

# **Transferability**

Transferability specifies the extent to which the results from a study can be transferred to other conditions or contexts (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To ensure transferability, I used the strategy of thick descriptions (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I made sure to describe not only the experiences and behavior of the participants, but also their background. Thick descriptions help establish transferability by allowing the researcher to ensure there is adequate contextual data about the data collection and participants to allow readers to determine transferability (Cassell et al., 2017). In this study, I ensured transferability by providing thick descriptions regarding the context of the research, especially the data collection process and the participants 'characteristics, which could help other researchers replicate the study in other conditions or contexts. A

purposive sampling technique was also used to ensure transferability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Using a purposive sampling technique, participants of specific characteristics were recruited in the current study, thereby establishing the limits of transferability. Through purposive sampling, transferability in the study was enhanced by providing details of the characteristics of the participants that will help other researchers identify the extent to which the current study can be transferred to other conditions or contexts (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

#### **Ethical Procedures**

Before beginning the recruitment process, I obtained authorization to conduct the study from the Walden University IRB. In addition, as part of the training involved for dissertation, I obtained details of the ethical considerations that had to be undertaken for this study. An important aspect of ethical procedures in this study was confidentiality (Cho, 2018). The participant's confidentiality was maintained using pseudonyms, which is a common practice in qualitative research to protect the identity of the participants (Lune & Berg, 2018). Pseudonyms, which included a combination of letters and numbers, such as A-1 and B-2, were used to replace the personally identifiable information of the participants. Any detail that could be used to identify the participants was removed from the transcripts (Silverman, 2016). I also shared both raw and processed data with committee members for review to ensure that confidentiality of the participant was maintained. I obtained a signed contract with the transcription agency indicating that the agency would protect participants 'confidentiality and the security of the data (Appendix F).

Another factor involved in ethical considerations is ensuring participant autonomy. It is important that participants are neither coerced nor manipulated during the data collection process (Flick, 2018). The use of an informed consent form was crucial for ensuring participant autonomy. By signing the informed consent form, participants acknowledged their voluntary decision to take part in the study. Additionally, the informed consent form was used to educate the participants on their rights. If participants wished to withdraw from the study at any point, they were asked to either call or email me. No explanations from them regarding why they want to withdraw would be required, and all the data collected from that participant until then would be permanently destroyed (Holloway & Galvin, 2016).

To maintain the security of the data collected digital data, such as interview recordings, were stored in a computer in my home that was locked with a password (Oflazoglu, 2017). Physical data, such as hard copies of the transcripts, were kept in a personal safe, protected with a lock in my home (Tjora, 2018). Before the final publication, I will review the dissertation once again to ensure all personally identifiable details have been removed (Brennen, 2017). I will make all the data, whether raw or processed, available to my committee members for review. The committee members will keep the identities of the participants confidential. All data, both digital and physical, will be kept for 5 years, after which they will be destroyed using a shredder and a digital erasing tool, respectively (Merriam & Grenier, 2018).

#### **Summary**

In this chapter, the research methodology for this study has been presented. The purpose of this research is to examine the perceptions of premarital counseling among African American couples. For this study's purpose, the qualitative method was found to be more appropriate. Likewise, in alignment with the purpose of the proposed study, the generic qualitative approach, which focuses on attitudes, perceptions, and values, presented a suitable option for this study. My primary role in this qualitative study was to develop the research design and conduct the study (Flick, 2018). The general population for this study consisted of African American married couples residing in the United States. The target population consisted of African American married couples who had been married for more than a year and never participated in premarital education program before. A purposive sampling strategy was used together with snowball sampling to select a sample of 10-12 married African Americans who had been married for more than a year and not participated in premarital education program before. In this generic qualitative research study, qualitative interviews were used as the primary and sole source of data. The data collection process was initiated following authorization from the IRB and included one-on-one interviews with the participants. For data analysis, I used thematic content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Issues related to trustworthiness, specifically transferability, credibility, confirmability, and dependability (Merriam & Grenier, 2018) were discussed, along with ethical procedures. In the next chapter, the results obtained from the data analysis are presented.

#### Chapter 4: Results

#### Introduction

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to examine African American couples' perceptions of premarital counseling. In general, researchers agree that premarital educational and counseling programs can reduce divorce rates by providing tools to address challenges related to marital distress and instability (Brank, 2019; Clyde et al., 2019; DeAngelis, 2017; Demir-Dagdas et al., 2017; Markman et al., 2019). However, previous researchers have found that African Americans perceive counseling as professional help meant only for those with mental illness (Fripp & Carlson, 2017). Nonetheless, there is little information regarding what may encourage or prevent African Americans from seeking premarital counseling. Although the effectiveness of premarital counseling for addressing challenges of marital instability for couples has been extensively researched, there is a lack of research on perceptions of premarital counseling among African Americans. The research question that guided this study was: What are African Americans couples' perceptions of premarital counseling? This chapter includes information on the setting of the study, demographics of the sample, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and results.

### Setting

IRB approval for this study (#12-08-21-0569793) was granted on December 8, 2021. The study included African American married couples residing in the United States. The study participants were recruited starting December 16, 2021. As recruiting

participants during the month of December and throughout the winter holidays was difficult, I waited until January to repost the recruitment flyer on social media.

I started receiving inquiries for participation shortly after January 1, 2022. In total, 11 participants expressed an interest in the study from January to June. However, only five completed the interviews. Two interested participants did not respond after I sent the consent form, and the other four did not meet the inclusion criteria. My committee chair suggested reaching out to my second committee member and university research reviewer to inform them of the difficulty and time it was taking to recruit. My committee chair requested permission to stop data collection. On June 2, 2022, I was granted approval from my second committee member and university research reviewer to stop recruiting and begin data analysis. Because the sample size was fewer than desired (see Chapter 3), this is a limitation of this study and is addressed in the limitations section of Chapter 5.

#### **Demographics**

Purposive sampling was used to recruit married couples to participate in the survey using the procedures and inclusion criteria described in Chapter 3. The demographics of participants are shown in Table 1. The participants ranged in age from 30 to 61 years (M = 44.2). Only three of the participants were willing to share their highest level of education. The participants had been married for 4 to 42 months (M = 20.6 months). Four (80%) of the couples resided in the state of Virginia, and one couple (20%) resided in Maryland. All participants confirmed that they had not participated in premarital counseling.

**Table 1**Sample Demographics

	Gender	Age	Highest education	State of residence	Time married (months)
C1	Female	30		Virginia	4
	Male	30	College		
C2	Female	49	_	Maryland	9
	Male	42	_		
C3	Female	49	_	Virginia	24
	Male	39	Undergraduate		
C4	Female	52	Graduate	Virginia	24
	Male	61			
C5	Female	43	_	Virginia	42
	Male	47	<del></del>		

*Note*. Seven of the participants preferred not to answer regarding their highest education. All participants confirmed that they had not previously participated in premarital counseling.

#### **Data Collection**

As indicated, I had some difficulty recruiting participants for this study. I posted adverts on social media sites and groups dedicated to African Americans, including Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. I also shared the study adverts with individuals from the Walden University participant pool. Five couples responded via email and phone. I explained the study and shared a recruitment questionnaire and informed consent with instructions to email back a signed consent form if they wished to participate in the study. Five couples sent back a signed consent form, and I set up an interview date and time.

Interviews were conducted via Zoom and verbal consent was requested before recording. Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Participants did not use video during the interviews; therefore, I was not able to observe the participants' nonverbal communication, such as body language, to assess their reactions to the questions.

However, I paid attention to the tone of participants' voices to gain further insights beyond what was said in the interview. There were no issues with the internet connection or streaming during the interview recordings. Interview files were saved on my laptop and secured with a password to ensure data confidentiality.

#### **Data Analysis**

#### **Process of Coding Into Themes**

I used Rev, speech-to-text company, to transcribe the interviews. Once the transcriptions were completed and sent back to me, I downloaded the document and saved it to a folder on my computer. To verify the information in the transcripts, I listened to each audio recording and simultaneously read the transcript. I made changes to the transcripts to add omitted information and correct errors identified. Then, I anonymized the transcripts by removing all identifying information such as names of participants and churches or organizations they had shared.

To code the data from the individual statements in the interview transcripts to the overall themes used to answer the research question, I followed Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step process for conducting thematic content analysis: (a) familiarization, (b) identifying significant statements, (c) formulating meaning, (d) clustering of themes,

(e) development of a detailed description for each meta theme, (f) removing

redundancies, and (g) verification of results. In Step 1, I sought to obtain a comprehensive sense of the phenomenon and ensure the analysis stayed focused on participants' statements (see Wirihana et al., 2018). I read the interview transcripts multiple times to become familiar with the content of the interview questions. The purpose of the second step was to find statements made by participants that relate directly to their perceptions of the phenomenon (see Wirihana et al., 2018). I reviewed each interview transcript more than once to identify significant statements. I first highlighted phrases, words, and statements in the transcript that were directly related to the research question. Then, I noted recurring words, phrases, and patterns that were seen in multiple transcripts. I highlighted them in the printed transcripts using different colored highlighters. I then used a coding template developed in Microsoft Word and transferred identified significant statements from each transcript into that template (see Table 2).

Table 2
Significant Statement Into Initial Code/Formulated Meaning

Participant	Significant statement	Initial code/ formulated meaning
C1M (Couple 1: Male)	Because when you have to me, a counselor to me when you're between two couples is basically a mediator, right? Whether it's good problems or bad, things going on with that person to have that view from the outside, that can give both sides that constructive criticism needed at times, that each other may not be willing to do when they're in private.	A counselor helps to discuss difficult topics
C5F (Couple 5: Female) C4M (Couple 4: Male)	And I think maybe it's kind of, Well, my mom and daddy didn't have it, so then I don't need it. Or It's not important. Or we don't need that.  But my parents never told me about marriage counseling, and I never heard about it until I became an adult. I never heard anybody talk about.	Counseling is not important to me or my parents Marriage counseling was not common growing up.
C2F (Couple 2: Female)	Also, I think that there may be things that because life is life and there's so many facets to life. And there may some things that you haven't even thought of, that that person that you are doing counseling with may throw out there and you as a couple never even thought about it.	Couples discover and address new issues about themselves

In Step 3, my aim was to attribute meaning to the quotes/significant statements (see Wirihana et al., 2018). I categorized and grouped the initial codes that had similar content together. This initial process of grouping recurring patterns of words and key phrases allowed me to see how large groups of similar/same content were. This step also allowed me to label these groups with a theme that described all of them (see Theron, 2015). Table 3 illustrates how meaning was formulated.

**Table 3**Significant Statement Into Formulated Meaning Into Theme

Participant	Statement	Formulated meaning	Theme
C3F (Couple 3: Female)	I think (premarital counseling) sometimes sets expectations such as what religion your partner is in and what their spiritual routine is, and whether that is something you will be able to live with or be a part of while sharing their lives. It just outlines who that individual is. So, you have things that come up that maybe you didn't just discuss while you were dating.	Partners discover and address new issues about themselves.	Premarital counseling has benefits
C3M (Couple 3: Male)	I think most ministers say we're going to marry you; you need to participate in premarital counseling. It was more so of; this is who we want to marry us so You kind of follow suit.	Religion encourages participation in premarital counseling.	Facilitator to premarital counseling
C5M (Couple 5: Male)	I just think people don't realize that premarital counselors don't know either one of you guys. They are scared to go to counseling, and I think they are scared to hear their faults in the marriage.	Afraid to hear about one's faults in marriage	Barriers to premarital counseling
C4F (Couple 4: Female)	My thoughts on it are, it wasn't something on my radar because I've never really known anybody in my circle that has talked about it or even had it, growing up or currently.	Participant and peers unaware of premarital counseling growing up	Premarital counseling should be better marketed
C4F	I think it can be a good thing. I mean, I don't think it's a negative thing. I would say, I would tell somebody who is getting married, "Hey, go to counseling."	Couples need premarital counseling.	Premarital counseling should be better marketed

In the fourth step, I clustered the similar quotes/significant statements determined in Step 3 that were related into larger groups (clusters). The list of clustered significant

statements is presented in Appendix F. I then reviewed every interview transcript and highlighted the responses based on the themes developed thus far. The purpose of the review was to validate the themes in comparison to the original transcripts. Where themes were found to be related, I engaged in the third round of selective coding. The selective coding resulted in the development of central meta themes that were more encompassing and contained closely related smaller groups (see Theron, 2015). I identified three themes and took time to reflect on their meanings to ensure the findings were accurate. Table 4 indicates the clustering of themes to form three meta themes.

Table 4

Themes Into Meta Themes

Clustering of subthemes	Meta themes
Exposure of sinister motives about marriage is	Benefits of premarital counseling
a benefit to the other partner.	
Discovering and resolving new issues is a	
benefit to a couple.	
Addressing known and difficult issues is a	
benefit to a couple.	
Couple receiving feedback from a counselor is	
a benefit.	
Religion as a barrier to counseling	Barriers to premarital counseling
Negative social norms among African	
American people	
Misconceptions about counseling	
Misconceptions about the counselor	
Community members are not adequately aware	Ideas to improve a couple's uptake
about counseling.	of premarital counseling
Couples were unaware of benefits of premarital	
counseling.	
Parents can help in creating awareness about	
counseling.	

In Step 5, I developed detailed descriptions for each meta theme used in answering the research question (results) and interpreting the results in Chapter 5 (see

Wirihana et al., 2018). I reviewed the transcripts, thematic clusters, and final themes several times to identify any inconsistencies and create a comprehensive description. I used the themes or meta themes to describe the participants' perceptions of premarital counseling. I then wrote a detailed description of the participants' responses to each of the interview questions. Table 5 indicates how a detailed description was achieved.

 Table 5

 Comprehensive Description of Themes

Meta themes	Explanation of theme	
Benefits of premarital	The benefits of premarital counseling to couples	
counseling		
Barriers to premarital	The barriers to uptake of premarital counseling by	
counseling	couples	
Ideas to improve couples'	There was a general lack of awareness about premarital	
participation in premarital	counseling. Participants' responses suggested that	
counseling	promotion of premarital counseling should be improved.	

The purpose of Step 6 was to remove redundant or misused descriptions (see Wirihana et al., 2018). In this step, I condensed the detailed description of the responses to the interview question into a description explaining the findings that answered the research question. In Step 7, I verified the structure developed concerning the phenomenon by conducting member checking. I emailed a summary of the data themes to the five couples and invited them to comment on the validity. I used feedback from study participants to review and edit the analysis. The participants considered the findings to be a true representation of their perceptions of premarital counseling. The following three themes were developed to answer the research question: (a) premarital counseling has benefits, (b) there are barriers to accessing premarital counseling for African American

couples, and (c) premarital counseling should be better marketed to African American couples.

#### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in a qualitative study concerns the extent of confidence in the methods, interpretation, and data for ascertaining a study's quality. The criteria for trustworthiness in a qualitative study consist of four elements: transferability, credibility, confirmability, and dependability (Merriam & Grenier, 2018). In the current section, the strategies that were adopted for each of the factors are discussed.

#### Credibility

To enhance the credibility of findings from this study, I conducted a transcript review and member checking. Member checking is a process in which interview transcripts are provided to the participants for feedback (Merriam, 1998). Member checking allowed participants to provide input regarding the plausibility of the interpretation and validity of the data as presented (Silverman, 2016). I also sent a copy of the findings from the data analysis to each of the couples via email and asked them to determine how accurately the interpretation reflected their perceptions of premarital counseling. The couples were asked to provide feedback by specifying any corrections they wanted made to the interpretations of the data. I made modifications in the final summary to reflect any feedback provided by the couples.

In addition to member checking, I practiced reflexivity to enhance credibility (see Goldblatt & Band-Winterstein, 2016). The practice of reflexivity involves reflections by the researcher to reduce personal bias by self-questioning during data collection and analysis (Goldblatt & Band-Winterstein, 2016). I identified potential aspects of bias and reduced their impact through bracketing (see McNarry et al., 2018). I kept a diary describing my thoughts during the research (see McNarry et al., 2018). I noted perceptions, feelings, and opinions regarding the research and examined and re-examined personal positions on topics relevant to the research phenomenon that could influence the research process (see Goldblatt & Band-Winterstein, 2016).

#### **Dependability**

I used an audit trail and member checking to enhance the dependability of the research. The audit trail involved transparent descriptions of the research process during the different stages, beginning with identifying the research phenomenon and ending with the final reporting (see Silverman, 2016). I ensured an audit trail of a record of the decisions made was kept during the study (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018) to allow readers to determine whether the research could be duplicated in another setting (see Silverman, 2016).

The details included in the audit trail included methodological choices such as participant selection, development of interview questions, and choices regarding data collection and analysis. Member checking included the researcher sending the final report to each couple via email and asking them to provide feedback on the representation of their data in the analysis (see Silverman, 2016). The couples were asked to provide input in response to the email specifying any corrections they wanted made (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I modified the final report iteratively until the couples who provided the feedback were satisfied with the representation of their perceptions (see Korstjens &

Moser, 2018). Member checking enhanced the dependability of results of this study by allowing participants to evaluate the recommendations, interpretation, and findings to ensure that they were supported by the data shared by the participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

#### **Confirmability**

I used member checking and audit traits to ensure confirmability (see Silverman, 2016). Through member checking, I provided confirmability by allowing participants to confirm that their interpretations of the data accurately reflected their perceptions (see Silverman, 2016). For member checking, I also sent the final report to each couple via email and asked them to provide feedback on the representation of their perceptions in the analysis. The couples were asked to provide input in response to the email specifying any correction they would like to make (see Silverman, 2016). As participants confirmed my findings based on their review and feedback to ensure the interpretations accurately reflected their perceptions, member checking helped to ensure confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Another strategy to ensure confirmability was an audit trail (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Based on the methodological description provided in the audit trail, readers should be able to determine the extent to which themes emerging from the data could be confirmed as coming from interpretations of the data (Cassell et al., 2017). The audit trail involved transparent descriptions of the research process during its different stages, from identifying the research phenomenon to the final reporting (see Cassell et al., 2017). I maintained an audit trail by recording the research paths during the study. To enhance

confirmability, I provided thick descriptions of themes and illustrative quotes from the participants in my discussion of the results.

#### **Transferability**

To ensure transferability, I used the strategy of thick descriptions of the participants' experiences and backgrounds (see Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Thick descriptions helped establish transferability by allowing me to provide adequate contextual data about data collection (see Cassell et al., 2017). I also provided a thick description of the research context, especially regarding the data collection process and the participant characteristics, to help other researchers replicate the study in different conditions or contexts.

The purposive sampling technique was also used to ensure transferability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I used purposive sampling to ensure that study participants met specific characteristics and establish the limits of transferability. The inclusion criteria for study participants will help other researchers identify the extent to which the current study can be transferred to other conditions or contexts (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

#### Results

The research question that was asked in this study was as follows: what are

African American couples 'perceptions of premarital counseling? The three themes that

were developed during the coding of the interview data to answer this research question.

The answer to this research question is that premarital counseling has benefits for

couples, there are barriers to premarital counseling, and premarital counseling should be better marketed to African American couples.

#### **Theme 1: Premarital Counseling Has Benefits**

Theme 1 describes the various advantages of premarital counseling for African American couples. The first benefit was that premarital counseling helped couples discover and address new issues about themselves. For instance, C4M (Couple 4 Male) stated, "I would think that I could see where it would help because if you are getting counseling, you get to know a little bit more about the other person, asking questions and doing some dialogue back and forth."

A second example of couples discovering and addressing new issues was indicated by C4F (Couple 4 Female). She noted that sometimes couples have an argument and fail to realize what the underlying issues are, but a premarital counselor may help such couples uncover the root issues and thus enrich their relationship. C4F stated,

You are not arguing about that little simple thing you think you are arguing about. It is something deeper. So, counseling helps, and the expert third party can pull those things out. And a lot of, I think couples don't even get to that level. And so, having a counselor could only enrich your relationship.

A premarital counselor may help couples build the confidence to discuss issues they were already aware of but could not address without a counselor's help. For example, C1M argued that premarital counseling could help couples overcome their fears of marriage, such as getting hurt, divorced, or losing money. C1M stated,

Many people have this whole stigma of getting married because they're scared of getting hurt, getting divorced, losing money, and all that other stuff. But it comes from misunderstandings and those minor miscommunications and misfires that can be prevented or checked in the beginning.

C2F indicated that premarital counseling might help couples discuss issues they have been bottling up or struggled to discuss. They argued that during premarital counseling, couples might get the courage to discuss complex topics. C2F stated,

There may be something bothering you about the other person but something you may be uncomfortable bringing up. I think that having that person that is unbiased to the two of you may make one feel comfortable enough to bring that situation or that thing to light.

C2M indicated that there are times when couples are unable to provide feedback to each other and a counselor can act as a mediator and provide feedback:

A counselor to me when they are between two couples it's basically a mediator, right? Whether it is good problems or bad, things going on with that person to have that view from the outside, that can give both sides that constructive criticism needed at times, that each other may not be willing to do when they are in private.

Participants shared that their experience of premarital counseling improved communication between each other as a couple. C5F reported that premarital counseling provided a platform for them to communicate as a couple: "But it (premarital counseling) just gives you a platform to be able to communicate and kind of put everything out there,

I think." C4F pointed out that although she and her partner did not go for premarital counseling, it would have helped them learn how to communicate better which supports the position of C5F. C4F stated,

When you are so sure of your love, you are like, okay, that is all you need. But here today, we know love is not all you need. It is the main ingredient, but you need to know how to communicate. And I think premarital counseling would have enriched us in that.

C1M gave an example of a friend who learned how to communicate better in their marriage due to premarital counseling. The friend had recommended counseling to C1M as a good option based on the value, they got from it. C1M stated,

It is just seeing from her, and how it helped her and her husband get better at communicating with one another. She knows that we will benefit from it, just in general, not based on any issues or anything we have discussed.

Premarital counseling also may expose inappropriate motives for getting married. For instance, C2F indicated that during premarital counseling, couples with the wrong motive for marriage might be exposed and such a marriage avoided. They reported that some people were interested in marriage because others were getting married and shared nothing in common:

I know you have some out here that get married just for the wrong reasons, and for some, it could be a fad. It could be that everybody is married so let us just get married. In that, you want to go through the cadence of getting married. So, you

tap into premarital counseling, and you are exposed, put it that way. You are exposed. You have nothing in common.

In summary, participants reported that premarital counseling had many benefits. The benefits included couples discovering and addressing new issues about themselves and discussing complex and known concerns before getting married, allowing them to know how to have those conversations after marriage. They also indicated that it improved communication between couples and helped some couples find out that they were not meant to be together.

#### Theme 2: Barriers to Premarital Counseling for African American Couples

Participants indicated that social norms against premarital counseling exist among African American couples. C1M observed that premarital counseling was common among religious couples but the negative perception against it was changing:

I think there is the stigma of therapy in general, and it is changing, especially in the last few years or so. It is changing. We are coming around as a people towards therapy just in general. But premarital counseling, I think those of us who are not in the church, it is more of a journey to get to premarital counseling because it is just like, I go, I find somebody I like, I want to be with them, I get married.

C4M shared that negative attitudes towards counseling were passed down from one generation to the next. They reported that their parents had taught them that they could sort out marital issues without seeking help:

So, I do not need counseling because I can handle this. I can figure this out. And it has always been, any type of trouble or any type of things I had to encounter, say,

"Look, I'm having some issues. I will figure it out." Or sometimes your dad would say, "Hey, take it on the chin, man, and keep moving." So, I never thought I had to go to a counselor to be told what to do. If I am married, I say, "Okay, I can figure it out."

Negative social attitudes towards counseling among African American people shared by participants included the belief that counseling was for White people. C3M indicated that peers would tease an individual if they disclosed that they were going for counseling: "The stereotypes that we are having in the black community, I have heard people in the barbershop say, "Man, you are going to get counseling? Man, that is for White folks. You bougie?"" C2M stated that African American men did not open up and were intimidated by counselors they perceived as more educated than they are:

The Black man, it is like, we do not open up as much. Most of the time, we are used to being accused of something, looking a certain way, or being treated a certain way. So, many times, we see a person, most of the time, the counselor feels that they are educated. Maybe they do not want to go around dealing with educated counselors; perhaps that's an intimidation factor for some black people, especially black men, as a sense of authority.

Participants also indicated that many African American couples thought they could resolve their issues without a counselor so they opted to not participate in premarital counseling. C3F stated,

When you are considering premarital counseling, to some, they may figure, I do not need somebody to come and talk about the things I have already discussed.

Or, if we have not talked about it, I do not need somebody to guide this conversation because it is deemed as something negative. They don't understand or have never been in that environment to seek good counseling.

C3M indicated that couples might fail to take up premarital counseling because they lack trust in the counselor: "I think that a big part of it is one party not feeling as safe as the other partner, just because they do not know who that individual is mediating." This was supported by C4F who indicated that couples might refrain from premarital counseling due to fear of being judged by the counselor:

I feared going in it, letting the counselor know certain things about me. I thought she may use it and say, "Oh, that is not cool." But I know that is not the case now. So, I think certain people feel that about giving out your information and wondering what the counselor would say.

Couples also had misconceptions about the purpose of counseling. C5F felt that they had been courting for a long time and there was no need for counseling because they had figured out the relationship and did not anticipate any changes, so they did not see the benefits of going to a premarital counselor:

Some people who have been together a very long time have figured out how to make things work. And you just kind of got to keep going, once you get married, and you can't expect anything to change.

C2M and C4F argued that they perceived God as their counselor, and they did not need to see a person in this role. They believed God could reveal to them when they made the

wrong decision, such as marrying the wrong partner. C2M reported that there was no need for premarital counseling when someone has God as their counselor:

My biggest thing is my faith. I believe in the biggest counselor of them all. So, if I take my matters to God, I pray to God, and have faith in God; with all the decisions that I make, I feel that if I were making the wrong decision, God would have brought it to light. So, for me, there was no need to do that counseling. Also, based on that, I felt God guided me to marry (Partner name withheld).

Participants also shared the perception that premarital counseling is only necessary if someone wishes to change aspects of their partner. C2M pointed out that they felt there was no need for premarital counseling because they had already accepted their partner with her flaws:

I just felt being almost six, seven years in a relationship. My biggest belief is that I had already decided whatever the things about my future wife at the time that I had a problem with before I decided to propose that I could live with it. If I can live with it, there is no reason to discuss it because I have already decided to live.

Various barriers to participating in premarital counseling for African Americans included negative social norms about premarital counseling. There were also barriers related to individuals 'perceptions of a counselor as someone they cannot trust and who may judge them. In addition, some couples had religious beliefs that perceived God as the only counselor they needed. Additionally, some couples did not see a need for counseling because they had dated for a long time. They felt confident that they knew their partner

had accepted their flaws. Other couples felt that their relationship did not require any changes.

## Theme 3: Premarital Counseling Should Be Better Marketed to African American Couples

Some of the couples felt that African American community members were unaware of premarital counseling. C1M, C3F, and C4M stated that individuals offering premarital counseling should create awareness about what it entails. C3F stated: "I would also say that if couples knew more about who it was that was counseling them, they would be more apt and more receptive to receive that counseling." C1M indicated that other aspects of marriage received more publicity and attention than premarital counseling:

I wish that [premarital counseling] was more publicized on the County's website, which is for individuals preparing to get married. Premarital counseling sites or premarital counselors can be found here. And premarital counseling can be sold there on the website as much as all the other [wedding] aspects.

The lack of knowledge about premarital counseling was listed as one of the issues that resulted in fewer African American couples going through premarital counseling.

According to C3F, they were unaware of premarital counseling, and their friends and family did not talk about it: "My thoughts on [premarital counseling] is that it was not something on my radar because growing up, I have never really known anybody in my circle that has talked about it or even had it."

C3M asked the researcher during the interview what the counselors 'role in premarital counseling was. The question indicates that C3M was unaware of services to expect when they take up premarital counseling. They stated:

It just may be a misconception as well, not knowing what the counselor's role is or not having experienced it. So, is this a counselor who gives you their opinion and tells you what to do, or is it more of listening and giving feedback or suggestions on handling specific situations?

C3F indicated that parents would be a good source to teach their children the value of premarital counseling as an approach to normalize it and this could create a positive outlook of counseling. She stated,

As children get older and they kind of follow a new suit to say, if I'm dating somebody and we're thinking about getting married, like my parents always recommended, yes you should go through premarital counseling. Not because you're trying to beat down on another person, but because you want to have those conversations and be comfortable and know that you're moving forward in a comfortable place.

The participants perceived that there was a need to improve the promotion of premarital counseling in the African American community. Some of the couples expressed that they were not aware of any friends who had taken up premarital counseling. Some participants argued that parents could teach children about the value of premarital counseling. In addition, some participants enquired about premarital counseling from the researcher.

#### **Summary**

This generic qualitative study aimed to examine African American couples' perceptions of premarital counseling. The study focused on five couples from the United States. Thematic analysis was performed manually using Microsoft Word. The three themes derived from the data included a) premarital counseling has benefits; b) there are barriers to participating in premarital counseling for African American couples, and c) premarital counseling should be better marketed to African American couples. These themes were used to answer the following research question: what are African American couples 'perceptions of premarital counseling? The results of the analysis indicated that there were advantages of premarital counseling for African American couples. The counseling helped couples discover and address new issues about themselves. However, there were generational opinions inherited about counseling that resulted in social norms against premarital counseling among African American couples. Participants indicated that if there was more information provided about premarital counseling, this stigmatism might be alleviated. In Chapter 5, these findings are compared with the literature and their implications for social change discussed. In addition, a series of recommendations are suggested for future research and the study's limitations identified.

#### Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

#### Introduction

In this study I examined African American couples' perceptions of premarital counseling in this study. In general, researchers have concluded that premarital educational and counseling programs provide tools to couples for addressing challenges related to marital distress and instability (Brank, 2019; Clyde et al., 2019; DeAngelis, 2017; Demir-Dagdas et al., 2017; Markman et al., 2019). Previous researchers have found that African Americans perceive counseling as meant only for those with mental illness (Fripp & Carlson, 2017; Kam et al., 2019). Although scholarly evidence has demonstrated the effectiveness of premarital counseling for addressing challenges related to marital instability for couples (Clyde, 2019; Engl et al., 2019; Kabbash et al., 2019; Markman et al., 2019), there is a lack of research on perceptions of premarital counseling among African Americans. The research question that guided this study was: What are African American couples' perceptions of premarital counseling? To answer this research question, I identified three themes in my analysis of the interview data: (a) premarital counseling benefits couples, (b) there are barriers to premarital counseling, and (c) premarital counseling should be marketed better among African American couples. In this chapter, I discuss the interpretation of the findings and the study's limitations, recommendations, and the implications of the findings.

#### **Interpretation of the Findings**

### **Related to Theoretical Foundations**

#### Theme 1: Premarital Counseling Has Benefits

According to functional attitude theory, attitudes influence many psychological functions, including processes, social relations, and personal decisions (Katz, 1960). The utilitarian function entails an individual maximizing rewards while minimizing punishment and increasing potential reward (Huang & Liu, 2022; Katz, 1960). The attitude developed toward a behavior influences one's decision (Wang et al., 2021). A person's decision to engage in premarital counseling is related to this functional attitude, as they would not engage in premarital counseling if they did not believe that participation would result in either a positive result or avoidance of a negative impact.

This was evidenced by the responses of participants who indicated they perceived premarital counseling to be beneficial concerning their marriage. Participants C4F, C4M, C2M, C5F, and C1M noted certain rewards or benefits they would get by engaging in premarital counseling. For example, C4M said, "I would think that I could see where it would help because if you are getting counseling, you get to know a little bit more about the other person, asking questions and doing some dialogue back and forth." Similarly, C4F said, "Counseling helps, and the expert third party can pull those things out. And a lot of, I think, couples don't even get to that level." My findings support the utilitarian portion of functional attitude theory to be something that motivates individuals to premarital counseling. The potential benefits of premarital counseling should be communicated more strongly to African American couples to promote engagement in this

type of counseling in terms of the personal experiences that couples have had rather than just statistics around the benefits of premarital counseling.

#### Theme 2: Barriers to Premarital Counseling for African American Couples

When people face numerous obstacles, they tend to develop negative attitudes, manifesting in avoidance behavior (Li & Huang, 2018). A fundamental principle from the functional attitude theory is that individuals develop positive or negative attitudes based on their experiences, which subsequently determines their behaviors or preferences on a particular issue (Katz, 1960). Although those negative attitudes can be overcome, it is not always easy to overcome them (Li & Huang, 2018).

Participants indicated the negative perceptions the African American community has towards premarital counseling as a critical barrier that needs to be overcome to result in more African American couples engaging in premarital counseling. For example, C1M said, "I think there is the stigma of therapy in general, and it is changing, especially in the last few years." Participant C3F also narrated misconceptions as barriers to the consumption of premarital counseling:

When you are considering premarital counseling, some they may figure I do not need somebody to come and talk about the things I have already discussed. Or, if we have not talked about it, I do not need somebody to guide this conversation because it is deemed negative. They don't understand or have never been in that environment to seek good counseling.

Some of the negative attitudes that African Americans have toward premarital counseling may come from a need to protect themselves from external threats and

conflicts, which is consistent with the ego-defensive functional attitude (Katz, 1960). People do not want to be vulnerable, and this is evidenced in the statement made by Participant C3M, who stated, "The stereotypes that we are having in the Black community, I have heard people in the barbershop say, 'Man, you are going to get counseling? Man, that is for White folks. You bougie?" Vulnerability can even be felt in what is a confidential conversation with a therapist, as indicated by C2M, who said, "The Black man, it is like, we do not open up as much. Most of the time, we are used to being accused of something, looking a certain way, or being treated a certain way."

Another barrier to seeking premarital counseling depends on the present or past perceptions of the usefulness of the behavior (Katz, 1960). If the behavior is not seen as having value, then individuals are less likely to engage in the behavior (Huang & Liu, 2022; Katz, 1960; Wang et al., 2021). For instance, an individual may perceive that participating in premarital counseling would not have value because the couple should be able to sort out their issues without seeking a counselor. Participant C4M said,

So, I do not need counseling because I can handle this. I can figure this out. And it has always been, any trouble or any type of things I had to encounter, say, "Look, I'm having some issues. I will figure it out." Or sometimes your dad would say, "Hey, take it on the chin, man, and keep moving." So, I never thought I had to go to a counselor to be told what to do. If I am married, I say, "Okay, I can figure it out."

Two functions of the function attitude theory (ego-defensive function and valueexpressive function) are relevant concerning the barriers that African Americans experience to seeking premarital counseling. The value expressive function involves the attitude expressed by individuals' personally held beliefs, concepts, and values and makes people closer to their ideal behavior (Katz, 1960; Rhodes et al., 2020). On the other hand, ego-defensive functions may entail adopting the attitudes and beliefs of the community to avoid rejection and anxiety (Katz, 1960). In the context of this study, participants indicated that their decision not to engage in premarital counseling was influenced by fear of being rejected by the community. Participant C1M stated, "I think there is the stigma of therapy in general, and it is changing, especially in the last few years or so." Based on these results, I found that African Americans' attitudes toward premarital marriage counseling are often not influenced by individual decisions (value-expressive function) but are rather more in line with community perceptions (ego-defensive function).

# Theme 3: Premarital Counseling Should Be Better Marketed to African American Couples

The findings of this study also confirm the fifth function of the functional attitude theory about the role of knowledge in decision making, as knowledge helps people comprehend the world, and the knowledge they have is used to make decisions (Katz, 1960). When people have more knowledge, they can make appropriate decisions (Heydarian et al., 2020; Ngo et al., 2020). My results indicate a need to increase the marketing of information about premarital counseling to the African American community about the benefits of premarital counseling and hence promote its consumption. As indicated by previous researchers, knowledge is an essential factor in

influencing an individual's attitudes toward certain behavior (Hano et al., 2020; Heydarian et al., 2020; Ngo et al., 2020; Sun et al., 2018).

Participants indicated that information about premarital counseling and its benefits should be shared more broadly. Participant C1M said, "And I wish that [premarital counseling] was more publicized on the county's website for individuals preparing to get married." This means that by increasing knowledge regarding premarital counseling, their behavior would change people's attitudes toward it. There is a need to market and share knowledge because African Americans lacked knowledge about premarital counseling. Participant C3F stated they were "unaware of premarital counseling, and their friends and family did not talk about it." Therefore, by increasing their knowledge, it is possible to alter their attitude toward this behavior.

#### **Related to Literature Review**

#### Theme 1: Premarital Counseling Has Benefits

Participants indicated that numerous benefits are associated with premarital counseling. Premarital counseling helps couples discover and address new issues and helps to build the confidence to discuss issues they were already aware of but could not handle without counseling. With premarital counseling, one can discover more issues relevant to their future family. The statements made by participants, such as participant C4F, support this conclusion:

You are not arguing about that little simple thing you think you are arguing about. It is something deeper. So, counseling helps, and the expert third party can pull those things out. And a lot of, I think, couples don't even get to that level. And so

having a counselor could only enrich your relationship. Furthermore, premarital counseling might help couples discuss issues they have been bottling up or struggled to discussion. It also provides an opportunity for couples to receive feedback from a counselor.

The findings that premarital counseling helps couples discover themselves and build confidence correspond to the scholarly evidence (Ballard et al., 2018; Commerford & Hunter, 2016; Hankerson et al., 2018; Rajabi & Abbasi, 2020). The results confirm that premarital counseling is a preventative approach to facilitate couples to understand each other more (see Commerford & Hunter, 2016). Further, these results align with previous findings that premarital counseling benefits couples in proactively addressing some issues they could not foresee about their future (see Hankerson et al., 2018).

Previous researchers also indicated that premarital counseling helps in managing the expectations of couples (Ballard et al., 2018; Rajabi & Abbasi, 2020), which was also consistent with the results of this study. For example, Ballard et al. (2018) found that premarital counseling helps understand the partner more before engaging in marriage. In addition, Rajabi and Abbasi (2020) found that premarital counseling is one of the best approaches to changing or reducing idealistic expectations and beliefs regarding marriage.

I found out that premarital counseling is beneficial by improving communication and resolving conflicts impartially. Participant C2M said,

A counselor to me, when they are between two couples it's basically a mediator, right? Whether it is good problems or bad, things going on with that person to

have that view from the outside that can give both sides constructive criticism needed at times, that each other may not be willing to do when they are in private. Similarly, C4F stated,

When you are so sure of your love, you are like, okay, that is all you need. But here today, we know love is not all you need. It is the main ingredient, but you need to know how to communicate. And I think premarital counseling would have enriched us in that.

The findings of this research resonate with those from previous studies that premarital counseling improves communication and helps to resolve conflict (Ballard et al., 2018; Hankerson et al., 2018; Kabbash et al., 2019). Conflicts that can be proactively addressed through premarital counseling include the playing a role in the marriage, managing finances, making a commitment, learning about the partner's family, and discussing sexuality and parenting goals are all topics that are typically covered in premarital education programs (Hankerson et al., 2018; Kabbash et al., 2019).

I found that participants see premarital counseling as helping to promote confidence in couples by eliminating issues that could make them uncomfortable. Participant C2F stated,

There may be something bothering you about the other person but something you may be uncomfortable bringing up. I think that having that person that is unbiased to the two of you may make one feel comfortable enough to bring that situation or that thing to light.

Premarital education programs are often instructional and frequently revolve around certain topics that help address bothering issues (Porta & Brown, 2016). Having a neutral third party that not only listens and directs interactions between members of the couple who also provides instruction to the couple is a dual benefit. The primary focus of premarital counseling is educating couples about potential issues that may arise in the future and teaching them tools to resolve these issues healthily (Banaei & Shafiabady, 2022; Kilic & Kara, 2018). This benefit (tools) should be shared in the marketing of premarital counseling to African Americans to increase their knowledge of the purposes and benefits of this type of counseling other than just discussing current issues.

#### Theme 2: Barriers to Premarital Counseling for African American Couples

Some of the barriers that my participants highlighted include misconceptions about counseling, negative attitudes passed from one generation to another, and the perception that premarital counseling was meant for White people. For instance, some participants indicated that premarital counseling is not beneficial, and a person should solve their marital issues privately. Participant C3F stated,

When you are considering premarital counseling, some they may figure out, I do not need somebody to come and talk about the things I have already discussed.

Or, if we have not talked about it, I do not need somebody to guide this conversation because it is deemed as something negative.

The misconceptions that I found align with previous researchers 'works that misconceptions are key barriers to premarital counseling among African Americans (see Ossai & Chujor, 2023; Silumbwe et al., 2018). Another issue that I noted as a barrier was

the aspects of religious beliefs concerning attitudes about premarital counseling. This was evidenced by a participant (C2M) statement that,

My biggest thing is my faith. I believe in the biggest counselor of them all. So, if I take my matters to God, I pray to God, and have faith in God; with all the decisions that I make, I feel that if I were making the wrong decision.

Some religions are founded on the beliefs that only God or the Creator should guide couples on how to run their affairs, which may hinder them from seeking the services of a premarital counselor (Gojali & Qodim, 2022). Differences in the religious beliefs between the couples are also a barrier to premarital counseling as the two have different positions regarding this issue (Udofia et al., 2021). Some religions completely ban couples from engaging with third parties before their marriage is officially unionized, negating the efforts of having premarital counseling (Hossain et al., 2021). This barrier was not brought up in many of my interviews, but future researchers may want to study how religious beliefs are related to engagement in premarital counseling in the African American community, as this may be one of the reasons that it is not engaged in as much as in other racial groups.

I also found that couples tend to lack trust in the counselor, whereas others are overconfident about their marriage, which is a key impediment to premarital counseling. Participant C4F stated, "I feared going in it, letting the counselor know certain things about me. I thought she may use it and say, "Oh, that is not cool."" Participants may not be interested in taking part in premarital counseling, as they did not trust their counselor. These findings are consistent with previous researchers who found that some couples see

no need to seek premarital counseling, as they trust their spouses and are very confident with the union but have issues trusting others outside of their relationship (Dixon, 2017; Maundeni et al., 2018; Osafo et al., 2021). Confidentiality hindered many couples from engaging in premarital counseling, as they feared counselors might share their experiences with others (Maundeni et al., 2018).

## Theme 3: Premarital Counseling Should Be Better Marketed to African American Couples

I found that there was a need to improve the marketing of premarital counseling to African American couples. Participant C1M said,

And I wish that it (premarital counseling) was more publicized on the County's website, which is for individuals preparing to get married. Premarital counseling sites or premarital counselors can be found here. And premarital counseling can be sold there on the website as much as all the other (wedding) aspects.

Some participants expressed that they were not participants and were unaware of any friends who had taken up premarital counseling. Participant C32 stated, "My thoughts on [premarital counseling] are that it was not something on my radar because growing up, I have never really known anybody in my circle that has talked about it or even had it." Some participants argued that parents could teach children about the value of premarital counseling. Participant C3F narrated,

As children get older and they kind of follow a new suit to say, if I'm dating somebody and we're thinking about getting married like my parents always recommended, yes, you should go through premarital counseling". Also, some

participants enquired about premarital counseling from the researcher. This confirms the fact that African Americans are not adequately seeking premarital counseling.

My findings that there is a need to market premarital counseling among African Americans justify the uptake of premarital counseling among this demographic group. According to scholars, there are marital problems among African Americans, which could be attributed to a lack of the availability of adequate counseling and or indicate that the African American community does not really know the benefits of counseling (Clyde et al., 2019; Dixon, 2017; Mikle & Gilbert, 2019).

According to multiple researchers, the high divorce rate among African Americans can be attributed, at least in part, to failure to seek counseling help when in marriage conflicts, poverty, education level, and life-related stressors such as economic hardship and discrimination (Miller, 2018; Smock & Schwartz, 2020). Miller (2018) and Smock and Schwartz (2020) indicated that a low percentage of African American couples participate in premarital counseling. Failure to engage in premarital counseling may lead to unsustainable marriage (Cobbinah & Osei-Tutu, 2019) and cause early marriage conflicts due to limited knowledge on coexistence (Irman et al., 2021), separation, and sometimes divorce (Adzovie & Dabone, 2021).

## **Limitations of the Study**

Some limitations could affect the application of this study's findings in different settings. First, this study had a small sample size, which could limit the transferability of the findings to other populations. However, the researcher attempted to reduce the extent

of this limitation by providing a comprehensive account of the methodology that was applied and reporting the demographics of the sample to assist with generalization of results. In this context, the findings could only be generalized to African American couples that shared the characteristics of the sample.

A second limitation was that the study was based on self-reported information from the participants. Self-reported responses have limitations, as the answers could be exaggerated, biased, or not completely accurate (Forman et al., 2008). Some respondents may be embarrassed to reveal their private details, a problem that may be exemplified by social desirability bias (Bergen & Labonté, 2020; Forman et al., 2008). This limitation could affect the study's results, as they may have shared information that they believed I wanted to hear as the researcher. In addition, as interviews were conducted with their spouse, they may also have avoided sharing information that had the potential to result in discord with their spouse.

### Recommendations

This study was conducted with African American/Black couples, focusing on their perceptions about premarital counseling. I recommend further studies with larger sample sizes and more heterogeneous African American/Black participants to get findings that can be generalized to a larger population of African American/Blacks.

Secondly, I recommended that a study be conducted with participants of different racial and ethnic groups for comparative purposes. By also studying individuals of different generations (ages), it may be possible to distinguish attitudes toward premarital counseling that are cultural from those that are generational. I also recommend further

studies be conducted on African Americans' perceptions of other forms of counseling other than premarital counseling. Future researchers could help to understand what attitudes African Americans/Blacks have toward counseling in general and other types of counseling to determine if their attitudes, perceptions, and barriers are similar or different for different types of counseling.

### **Implications**

## **Implications for Social Change**

Based on the study findings, it is evident that African Americans are not adequately engaging in premarital counseling. This trend denies them the numerous benefits such as equipping the partners with knowledge on conflict resolution, conflict prevention, management of finances, expectation about parenting, sexuality, and effective communication (Ballard et al., 2018; Hankerson et al., 2018; Kabbash et al., 2019; Markman et al., 2019). I also concluded that barriers to participation in premarital counseling for this population could be eliminated if there is increased marketing of the premarital counseling to African Americans. By marketing professional counseling, increased participation in premarital counseling may occur, potentially leading to the alleviation of some of the marriage problems that ultimately lead to divorce among the African Americans.

Human service professionals and professionals in other fields may use these findings to advocate for educational seminars and awareness campaigns that increase knowledge of the advantages of premarital counseling. By providing information that could be used to promote the uptake of premarital counseling, there is the potential to

reduce the level of divorce among African Americans. This information could, in turn, contribute to the stability of marital relationships, reducing the likelihood that marriages will end in divorce. If the professional counselor could increase awareness and engage in greater marketing, it becomes possible to purge misconceptions and promote premarital counseling.

Based on the research findings, counselors may play a role by ensuring they eliminate the barriers that impede African Americans from seeking premarital counseling. I have outlined those barriers, and it is important for groups who work with African Americans to address them through appropriate measures and hence get the benefits associated with premarital counseling. It is recommended that professional counselors should seek appropriate ways of promoting and encouraging African American to participate in premarital counseling.

### **Implications for Practice**

The information that I have shared based on this research is anticipated to expand current understanding on the perceptions of premarital counseling among African Americans. Adequate information about the perceptions about premarital counseling for African Americans is lacking, and therefore, this study provides valuable information to fill the gaps in the literature. According to scholars, little research has been done on African Americans and marriage education (Skipper & Taylor, 2021; Smock & Schwartz, 2020). In addition, researchers have emphasized how important it is to conduct greater study on marriage in the African American community (Wilmoth & Blaney, 2016).

Although I have produced one such study, there is a need for additional studies to be conducted in this area to continue to add information about this topic.

The findings of this study have the potential to serve as a source of information for both practice and policy. The results highlight the perceptions and barriers that have discouraged certain African American couples from taking part in premarital counseling. By providing valuable information, I hope that there will be an increased understanding that can be used to modify the approaches that could be used to promote uptake of counseling among the African Americans. I also hope that counselors can use this information to share information about the benefits of premarital counseling that may be able to overcome these perceptions and barriers.

### Conclusion

African Americans are not adequately involved in premarital counseling. However, it appears that some African Americans are aware of the benefits associated with premarital counseling. Therefore, the question lingers as to the reason for low uptake of premarital counseling. Misconceptions about premarital counseling that the individual holds, as well as those held by their social groups, remain a major challenge that hinders premarital counseling. There is a need to address misconceptions and other barriers that hinder them from seeking the services of a counselor. Effectively marketing premarital counseling could help promote this practice among the African Americans.

There is a need to promote greater awareness to enhance premarital counseling, as the benefits of engaging in the practice outweigh its negative effects. Premarital counseling has been shown to improve relationships between spouses, but this is primarily in White couples, as they are more likely to engage in premarital counseling.

However, premarital counseling can help people from different backgrounds. It is my hope that this research will result in a larger conversation about premarital counseling, its benefits, and acceptance of premarital counseling in the African American community.

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## Appendix A: Screening Questionnaire

African American Couples' Perceptions Of Premarital Counseling

Interview Identifier/Code: Date:
The purpose of this form is to screen potential participants to ensure that they meet the
criteria for the study.
This research is designed with the intent to minimize the risk to <b>human subjects.</b> My
research is designed to focus specifically on African American couples who are ideally
suited to answer this study's research question, without burdening others unnecessarily.
Now, I would like for you to answer a few questions to determine if you are the best fit to
participate in helping to answer this study's research questions through the interview
process.
1. Are you 18 to 65 years old?
2. Have you been married for more than a year?
3. Are you currently living together in the United States?
4. Have you not participated in a premarital education program?
5. Are you both fluent in English?

## Part to be read to the participant:

1. English needs to be the primary language of the participant to ensure all forms of communication (speaking, writing, and reading) are understood.

6. Do you have access to Zoom for the interview session?

2. Participants must be 18 to 65 years old, have been married for more than a year to ensure they have sufficient experience to answer the research question, currently living together in the United States, have not participated in a premarital education program, both are fluent in English, and both have access to Skype/Zoom for the interview session.

You cannot participate if (exclusion criteria): If you have answered no to any of the questions asked previously.

If you qualify to take part in this study and would like to participate in the study, I will schedule our interview at this time. On the day of the interview, I will further inform you of the study's detail by reading a form known as informed consent.

## Appendix B: Interview Questions

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in a Zoom/Skype interview session (45-60 minutes)
- Review and validate interview responses (approx. 30 minutes)

Here are the interview questions:

- 1. What are your thoughts about premarital counseling?
- 2. What do you think might be some positive effects of participating in premarital counseling?
- 3. What do you think may some negative effects of participating in premarital counseling?
- 4. How do you think premarital counseling affects marriage?
- 5. What do you think are some things that might keep African American couples from participating in premarital counseling?
- 6. What prevented the two of you from participating in premarital counseling?
- 7. Do you know of anyone who has participated in premarital counseling? What information did these individuals share with you about premarital counseling?
- 8. Did anyone encourage you to seek premarital counseling? If yes,
- a. Who was that person?
- b. What was the person's reason for suggesting premarital counseling?
- 9. What suggestions do you have for encouraging African American couples to participate in premarital counseling?

10. What other thoughts to you have about premarital counseling that we have not yet discussed?

# Appendix C: Demographic Questions

Here are the demographic questions:

- 1. What is your age?
- 2. In which city do you live?
- 3. What are your educational qualifications?
- 4. How long have you been married?

### Appendix D: Recruitment Flyer

### **VOLUNTEER PARTICIPANTS NEEDED**

The purpose of this study to examine African American couples 'perceptions of premarital counseling.

Participants needed are African American couples who: (a) are 18 to 65 years old, (b) have been married for more than a year to ensure they have sufficient experience to answer the research question, (c) are currently living together in the United States, (d) have not participated in a premarital education program, (e) both are fluent in English, and (f) both agree to participate in a Skype/Zoom interview session.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Sign an informed consent form (approximately 10 minutes),
- Participate in an audio-recorded interview session (45-60 minutes), and
- Review and validate interview responses (approximately 30 minutes)

Interested participants may contact the researcher at	or email at
Kimberly.brown24@waldenu.edu.	

Thank you!

### Appendix E: Informed Consent

The purpose of this generic qualitative research is to examine African American couples' perceptions of premarital counseling. The researcher is inviting African American couples to participate in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Kimberly A. Brown, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this generic qualitative research is to examine African American couples' perceptions of premarital counseling.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue and stress. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

As a result of the findings of this research study, human services and professionals will gain information about the barriers that prevent some African American couples from participating in premarital counseling.

### **Payment:**

There will be no payment given for participating in the study.

### **Privacy:**

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by using aggregate or pseudonyms for presentation. All data will be stored in a password protected computer and a locked filing cabinet in the private office of the researcher. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

### **Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via Kimberly.brown24@waldenu.edu.

Walden University's approval number for this study is	s <u>IRB</u>	will enter	approval	number
here and it expires on IRB will enter expiration date	e.			

The researcher will give you a copy of this consent form. You may opt to print or save a copy.

# **Obtaining Your Consent**

If you fe	el you	understa	nd the s	study '	well (	enough t	o make a	a decision	n about it	t, and	if you
agree to	particip	oate in th	e audic	-reco	rded:	interviev	v session	, please	sign belo	w.	

Participant's Name	
_	
Signature	

# Appendix F: Levels of Coding

Meta Themes	Additional Clustering of Themes/Subthemes (if needed; in Step 4)	Clustering of Themes (in Step 4)	Grouping of Similar Statements (in Step 3)	Significant Statements (in Step 2)
Premarital counseling has benefits	Benefits of premarital counseling to one partner	Exposure of sinister motives in marriage is a benefit to the other partner	Counseling exposes incompatible partners and those with wrong motives for marriage.	Couples avoid marrying partners who are not compatible with them (C1M). Couples avoid marrying partners with wrong motives for marriage (C2F).
Premarital counseling has benefits	Benefits of pre- marital counseling to a couple	Discovering and resolving new issues is a benefit to a couple	Partners discover and address new issues about themselves	Couples get to know each other better during counseling (C4M). Couples discover root causes of arguments (C4F).
Premarital counseling has benefits	Benefits of pre- marital counseling to a couple	Addressing known and difficult issues is a benefit to a couple	Pre-marital counseling creates opportunity to address known issues.	Counselor helps discuss known difficult topics such as constructive criticism, fear of divorce, religion,

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				finances (C5F; C1M; C2F; C3M).
Premarital counseling has benefits	Benefits of pre- marital counseling to a couple	Couple receiving feedback from a counsellor is a benefit	Pre-marital counseling provides an opportunity to receive feedback from a counsellor	Counselor provides constructive feedback to couples (C2M).
Barriers to premarital counseling.	Barriers to pre- marital counseling	Barriers to premarital counseling.	Negative social norms among African American people	Couples can resolve their issues privately (C3F).
Barriers to premarital counseling.		Barriers to premarital counseling.	Negative social norms among African American people	Counseling is not important to me or my parents (C4M).
Barriers to premarital counseling.		Barriers to premarital counseling.	Negative social norms among African American people	Counseling is for white people (C3M).
Barriers to premarital counseling.		Barriers to premarital counseling.	Negative social norms among African American people	Pre-marital counseling is for people with the wrong partner (C1F)
Barriers to premarital counseling.		Barriers to premarital counseling.	Negative social norms among African American people	Men don't talk about their issues (C2M).

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Barriers to premarital counseling.		Barriers to premarital counseling.	Negative perceptions of counselors	Fear of being judged by a counselor (C4F)
Barriers to premarital counseling.		Barriers to premarital counseling.	Negative perceptions of counselors	Counselors cannot be trusted (C3M)
Barriers to premarital counseling.		Barriers to premarital counseling.	Religion as a barrier to counseling	God is only counsellor a couple needs (C2M; C4F).
Barriers to premarital counseling.		Barriers to premarital counseling.	Misconceptions about counseling	Couples who have courted for long don't need counseling (C5F).
Barriers to premarital counseling.		Barriers to premarital counseling.	Misconceptions about counseling	Partners who have accepted their partner do not need counseling (C2M).
Barriers to premarital counseling.		Barriers to premarital counseling.	Fear of being corrected is a barrier to counseling	Afraid to hear about one's faults (C5M).
Premarital counseling should be better marketed to African	Pre-marital counseling should be better marketed to African American couples	Premarital counseling should be better marketed to African	People are not adequately aware about counseling.	Couples don't have adequate information about counseling (C1M; C4M)

Meta Themes	Additional Clustering of Themes/Subthemes (if needed; in Step 4)	Clustering of Themes (in Step 4)	Grouping of Similar Statements (in Step 3)	Significant Statements (in Step 2)
American couples		American couples		
Premarital counseling should be better marketed to African American couples		Premarital counseling should be better marketed to African American couples.	Couples would benefit from counseling.	More information would lead to better uptake of counseling (C3F)
Premarital counseling should be better marketed to African American couples		Premarital counseling should be better marketed to African American couples.	Parents can help in creating awareness about counseling.	Parents can help create awareness among dating children (C3F)