

2018

# Identity Style Preference and Marriage among Black Americans

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Walden University  
2018

Abstract

Identity Style Preference and Marriage among Black Americans

by

Russell T. Klumpp

MS, Walden University, 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Social Psychology

Walden University

January 2018

## Abstract

Blacks marry less and divorce more than any other racial demographic in the United States. The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine identity style preferences in relation to attitudes toward marriage and marital satisfaction among Black Americans to determine if the way in which a person processes information related to marriage was predictive of his or her attitude toward marriage or their marital satisfaction once married. Identity style is the way in which a person approaches and processes information that has the potential to affect self-identity. Identity style theory suggests there are three primary styles (informative, normative, and diffuse-avoidant) and that each person will eventually settle upon a preferred style. All participants in this study were United States citizens, over the age of 18, and self-identified as Black. Participants were recruited through online participant pools. This study consisted of 2 groups of participants: single and married. All participants completed the Identity Style Inventory 5 to provide a measure of identity style preference. Single participants completed the General Attitudes toward Marriage Scale (GAMS) to provide a measure of attitudes toward marriage. Married participants completed the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale to provide a measure of marital satisfaction. Multiple regression analyses were used to identify relationships between the 3 identity styles, marital satisfaction, and attitudes toward marriage. The informational identity style was found to predict higher marital satisfaction. The diffuse-avoidant identity style was found to predict positive attitudes toward marriage. The normative style was not found to predict marital satisfaction or attitudes toward marriage. This study adds to the current literature regarding Black marriage trends and may aid in future development of intervention methods designed to increase the marriage rate and lower the divorce rate among all Black Americans.

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## Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Chapter 1: Introduction .....           | 1  |
| Background .....                        | 2  |
| Problem Statement .....                 | 4  |
| Purpose of the Study .....              | 4  |
| Research Questions and Hypotheses ..... | 5  |
| Theoretical Framework .....             | 5  |
| Nature of the Study .....               | 6  |
| Definitions .....                       | 7  |
| Assumptions .....                       | 8  |
| Scope and Delimitations .....           | 9  |
| Limitations .....                       | 10 |
| Significance .....                      | 11 |
| Summary .....                           | 13 |
| Chapter 2: Literature Review .....      | 14 |
| Introduction .....                      | 14 |
| Literature Search Strategy .....        | 14 |
| Theoretical Foundation .....            | 15 |
| Identity Style Preference .....         | 15 |
| Marriage and Relationships .....        | 21 |
| Marital Satisfaction .....              | 22 |
| Attitudes Toward Marriage .....         | 22 |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Benefits of Marriage .....                                 | 25 |
| Black American Marriage.....                               | 25 |
| Marital Satisfaction Among Black Americans .....           | 27 |
| Attitudes Toward Marriage Among Black Americans .....      | 29 |
| Summary .....  | 30 |
| Chapter 3: Research Method.....                            | 32 |
| Introduction.....  | 32 |
| Research Design and Rationale .....                        | 32 |
| Research Questions .....                                   | 33 |
| Methodology .....  | 33 |
| Population .....   | 33 |
| Sampling and Sampling Procedures .....                     | 34 |
| Procedures for Recruitment and Participation .....         | 34 |
| Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs ..... | 35 |
| Identity Style Inventory 5 .....                           | 35 |
| General Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale .....              | 37 |
| ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale .....                    | 38 |
| Data Collection .....                                      | 40 |
| Data Analysis Plan.....                                    | 40 |
| Threats to Validity .....                                  | 41 |
| Ethical Procedures .....                                   | 42 |
| Informed Consent.....                                      | 42 |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Confidentiality .....   | 43 |
| Summary .....   | 43 |
| Chapter 4: Results .....  | 45 |
| Research Questions and Hypotheses .....                         | 45 |
| Data Collection .....   | 45 |
| Results   | 46 |
| Descriptive Statistics.....                                     | 46 |
| Evaluation of Statistical Assumptions .....                     | 47 |
| Multiple Regression Analysis .....                              | 49 |
| Multiple Regression: Marital Satisfaction .....                 | 50 |
| Multiple Regression: Attitudes Toward Marriage .....            | 51 |
| Summary .....   | 53 |
| Chapter 5: Conclusions .....                                    | 55 |
| Interpretation of Findings .....                                | 55 |
| Limitations .....   | 57 |
| Recommendations.....  | 58 |
| Implications.....   | 60 |
| Conclusion .....  | 61 |
| References .....  | 63 |
| Appendix A: Participant Demographics .....                      | 80 |
| Appendix B: Identity Style Inventory 5 (ISI-5).....             | 81 |
| Appendix C: General Attitudes toward Marriage Scale (GAMS)..... | 83 |



|                                 |    |
|---------------------------------|----|
| Appendix D: ISI Box Plot.....   | 84 |
| Appendix E: Scatter Plots ..... | 85 |

|

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Black Americans marry less and divorce more than any other race in U.S. culture. Marriage quality for Black Americans is lower than that of their White counterparts (Blackman, Clayton, Glenn, Malone-Colon, & Roberts, 2005; Malon-Colon, 2007; Straughn, 2012). Black marriages are less stable and more prone to conflict than White marriages (Blackman et al., 2005). Because of the instability and conflict of marriage, many young Blacks choose not to get married, indicating negative attitudes toward the institution of marriage (Blackman et al., 2005). This racial disparity in marriage has existed for over 50 years; yet, scholars have not determined why (Kinnon, 2003). In this study, I examined the relationship between identity style preferences, marital satisfaction, and attitudes toward marriage among Black people in the United States. The results of this research adds to the literature by providing an empirical understanding of this complex problem. The results of this study have potential for positive social change because increased understanding of Black relationship patterns may inform future development of interventions and programs designed to increase the marriage rate and reduce the divorce rate within this group.

In this chapter, I review the background of the study and provide a detailed explanation of the problem. The nature of the study and research questions are also established. I discuss the theoretical background, significance, nature, purpose of the study, definitions, scope, limitations, delimitations, and assumptions related to the study. Research questions are provided in this chapter as well.

## **Background**

Berzonsky (1989) built upon Marcia's (1966) self identity status theory to develop a new theory of individual identity styles. Berzonsky defined self-identity as something that continues to develop on a personal level over time. Marcia who approached self-identity as an outcome of standardized sequence. In identity styles, Berzonsky (1992) described different cognitive approaches a person uses to process identity-related information. The styles were labeled by Berzonsky (1992) as informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant (Berzonsky, 1992). The informational style is a direct exploratory approach to the information. A normative style is a selective approach in which only information that matches the person's preformed concept of self-identity is accepted, remaining information is dismissed. The diffuse-avoidant style is an avoidant approach in which all information that may change or challenge the person's self-identity is ignored or actively avoided. By adulthood, all normally developing persons are capable of using any of the three styles with one being established as the preferred method for processing identity-related information (Corcetti, Sica, Schwartz, Serafini, & Meeus, 2013; Phillips, 2008).

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013), the low marriage/high divorce trend continues to persist among Black people in the United States. This puts Black Americans at a social and progressive disadvantage because they are less likely to enjoy the benefits of marriage, such as increased health (Johnson, Backlund, Sorlie, & Loveless, 2000; Simon, 2002), strong social support networks (Nock, 1995), and a variety of financial benefits outlined in the law (Herek, 2006). Further, marriage has

also been linked to increased well-being when compared to never-married individuals (Yap, Anusic, & Lucas, 2014).

Although marriage is a salient goal among Black people in the United States (Barr, 2014; Hurt, 2013), the reason for low marriage rates is unclear. Researchers have examined external factors such as socioeconomic status (Straughn, 2012) and low employment (Chambers & Kravits, 2011), as well as internal factors such as religiosity (Brown, Orbuch, & Bauermeister, 2008) and perceptions of vulnerability (Chambers & Kravits, 2011). Yet, researchers do not understand the low marriage rates among Black people in the United States. In this study, I examined positive and negative attitudes of unmarried Black people toward marriage and explored the possibility that identity style preference may be associated with attitudes toward marriage.

Each of the style preferences have been linked to various social skills, such as ability to manage relationships, forgive others, and cope with stress (Berzonsky, 2003; Berzonsky & Ferrari, 2003; Berzonsky, Ciecuch, Durriez, & Soenens, 2011; Berzonsky, Soenens, Luyckx, Seaton, & Beaumont, 2013; Smits & Papini, 2013). The ability to self-regulate emotions is also a predictor of marital satisfaction (Levenson, 2014). However, identity style preference has not been studied as a possible factor affecting the decision to enter into a marriage or marital satisfaction of those who are married. In this study, I aimed to fill that gap.

Attitudes toward marriage and marital satisfaction are the result of many influencing factors. In this study, I explored individual identity style preference as a predictor of attitudes toward marriage and marital satisfaction among Black people in the

United States within the context of persistent low marriage and high divorce rates within this population.

### **Problem Statement**

There is a significantly low marriage rate high divorce rate within the U.S. Black population. Low marriage rates and high divorce rates have social and existential implications for millions of Black people in the United States (Barr, 2014; Chambers & Kravits, 2011; Hurt 2013; Straughn, 2012). I considered the attitudes of Black people in the United States toward the institution of marriage as a possible factor influencing these marriage and divorce trends. There is a lack of studies on relationships between identity style and individual attitudes toward marriage. As Barr (2014) pointed out, there is also a lack of empirical studies examining marriage trends among Black people in the United States.

By age 35, 40.3% of Black people in the United States had not married while only 15.3% of White people in the United States had not married by the same age (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Black people in the United States have the highest divorce rate of any ethnic group at 47.9% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). In addition, only 52.4% of the Black people in the United States who divorced remarried compared to 68.6% of Whites who divorced (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013).

### **Purpose of the Study**

In this quantitative study, I examined relationships between identity style preferences, attitudes toward marriage, and marital satisfaction among Black people in the United States. This study was designed to determine if identity style preference was a

predictor of attitudes toward marriage or marital satisfaction among Black people in the United States. This study added to the empirical literature to improve scholars' understanding of Black marriage trends. The three identity styles (informational, normative, diffuse-avoidant) served as predictor variables for the criterion variables (attitudes toward marriage and marital satisfaction).

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

RQ1: Is identity style preference (informational, normative, diffuse-avoidant), as measured by the ISI-5 questionnaire, a predictor of attitudes toward marriage among single Black people in the United States, as measured by the GAMS questionnaire?

*H<sub>1</sub>1*: Identity style preference is a predictor of attitudes toward marriage.

*H<sub>0</sub>1*: Identity style preference is not a predictor of attitudes toward marriage.

RQ2: Is identity style preference (informational, normative, diffuse-avoidant), as measured by the ISI-5 questionnaire, a predictor of marital satisfaction among married Black people in the United States, as measured by the EMS questionnaire?

*H<sub>1</sub>2*: Identity style preference is a predictor of marital satisfaction.

*H<sub>0</sub>2*: Identity style preference is not a predictor of marital satisfaction.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Berzonsky's (1989) identity style theory, which poses individual identity to be a product of implicit cognition, formed the framework for this study. Consistent with Mead's (1913) psychosocial theory, Berzonsky believed that self-identity results from a developmental process over time that progresses through relationships and interactions with others. Identity style theorists posited three ways in which an individual processes

information that is likely to have an impact on self image. According to the theory, a person may approach the information head on and actively strive to learn more about it. This is called an informational style. Second, an individual may filter the information, accepting only that which is consistent with established beliefs and the perceived expectations of others. This is called a normative style. Third, an individual may attempt to avoid dealing with the information by avoiding social contexts in which the information may be brought forth or they may dismiss the information altogether. Because marital status is associated with self-identity (Laughlin, 2014), information relating to marriage will be processed according to the person's preferred identity style in accordance with Berzonsky's theory. The identity style theory is aligned with the quantitative approach and has direct implications toward marital satisfaction and attitudes toward marriage because reliable and valid quantitative measures have been developed and validated. These quantitative measures are used in this study. Identity styles have the potential to impact attitudes toward marriage and development of self-identity through the inherent transition in self-identity involved when a person gets married. In a similar way, Berzonsky suggested a person experiencing low marital satisfaction will approach the subject of divorce by using the preferred identity style to process-related information. A detailed review of Berzonsky's identity style theory is provided in Chapter 2.

### **Nature of the Study**

A quantitative approach was chosen for this study, consistent with a majority of studies found in the empirical literature that examine identity style preference in relation

to other variables. Beaumont and Pratt (2011), Berzonsky et al. (2011), and Corcetti et al. (2013) used a quantitative approach to examine identity style preferences in relation to other variables. The instrument used in this study to measure identity style, the Identity Style Inventory-5 (ISI-5), and former models of this instrument were designed to be used as surveys in quantitative studies.

Participants were recruited from the Walden University participant pool and a SurveyMonkey participant program. Participation was limited to Black people in the United States, 18 years of age and older. Data were collected via online survey through Survey Monkey ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)). Relationships between identity style preferences, attitudes toward marriage, and marital satisfaction were examined. Specifically, the three identity styles (informational, normative, diffuse-avoidant) served as predictor variables for the criterion variables (attitudes toward marriage and marital satisfaction). Socioeconomic status, gender, and level of education were also evaluated as possible predictor variables. The data were analyzed using multiple regression analysis (using an SPSS analytical software package) to examine the relative strength of each of the identity style preferences (informational, normative, diffuse-avoidant) in predicting attitudes toward marriage among single participants and marital satisfaction among married participants.

### **Definitions**

*Attitudes toward marriage:* Positive and negative attitudes toward marriage that may affect the decision to get married or individual behaviors within an intimate relationship (Park & Rosen, 2013).



*Diffuse-avoidant style:* One of three cognitive approaches toward information with the potential to affect a person's self-identity. Active avoidance or complete dismissals of information are key characteristics of this approach (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000).

*Identity style:* Berzonsky (1989) conceptualized identity style as the mostly implicit, cognitive approach to confronting and processing information related to a person's own self-identity.

*Informational style:* One of three cognitive approaches toward information with potential to affect a person's self-identity. Active exploration of the information in relation to an individual's self is a key characteristic of this approach (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000).

*Marital satisfaction:* Roach, Frazier, and Bowden (as cited in Fowers & Olson, 1993) defined marital satisfaction as an attitude of greater or lesser favorability toward one's own marital relationship.

*Normative style:* One of three cognitive approaches toward information with potential to affect a person's self-identity. Filtration of information in which only information consistent with preconceived beliefs and self-concept are accepted is a key characteristic of this approach (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000).

### **Assumptions**

Identity style preference is aligned with normal brain development (Phillips, 2008). According to Phillips (2008), if the brain is not developing normally, the ability to apply the identity styles and form a preference may be inhibited. It was assumed that all

participants are normally developing individuals answering truthfully to all questions in the survey. This assumption was necessary because Berzonsky's theory was based upon identity styles in normally developing people (Phillips, 2008). It was also assumed that the marital trends established in the 2010 U.S. census (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013), which are consistent with historical trends, remain unchanged in the present. There is currently no evidence to the contrary. This assumption was necessary because the 2010 census was cited consistently in contemporary research, and there has not been a comprehensive study capturing comparable data since the census.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between identity style preference, attitudes toward marriage, and marital satisfaction among Black people in the United States. It is important to investigate low marriage and high divorce trends among Black people in the United States considering the personal and societal benefits of marriage (Bryant et al., 2008; Herek, 2006; Malone-Colone, 2007; Webb & Chonody, 2014) and the damaging impact of divorce (Rotterman, 2007; Sbarra, Hasselmo, & Bourassa, 2015), especially upon children of divorced couples (Buckingham, 2012; Whitton, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2008).

Participants in this study were required to be U.S. citizens, age 18 or older, who racially self-identify as Black or African American. This was an online survey study, so the participant needed to read in order to complete the study. Those who did not meet these criteria were excluded from the study by their inability to participate. Variability in the population is important to represent different perspectives and characteristics within

the population to enhance the generalizability of the results. I assessed variability in socioeconomic status and education. Distributions in age and gender among participants similar to distributions of the U.S. Black population was also a goal to maximize generalizability.

Berzonsky's identity style theory was used as a framework for this study because it was based upon ongoing personal development of self-identity through processing of individual life events (Berzonsky, 1989, Phillips, 2008). Marcia's identity status theory was not used because it considered general self-identity exploration and not the individual life events such as marriage or the possibility of marriage (Marcia, 1966; Phillips, 2008).

### **Limitations**

I used an online survey method for data collection. The self-reporting nature of a survey is potentially vulnerable to inaccuracies of answers resulting from participant bias that may pose a threat to statistical validity (Fowers & Olson, 1993; Nisbett, 1977). Although criteria for participation and the importance of truthful information is explicit in the process to enter the study, honest and accurate responses cannot be guaranteed.

The ENRICH Marital Satisfaction (EMS) scale incorporates a design to counter idealistic distortion, a tendency for participants to report the answer they want to be true and not necessarily the actual truth (Fowers & Olson, 1993). The GAMS (Park & Rosen, 2013) and ISI-5 (Berzonsky et al., 2013), while validated, do not measure truthfulness or deception.

There are many factors that may affect a single person's attitude toward marriage and the reported level of satisfaction of married participants in this study. Level of education and socioeconomic status are variables that may have an impact on the results (Kim, 2012; Kinnon, 2003). The demographic data were collected from participants and evaluated as possible predictor variables if there was enough variability. Participants' religiosity, sexual orientation, past social traumas, whether they were orphaned and adopted, and whether they had parents who divorced and at what age that happened for them may all have an impact on attitudes and marital satisfaction. However, due to the limited scope of this study, these variables were not captured for evaluation. The measure of impact upon variables is limited because every possible variable that may impact marital satisfaction and attitudes toward marriage cannot be accounted for in a single study.

External validity was considered in the selection of instruments for this study. All three instruments (ISI-5, EMS, and GAMS) measure the construct for which they are designed (see Chapter 3 for a full description of instrument validity). Generalizability of the study results was a goal in this study. Distributions in age and gender among participants similar to distributions of the U. S. Black population were examined to determine generalizability of the sample population used in this study.

### **Significance**

The 2010 U.S. Census estimated that the U. S. Black population at over 38.6 million people (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). If the marriage and divorce rates demonstrated in the census data remain true, only 22.4 million will get married by age 36

(U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Of those, 10.7 million will divorce by age 46 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Research that furthers the understanding of these marriage trends has the potential to impact millions of people in a positive way.

Decreasing racial disparity in marriage trends can increase the potential for Black people in the United States to experience the economic and psychosocial benefits of a healthy marriage. Increased numbers of satisfying marriages will also benefit children who would otherwise experience tension and conflict between the parents.

Understanding the relationship between identity style preferences, attitudes toward marriage, and marital satisfaction may establish a foundation for future models that predict likelihood to marry and potential for marital success. Further, Berzonsky (1989) claimed identity style preference to be part of an ongoing developmental process. The preference can change over time. Thus, potential exists for the development of future intervention processes that aid in the intentional transition from one style preference to another that may benefit the individual with regard to marriage and marital satisfaction.

This study not only adds to the scientific literature relating to Black marriage, it also has potential to inform future development of interventions that increase marriage and lower divorce rates in the U.S. Black population. Such interventions could be useful for therapists and counselors to adjust patient/client attitudes toward marriage and marital satisfaction.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I established the problem addressed by the study. The need for the study and potential for significant positive social impacts were also discussed. The background of the study was reviewed and research questions were established in this chapter. Assumptions and threats to validity were also acknowledged. Chapter 2 provides a review of relevant empirical literature relating to attitudes toward marriage and marital satisfaction. Berzonsky's identity style theory will also be elaborated upon in Chapter 2. The literature search strategy and theoretical foundation for this study are described in detail. Attitudes toward marriage and marital satisfaction are discussed. A focused discussion of attitudes toward marriage and marital satisfaction among Black people in the United States is also provided.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

There is a significantly low marriage rate and high divorce rate within the U.S. American population. The purpose of this chapter is to review literature relevant to individual identity development style, individual attitudes toward marriage, and factors that influence marital satisfaction. Attention was given to the African American population and relationship research. Existing trends and theoretical considerations are highlighted and discussed within this review of literature.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

I used the following databases to identify and retrieve literature: PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, PsycBOOKS, Walden University's Thoreau multidatabase search engine, Google Scholar, and SAGE Premier. Search terms included *identity style*, *identity development style*, *identity style theory*, *self identity*, *identity style and marriage*, *identity style and attitude*, *marriage*, *marital success*, *marital satisfaction*, *age and marital satisfaction*, *gender and marital satisfaction*, *marital attitudes*, *attitudes toward marriage*, *attitude toward relationships*, *relationship status and identity*, *African American marriage*, *Black American marriage*, *Black relationships*, *race and marriage*, *American marital trends*, *marital satisfaction among African Americans*, *interpersonal behavior and marriage*, *African American marital expectations*, *marital quality and minorities*, *Black marital trends*, *divorce among African Americans*, *Black social norms*, *African American social norms and marriage*, *racial identity*, *racial identity and*

*marriage, racial identity and divorce, Black identity, African American identity, and ethnic identity.* No articles were found that combined variables similar to this study.

Although research regarding marriage spans decades, there is an increasing amount of literature on factors that contribute to marital satisfaction and success. Likewise, research regarding social and interpersonal trends of Black people in the United States is increasing in contemporary literature. There is a need for studies that fill empirical gaps within U. S. Black relationship literature.

I added to the empirical literature by examining the relationship between individual identity style preference and marriage among Black people in the United States. This study may have a positive social impact by increasing an understanding of relationship patterns and informing the future development of interventions and programs that increase the marriage rate and reduce the divorce rate in the U. S. Black population.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

#### **Identity Style Preference**

Marcia (1966) developed a series of four identity statuses associated with how an individual approaches the development of personal goals. Marcia's identity status theory was based upon two primary factors. The first factor was a person's willingness to explore various goal-related options. The second factor was a person's commitment to goal-related choices. The statuses were labeled as diffused, foreclosed, moratorium, and identity-achieved.

According to Marcia (1966), the diffused status is characterized by a person who is unwilling to explore personal goal options and who is not committed to the task of



forming goals. A person with a diffused identity status is likely to have little concern about goal options or making personal goals. The foreclosure status is characterized by a person who is unwilling to explore personal goal options, but is committed to the task of forming goals. A person with foreclosure identity status is not be interested in exploring goal-related options but is willing to make personal goals without the benefit of exploration. A person with moratorium identity status is willing to explore personal goal options but is not committed to the task of forming goals. Essentially, the moratorium status individual is in a perpetual state of exploring options and not making a decision to commit to one. The identity achieved status is characterized by a person who is willing to explore personal goal options and who is committed to the task of forming goals. A person with identity achieved identity status is likely to give a lot of thought to goal-related options and then be willing to choose one of those options.

Although Marcia's status paradigm was generally well regarded, it has received criticism for treating identity as an outcome variable absent of the actual process of identity development (Kerpelman, Pittman, Lamke, & Sollie, 1997; Phillips, 2008). Phillips (2008) claimed that identity is constructed over time, not simply discovered at a single point in a person's life as implicated in Marcia's work. Phillips (2008) also pointed out that Berzonsky's identity development style theory was a move away from identity outcomes and toward identity development by focusing on social-cognitive factors that affect identity-related decision making over time. Berzonsky considered identity from the perspective of how a person approaches information that has the potential to affect his or her self-identity and how that information is cognitively

processed. It is for this reason that identity style was chosen as the theoretical framework for this study.

Berzonsky (1989) developed the three identity styles to describe different approaches toward identity-related information as a process of personal identity development. Berzonsky labeled the styles as informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant (Berzonsky, 1992; Corcetti et al., 2013; Phillips, 2008). In this study, I measured these identity styles among participants.

An informational approach is an active exploration in which the individual seeks out and analyzes information about him/herself (Berzonsky et al., 2011; Phillips, 2008). An informational approach is characterized by both a willingness to acknowledge and process information that provides insight for an individual's self and an active seeking-out of such information. Individuals with an informational approach are not only willing to seek out information that may inform their self-identity, but they are also able to objectively analyze the information and decide whether to accept it. They can then adjust their self-conceptualization or deny and dismiss the information.

In a normative approach, a person generally ignores information that may contradict current beliefs and values (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Luyckx, Meca, & Ritchie, 2013). A person using a normative approach has developed a general self-concept, often related to his/her perceived expectations of others and friends (Berzonsky et al., 2011). A person with a normative approach will deal with self-related information by evaluating the information and deciding if it aligns with his or her current self-conceptualization. Information that is in line with their current self-conceptualization, or beliefs, will be

accepted without further exploration. Information that contradicts their self-conceptualization is ignored or dismissed (Berzonsky et al., 2011; Schwartz, et al., 2013).

A diffuse-avoidant approach is one in which the person actively avoids dealing with information that may lead to insight about him or herself (Berzonsky, 2011). The diffuse-avoidant person tries to avoid confronting information related to his or her self-identity. Whereas normative and informational persons will confront information and process it differently, the diffuse-avoidant person avoids confronting it at all (Berzonsky et al., 2011; Phillips, 2008; Schwartz et al., 2013). Berzonsky (2009) explained that the diffuse-avoidant person generally has a fragmented self-concept based upon aspects of social context, such as popularity and personal reputation. In situations where a diffuse-avoidant person is unable to avoid or delay confronting self-identifying information, decisions of whether to accept or deny the information are based upon situational demands and the consequent impact on social aspects, such as popularity and reputation.

The three identity development styles in Berzonsky's identity theory aligned with Marcia's identity status categories (Phillips, 2008). For example, the informational style aligned with the moratorium and identity-achieved statuses. The normative style aligned with the foreclosed status. The diffuse-avoidant style aligned with the diffused status.

Berzonsky (1992) concluded that all normally developing persons are capable of using each of the three styles, and one style will generally be favored. Phillips (2008) and Corcetti et al. (2013) conducted studies examining identity style and age and they claimed that adolescents will generally favor a diffuse-avoidant style and gradually transition to informational or normative orientations in young adulthood. However,

scholars have not explained why particular identity style preferences are used. Phillips (2008) speculated that the answer may have to do with neurological development of the brain as it matures. Phillips explained that the maturation process of the human brain, male and female, continues into early adulthood. Phillips argued that identity style preference is linked to the person's cognitive development. The frontal lobe, which plays a role in executive functions such as complex choices, reasoning, and planning (Kyte, Goodyer, & Sahakian, 2005) is the last part of the brain to develop (Gogtay et al., 2004). Although mental ability is fully developed by adulthood, the ability to choose a preference remains (Phillips, 2008). Normally developing adults have the mental ability to efficiently use any of the three identity styles (Berzonsky et al., 2011; Corcetti et al., 2013; Phillips, 2008). There were no gender differences in the development of identity style preferences.

Identity style theory is universal. Studies have been conducted in various countries among a variety of cultures. In addition to U.S. population research, there have also been studies conducted in Italy (Corcetti et al., 2009), Iran (Crocetti & Shokri, 2010), Australia (Caputi & Oades, 2001), United Kingdom (Bartram, 2011), the Netherlands (Vleioras & Bosma, 2004), and Canada (Beaumont, 2009). The results of these studies were consistent regardless of ethnic context. Style preference development is not adversely affected by culture or social norms.

Aside from research intended to develop and build the theory of identity style preferences, many scholars have focused upon mental health issues. For example, an informational approach has been associated with psychological hardiness, proactive

coping ability, and resilience (Beaumont & Seaton, 2008; Berzonsky, 2003). Normative individuals generally score lower than informational individuals in social coping ability; life management; and development of positive relationships, autonomy, and a feeling of purpose in life (Berzonsky, 2003). Diffuse-avoidant individuals consistently score higher than informational or normative for depression, hyperactivity, and misconduct (Adams et al., 2001; Nurmi, Berzonsky, Tammi, & Kinney, 1997).

Although relationships between identity styles and individual differences in cognition (Berzonsky, 2007; Ghamari, Salehi, & Foumany, 2015) and behavior (Smits, Doumen, Luyckx, Duriez, & Goossens, 2011) have been examined in the literature, little attention has been given to identity style preference and aspects of social psychology. There have been a few researchers who focused on social issues such as psychosocial maturity (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2005), psychosocial balance (Beaumont & Pratt, 2011), and interpersonal forgiveness (Seaton & Beaumont, 2013). However, no research has been conducted on the relationship between the three identity style preferences and intimate relationships. Scholars have linked each of the style preferences to various social skills, such as ability to manage relationships, commitment to moral values, and the ability to cope with stressors (Berzonsky, 2003; Berzonsky & Ferrari, 2003; Berzonsky et al., 2011; Berzonsky, Soenens, Luyckx, Smits, & Papini, 2013). Researchers have not, however, directly examined identity style preference as a possible factor affecting the decision to enter into a marriage or marital satisfaction of those who are married.

## **Marriage and Relationships**

Relationship research covers a range of associated factors. For example, gender (Jackson, Miller, Oka, & Henry, 2014), cohabitation (Brown, Manning, & Payne, 2015), race (Cole, 2015), premarital children (Cole, 2015), health and life-satisfaction (Botha & Booysen, 2013), racial and ethnic norms learned during adolescence (Harper et al., 2012), age at marriage and level of education (Aughinbaugh, Robles, & Sun, 2013), perceived partner generosity (Peterson, 2010), and subsequent marriages (Mirecki, Chou, Elliott, & Schneider, 2013) are among the many variables examined in the relationship literature.

Identifying predictors of success and satisfaction in personal relationships is of interest among scholars. Relationship status is not only positively associated with external factors such as socioeconomic success (St. Vil, 2014), it has also been linked to increased well-being (Yap et al., 2014). The link between self-identity and satisfying, successful relationships has been established for over a century since Mead's (1913) social-self theory was introduced into the literature. Mead concluded that self-identity emerges from the relationships people form with others. Therefore, the quality and success of those relationships is linked to identity development. Mead showed that intimate and social relationships with others are central to individual identity. Anthony and McCabe (2015) found that social interaction with friends plays a role in the development of self-identity. Dorahy et al. (2015) found that abusive relationships can impact self-identity.

### **Marital Satisfaction**

There are many factors related to marital satisfaction, and those factors are not universal among married couples (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000). The criteria by which marital satisfaction is measured is individualized (St. Vil, 2014). Variance in marital satisfaction among the races has also been established in the literature (Broman, 2005).

However, some consistencies have been identified in the literature. For example, it has been established that relationships exist between identity style preference and the ability to self-regulate emotions (Crocetti et al., 2013; Phillips, 2008). Bloch, Haase, and Levenson (2014) found self-regulation of emotions to be a predictor of marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction may be influenced by identity style preference. Marital status may also be associated with self-identity (St. Vil, 2014; Yap et al., 2014). There is an association between identity development and marriage choices.

### **Attitudes Toward Marriage**

There is a significantly low marriage rate within the U. S. Black population, as well as a high divorce rate. Attitudes of Black people in the United States toward the institution of marriage may be a possible factor influencing marriage and divorce trends. Although studies regarding attitudes toward homosexual and biracial marriages are common in contemporary marital attitude literature (Kite & Bryant-Lees, 2016; Webb & Chonady, 2014), there is a lack of literature regarding attitudes toward the concept of marriage.

Although there is a lack of research in the area of attitudes toward marriage, such research was not entirely absent from the literature. Muench and Landrum (1994) examined family dynamics and attitudes toward marriage and found that family dialogue impacts attitude development. Martin, Specter, Martin, and Martin (2003) studied adolescent attitudes toward marriage and found that a majority of adolescents have a negative attitude toward divorce and view marriage as a life-long commitment. Riggio and Weiser (2008) examined the relationship between embeddedness of attitudes toward marriage and relationship outcomes and found embedded attitudes toward marriage affect relationship quality. Riggio and Weiser found that the more an attitude is embedded, the stronger the influence on relationship quality. Cherlin, Cross-Barnet, Burton, and Garrett-Peters (2008) studied attitudes of women toward marriage and divorce and found that low-income women to have minimal stigma toward child bearing outside of marriage. Servaty and Weber (2011) examined the relationship between gender and attitudes toward marriage, finding only minimal differences. Ortyl (2013) examined the attitudes of long-term heterosexual cohabiters and found that long-term heterosexual cohabitation to be a complex dynamic involving a range of attitudes.

Attitude development is a common theme in the literature with regard to relationships and marriage. Trotter (2010) found the modeling of marriage by parents or through the media to impact the formation of attitudes toward marriage. According to Campbell and Wright (2010), Riggio and Weiser (2008), and Willoughby (2010, 2014), those attitudes and beliefs toward marriage developed during adolescence later affect outcomes of marital success and failure.



Another common theme is the role of family and social ingroups during adolescence with regard to attitude toward relationships and social norms. Harper et al. (2012) also found that interaction with family members, especially siblings, and the African American familial messages regarding relationships had a role in the development of attitude development regarding intimate relationships. Harper et al. also found that gender-specific social expectations and relationship roles were also relayed to the adolescents through familial interaction and communication. Browning and Miller (1999) found that messages from family members during childhood regarding the expectation of marriage later in life impacted the formation of beliefs and attitudes toward marriage later in life. I stopped reviewing here due to time constraints. Please go through the rest of your chapter and look for the patterns I pointed out to you. I will now look at Chapter 3.

There were a few articles exploring general attitudes toward marriage. For example, Campbell and Wright (2010) conducted a study of American beliefs toward marriage. They found that American marriage ideology has remained relatively stable over time with a common acceptance that marriage is lifelong and monogamous. Abowitz, Knox, Zusman, and McNeely (2009) explored gender differences in views toward romantic relationships. They found males were more likely to view cohabitation prior to marriage as positive and helpful. Abowitz, et al. (2009) also posited that females are more likely to believe that relationship satisfaction decreases after marriage. Servaty and Weber (2011) also examined gender differences in attitudes toward marriage. They found minimal gender differences in all categories however they did conclude that the

overall attitude toward marriage is becoming more relaxed and marriage is no longer seen as being ideal. This is in contrast to Campbell and Wright (2010) who concluded that American attitudes toward marriage remain unchanged and stable over time.

### **Benefits of Marriage**

The social, psychological, and financial benefits of marriage are well-documented (Bryant, et al., 2008; Herek, 2006; Webb & Chonody, 2014). Married persons are more likely to have better health than non-married persons (Johnson et al., 2000; Simon, 2002). Married persons are more likely to have strong social networks that provide emotional support in times of hardship or crisis (Nock, 1995). There are over 1100 provisions in the law in which marital status is considered as a factor with regard to eligibility for receiving federal benefits and privileges (Herek, 2006). These are not only financial but also social. Spouses are recognized as next-of-kin and therefore they incur many benefits in times of crisis. Spouses are able to make important medical care decisions and many laws are written to recognize surviving spouse as an automatic inheritor of assets in the event of death. While this may seem somewhat trivial, the reality is that non-married survivors often endure legal and social burdens that complicate matters in situations that are already emotionally difficult and traumatic (Herek, 2006).

### **Black American Marriage**

Although social, financial, and psychological benefits of marriage are well documented, negative marriage trends of low marriage rates and high divorce rates among Black Americans persist. In fact, these trends have persisted for at least five decades (Kinnon, 2003). Surprisingly, there is a very little literature directly exploring

this social issue. Bennett, Bloom, and Craig (1989) studied the divergence in Black and White marriage trends and discussed the significantly low Black American marriage rates compared to other ethnic groups. They concluded that because employment status is positively associated with tendency to marry, the poor labor market for young Black men is a factor suppressing marriage rates. They also found that having a child outside of marriage and at a young age had a strong negative impact on the likelihood of marriage for the mothers. The issue resurfaced after the 2000 U.S. Census in an article by Beshrov and West (2001) who provided a historical overview detailing the declination of marriage and inclination of divorce among Black Americans over time. While they did not draw conclusions as to why these trends were occurring in the Black American population, they did indicate unplanned pregnancies, poverty, and residual social effects of slavery and Jim Crow laws may play a role.

The conclusion that socio-cultural factors play a role in marital satisfaction among Black Americans was supported by Straughn (2012). Straughn found that while gender role expectations were evident within sampled couples, those expectations had little to no impact on marital satisfaction. However, socioeconomic status was a significant factor in marital dissatisfaction according to Straughn (2012). Kinnon (2003) began to change the tone of empirical discourse regarding Black American marriage and warned that research was indicating most young Black Americans would never marry. Blackman, et.al. (2005) provided a comprehensive review of negative marriage and divorce trends among Black Americans. They provide a historical overview of the problem and discuss racial differences in the consequences of marriage. They concluded that marriage remained a

salient social goal among Black Americans, especially among black males. They also stated that marriage quality for Black Americans is lower than that of their white counterparts. The explanation they provided is that Black American marriages are less stable and more prone to conflict than white marriages. However, no explanation is provided as to why those elements exist within Black marriages. Religiosity was considered as a possible predictor of marital instability by Brown et al. (2008) however they found religiosity was not positively associated with marital instability or satisfaction among Black couples when compared to White couples. Chambers and Kravitz (2011) cite social constraints such as difficulties finding jobs and psychological constraints such as perceived vulnerabilities as possible reasons for the marriage trends observed among Black Americans.

### **Marital Satisfaction Among Black Americans**

Marital dissolution among Black American couples is an important issue because of the immediate and long-term negative impacts created in association with divorce (Cherlin, et al., 2008). Sbarra et al. (2015) found that divorce can cause enormous personal suffering for those involved. A failed marriage can quadruple the risk for depression (Rotterman, 2007). A divorce in which children are involved can have long-reaching impacts on marital outcomes of the affected children (Buckingham, 2012; Whitton et al., 2008). This is especially true for females. Whitton, et al. (2008) found female children likely to enter marriage as adults with lower confidence in the marriage and commitment to marital longevity. Thus, female children who experience the divorce of parents are at high-risk for divorce when they marry as adults. This creates an

intergenerational trend of marriage failure that can last decades (D'Onofrio, et al. 2007; Whitton, et al. 2008).

In 2007 Malone-Colon stated low marriage and high divorce trends among Black Americans was a critical social issue and identified marital strife among Black couples as negatively impacting the Black community as a whole. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics conducted a census that confirmed the enduring persistence of high divorce trends among Black Americans (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). The census showed that by age 35 40.3% of Black Americans had not married while only 15.3% of whites had not married by the same age. The study also showed Black Americans to have the highest divorce rate by age 46 of any ethnic group at 47.9%. In addition, only 52.4% of the Black Americans who divorced remarried compared to 68.6% of whites who divorced.

Chambers and Kravits (2011) approached divorce trends among Black Americans from both a sociological and psychological perspective. They contend that social stressors unique to the Black American population in the United States are responsible for both the decreased marriage rates and the increased divorce rates. Some of these stressors discussed by Chambers and Kravits (2011) are lower employment which creates financial stressors and an implicit, nonclinical sense of mistrust and paranoia that has become common within the Black American culture, likely stemming from historical racism and discrimination. They conclude this mistrust of others degrades relationship quality leading to social friction and an increased likelihood that the relationship will fail. This conclusion also aligns with Mead's social-self theory in the aspect that implicit

mistrust within the relationship leads to a decreased sense of identity within the relationship as an equal and worthy partner, particularly among black men (Chambers & Kravits, 2011).

### **Attitudes Toward Marriage Among Black Americans**

Hurt (2013) made conclusions in line with Dixon (2009) and Blackman, et al. (2005) that Black males value marriage. Hurt also found that Black male participants had beliefs about marriage similar to the participants in the study by Campbell and Wright (2010) such as the salience of marriage as a life goal, the idea that love is a key factor, and that marriage should be a monogamous union. DeLoach (2010) concluded that marriage is also salient to black females. Further, they found that positive attitudes toward marriage are associated with lower levels of psychological stress.

Barr (2014) also recognized the empirical gaps surrounding Black American marriage trends. Barr affirmed most Black Americans consider marriage to be important, beneficial, and relevant to modern American society. One of the key findings of her study was that cohabitation, a behavior often associated with marriage avoidance, actually had positive attributes that led couples toward marriage rather than away from it. However, relationship alternatives such as cohabitation (Manning, 2015; Phillips, 2005) and integrated families (Brown, Manning, and Stykes, 2014) can have a negative impact on wellbeing of children involved.

Cohabitation is becoming an accepted social norm and thus a viable alternative to marriage in American society (Waggoner, 2015). While husband-wife households increased in the United States between 2000 and 2010 by 3.7%, unmarried-couples

increased 41.4% during the same timeframe. However, this trend is consistent among all races and does not explain the disparity between Black and White marriage trends (Waggoner, 2015).

Johnson and Losocco (2014) address challenges specific to Black marriages through the lens of implicit racism in America in which societal values and standards of a proper marriage have been established by the white majority. Those values and standards are not clearly laid out in the article. However, Johnson and Losocco contend that Black American couples struggle to gain acceptance among their white counterparts which creates stressors leading to an avoidance of marriage and marital strife among those who do marry. They also acknowledged the lack of empirical research focusing on marriage among black Americans and encouraged utilization of black sample populations in future research.

### **Summary**

A review of relevant empirical research supports the need for further examination. Identity style preference has been shown to influence decision making, social skills, and behavior (Beaumont & Pratt, 2011; Berzonsky & Kuk, 2005; Seaton & Beaumont, 2013). However, the relationship between identity style and marriage has not been considered in the literature. This study brought both variables together for examination as it pertains to the Black American population with potential implications for all people in general.

The relationship between identity style and individual attitudes toward marriage is also absent from the literature. This study will examine the relationship between these variables and contribute literature toward this gap. Fourth, the literature also indicates

that low marital satisfaction may discourage Black Americans from entering into marriage and may also be a driving factor in the high divorce rate among those who do get married. This study examined individual identity style preference as a possible predictor of marital satisfaction among Black Americans.

This chapter reviewed literature relevant to the negative marital trends that persist among Black Americans. Gaps in the literature were identified and relationships among the variables used in this study were discussed. Chapter 3 will provide details regarding methodology, aspects of the research design and rationale, the study's sample population, sampling method, instruments used to measure constructs , threats to validity, and ethical considerations and procedures.



## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

In this quantitative study, I examined relationships between identity style preferences, attitudes toward marriage, and marital satisfaction among Black people in the United States aged 18 years and older. I explored individual identity style preference as a predictor of attitudes toward marriage and marital satisfaction (criterion variables) among Black people in the United States within the context of ongoing and persistent low marriage and high divorce rates within the U. S. Black population. An online survey was administered to measure identity style preference, attitudes toward marriage, and marital satisfaction among participants. This design is consistent with past studies of identity style preference (Beaumont & Pratt, 2011; Berzonsky et al., 2011; Corcetti et al., 2013). In this chapter, I describe the overall research design, as well as the sample, instrumentation and measurement, data collection, and statistical analysis.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

As a single investigator with limited time and resources, an online survey was the most efficient method for this study. This design was also consistent with the way in which the instruments used in this study to measure attitudes toward marriage and marital satisfaction were intended. The three identity styles (informational, normative, diffuse-avoidant) served as predictor variables for the criterion variables (attitudes toward marriage and marital satisfaction). Gender, household income, and education were also examined as predictor variables.

## **Research Questions**

RQ1: Is identity style preference (informational, normative, diffuse-avoidant), as measured by the ISI-5 questionnaire, a predictor of attitudes toward marriage among single, Black people in the United States, as measured by the GAMS questionnaire?

*H*<sub>1</sub>1: Identity style preference is a predictor of attitudes toward marriage.

*H*<sub>0</sub>1: Identity style preference is not a predictor of attitudes toward marriage.

RQ2: Is identity style preference (informational, normative, diffuse-avoidant), as measured by the ISI-5 questionnaire, a predictor of marital satisfaction among married Black people in the United States, as measured by the EMS questionnaire?

*H*<sub>1</sub>2: Identity style preference is a predictor of marital satisfaction.

*H*<sub>0</sub>2: Identity style preference is not a predictor of marital satisfaction.

## **Methodology**

### **Population**

The target population for this study was Black people in the United States 18 years of age or older who are currently married or are single and have never been married. The number of Black people in the United States over 18 years of age was documented in the last U.S. census (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013) to be nearly 28 million people, accounting for 12% of the total U.S. population over 18 years of age.

Participant self-identified as married or single/never married and provided their gender, socioeconomic status, and level of education as part of the questionnaire completion process. Participants were recruited from Walden and SurveyMonkey

participant pools. Foreign nationals were excluded. Only U.S. citizens participated in this study.

### **Sampling and Sampling Procedures**

A purposive sample was used in this study. Participants meeting the inclusion criteria were recruited for participation. Participants were connected to the study through a hyperlink to Survey Monkey. Collected demographic data (age, gender, education, and annual household income) were evaluated to ensure sampling criteria was met.

G\*Power software (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009) was used to conduct a power analysis for linear multiple regression using an alpha level of .01, with three predictor variables (identity style subscales: informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant), with power at .95 and an effect size of .15. The analysis resulted in a recommended sample. According to Green (1991), statistical power may reduce to inadequate levels if the sample population is less than 100, resulting in estimation errors. Using the G\*Power-recommended sample size of 119 kept statistical power at an adequate level. There were 123 participants in this study.

### **Procedures for Recruitment and Participation**

Once permission was granted from Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB), I used the Walden participant pool and a SurveyMonkey participant pool to recruit participants. Participants were directed to Survey Monkey ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)), which was used to administer the questionnaire to participants and record the response data.

Informed consent was provided to each participant prior to beginning the survey. My contact information and the contact information for Walden University was included within the informed consent providing the participant with access to post participation communication if desired. Voluntary participation and ability to end participation at any time were also emphasized and detailed in the informed consent.

All participants were asked to provide demographic information with regard to age, gender, education, and annual household income (see Appendix A). Participants in this study were separated into two groups: married and single. Participants in the two groups received different surveys. Married participants completed the ISI-5 (see Appendix B) and the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale. Single participants completed the ISI-5 and the General Attitudes toward Marriage Scale (see Appendix C).

### **Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs**

#### **Identity Style Inventory 5**

Berzonsky (1989) established that there are three ways in which an individual approaches information or situations that have the potential to affect his or her self-concept. Although everyone is capable of using each of the three styles, one style will generally be favored (Crocetti, Sica, Schwartz, Sarafini, & Meeus, 2013; Phillips, 2008).

Berzonsky (1989) developed the original Identity Style Inventory (ISI) to measure identity styles. Berzonsky later updated the ISI in 1992 with introduction of the ISI-3. The ISI-3 has been found to be a valid measure of identity style and is applicable to most empirical studies of identity style (Berzonsky, Soenens, Luyckx, Smits, & Papini, 2013). Two other versions of the ISI have been created as well. The ISI-5 is a modified version

of ISI-3 designed for longitudinal and cross-national studies (Berzonsky et al., 2013).

The Identity Style Inventory 5 (ISI-5) developed by Berzonsky et al. (2013) is a 27-item instrument designed to determine an individual's identity style preference.

Each item of the ISI-5 is answered using a 5-point Likert scale (from *Not at all like me* to *Very much like me*). The instrument provides a subscale score for each of the identity styles (informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant) as a subscale. An example of an item from the instrument measuring the diffuse –avoidant identity style is “When personal problems arise, I try to delay as long as possible.” An example of an item measuring the informational identity style is “When facing a life decision, I like to analyze the situation in order to understand it.” An example of an item measuring the normative identity style is “I prefer to deal with situations in which I can rely on social norms and standards.” Scoring is done by totaling scores for each subscale. There is no reverse scoring.

The ISI-5 is an improved version of the ISI-3. Validation of the original ISI was conducted by administering three measures of social-cognitive and personality dimensions. These measures were then examined in relation to participant answers to the ISI. Berzonsky (2013) found social-cognitive and personality dimensions associated with the three identity styles, correlated with measures of participant identity style as measured by the ISI. Those correlations confirmed the ISI-5 was accurately identifying identity style subscales among participants.

The ISI-3 was validated by administering the ISI and the ISI-3 to participants and analyzing the scores. Convergent validity of the ISI-5 was done by administering the ISI-

3 and the ISI-5 to participants and comparing the results (Berzonsky et al., 2013). Berzonsky et al. (2013) concluded this instrument to be valid for empirical research. The ISI-5 was administered to 403 college age males and females (author, year). The three styles (informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant) are equally represented by three subscales, each composed of nine items (author, year). Cronbach alphas for scores among participants who completed the ISI-5 were informational .86, normative .82, and diffuse-avoidant .87 (author, year). Cronbach alphas for scores among participants who completed the ISI-3 were informational .80, normative .77, and diffuse-avoidant .87 (author, year). The 2-week test-retest reliabilities for each style scale were found to be as follows: informational  $r = .81$ ; normative  $r = .78$ ; and diffuse-avoidant  $r = .77$  (author, year). Internal consistency for each style was tested with the following coefficient alphas: informational .74; normative .77; and diffuse-avoidant .71 (author, year). The ISI-5 was standardized using U.S. college students ranging in age from 17 to 30 years. Although a majority of the participants were Caucasian, other ethnic groups were represented in the sample, including Black people in the United States. Although the ISI-5 is in the public domain, permission was received from Berzonsky to use this instrument.

### **General Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale**

The GAMS, developed by Park and Rosen (2013), is a 10-item instrument designed to measure an individual's general attitude toward marriage as an institution. The instrument was designed to measure positive and negative attitudes toward marriage. Each item of the GAMS is answered using a 7-point Likert scale (from *strongly agree* to

*strongly disagree*). Of the 10 items, four of them reflect positive attitudes (ei., “Marriage is important”), three indicate negative attitudes (ie., “People should not marry”), and three indicate fears and doubts related to marriage (ie., “I am fearful of marriage”). Scoring is done by totaling of the item response scores. Reverse scoring is done on five of the items. Interpretation is on an interval scale with higher scores indicating a more positive attitude toward marriage.

Reliability and validity testing of the GAMS was conducted on data collected from GAMS items administered to 516 college students (author, year). Internal consistency was high with Cronbach’s alpha at  $\alpha = .84$  (author, year). The GAMS was tested against two established instruments to confirm validity (author, year). The first was the Marital Attitude Scale (MAS) and the other was the Attitudes toward Marriage Scale (ATMS). Analysis of correlations with MAS ( $r = .74, p < .001$ ) and ATMS ( $r = .70, p < .001$ ) confirmed validity of the GAMS (author, year). The GAMS was standardized using U.S. college students ranging in age from 17 to 41 years. Although a majority of the participants were Caucasian, other ethnic groups were represented in the sample, including Black people in the United States. Although the GAMS is in the public domain, permission was obtained from Rosen to use this instrument.

### **ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale**

The ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMS) is a 15-item instrument developed by Fowers and Olson (1993) to measure individual marital satisfaction. The EMS Scale is an abbreviated version of the full ENRICH Inventory (Olson, Fournier, & Druckman, 1983) which consists of 125 items. Fowers and Olson identified a need for a reliable and

valid instrument that was short enough to be used in multivariate studies. The EMS Scale was found to have high internal reliability with Cronbach's alpha at  $\alpha = .86$  (author, year). This is similar to the full ENRICH Inventory, which has been found to have an accuracy of 85 to 95% in discerning happy marriages from unhappy ones (Fowers & Olson, 1993). When compared to marital satisfaction as measured by the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test, the EMS Scale was found to have a correlation of  $r = .73$  (author, year).

Each item of the EMS is answered using a 5-point Likert scale (from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*; author, year). Of the 15 items, nine of them reflect positive marital satisfaction (ie., "Our relationship is a perfect success") and six indicate negative marital satisfaction (ie., "I have some needs that are not being met by my partner"). Scoring is done by totaling of item scores. Reverse scoring is done on six of the items. Interpretation is on an interval scale with higher scores indicating higher marital satisfaction.

The EMS was standardized using married individuals in the United States. The mean age among participants was approximately 32.5 years (author, year). Fowers and Olson (1993) acknowledge that a majority of the participants were Caucasian; however, they did not elaborate upon the ethnic make-up of the participants who were not Caucasian. The EMS is in the public domain and available for use in this study without written permission. However, usage is limited and the instrument could not be reproduced as an appendix within the dissertation, only cited and included in the references.



### **Data Collection**

Each of the three instruments used in this study are designed to be administered as a survey. A quantitative design using surveys was common in the empirical literature investigating identity style, attitudes toward marriage, and marital satisfaction. As a single investigator with limited time and resources, an online survey was the most efficient method for this study. Separate requests for participation were sent out for single participants and married participants. Participants accessed the study through [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com). Informed consent was provided to each participant (see Appendices A and B) prior completing the survey. Participants were allowed to exit the process at any time. Data from participants who chose to exit the survey prior to completion were discarded prior to data analysis. Follow-up with participants was not necessary in this study.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

A quantitative design was used to determine if identity style preference influences attitudes toward marriage and marital satisfaction. The three subcategories of identity style preference (informational, normative, and diffuse-avoidant) were examined in relation to attitudes toward marriage among single, never married participants, and the marital satisfaction of married participants to answer the research questions. Socioeconomic status, gender, and level of education had the potential to affect individual perspectives, which may have affected the relationship between variables of interest in this study (Cherlin, Cross-Barnet, Burton, & Garrett-Peters, 2008; Jackson et al., 2014; Servaty & Weber, 2011; Straughn, 2012). They were assessed for possible use

as predictor variables. The SPSS software package was used to analyze the data. Multiple regression analysis was used to determine if identity style preference predicted attitudes toward marriage and marital satisfaction. I tested for statistical assumptions (linear relationship, multivariate normality, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity) to ensure that the data met requirements of multiple regression.

### **Threats to Validity**

The self-reporting nature of a survey is potentially vulnerable to inaccuracies of answers resulting from participant bias, which may pose a threat to statistical validity (Fowers & Olson, 1993; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Inclusion and exclusion criterion for participation and the importance of truthful information was explicit in the process to enter the study. However, honest and accurate responses cannot be guaranteed. This threat was not considered significant. The U.S. Department of Commerce (as cited in Horwitz, Tancreto, Zelenak, & Davis, 2012) published a report outlining their findings in a study examining the accuracy of online survey data and they found Internet surveys to be a reliable method for collecting national census data.

Idealistic distortion, a tendency for participants to report the answer they want to be true and not necessarily the actual truth, may have created a threat to internal validity in this study due to a desire to have an ideal marriage or social norms related to attitudes toward marriage. The ENRICH Marital Satisfaction (EMS) scale incorporates a design to counter idealistic distortion. The GAMS does not incorporate an integrated counter to this type of participant bias, but it was not indicated in the literature as having an impact on instrument validity.

Generalizability of the study results was a goal in this study. Distributions in age and gender among participants similar to distributions of the U. S. Black population was examined to determine generalizability of the sample population used in this study. I stopped reviewing here due to time constraints. Please go through the rest of your chapter and look for the patterns I pointed out to you. I will now look at Chapter 4.

### **Ethical Procedures**

This study began upon receiving permission from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB application provided a comprehensive description of the study and of the potential risks and benefits of participation, as well as an explanation of voluntary participation and confidentiality of information. There are no known personal ethical issues such as conflicts of interest, employer-related issues, power differentials, or use of incentives.

### **Informed Consent**

The American Psychological Association (2010) code of ethics establishes guidelines for respect of rights and dignity of research participants. Researchers are expected to respect the confidentiality and privacy of all individuals they work with. Toward this end, each participant must be informed of benefits and risks of their participation in the study. They should also understand their individual rights as a participant. An informed consent statement was provided to each participant in this study (see appendices A and B). The participant's decision to proceed with the survey constituted their acknowledgement of consent and their voluntary decision to proceed as a participant in the study. The informed consent included an explanation of the

participant's right to revoke consent at any time and end their participation in the study. The survey data is anonymous because data from completed questionnaires contains no personal identifiers. The participant's data is completely anonymous.

### **Confidentiality**

Personal identifying information will not be collected from participants. All collected data is stored on the researcher's computer. A copy of the data is also stored on a standalone hard drive. The researcher's computer is equipped with antivirus software and access is protected by password. The standalone hard drive is also password protected. Any archived paper documents containing research data will be kept in the researcher's locked file cabinet when not in use and for a period of 5 years following completion of the study. Only the researcher will have access to the raw data collected in this study.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 explained, in detail, the research design for as a quantitative study utilizing three instruments , to be administered as an online survey to measure identity style preferences, attitudes toward marriage, and marital satisfaction among Black Americans over 18 years of age. This study was designed to determine if identity style preference is a predictor of attitudes toward marriage or marital satisfaction among Black Americans. Justification for choosing this design and approach was supported by empirical references. The instruments, recruitment plan, data collection, data analysis, threats to validity, and ethics were also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 4 will further describe the process of data collection in this study. The statistical analytic procedures and results of the analysis will be explained in detail. Tables and figures will be used to illustrate the results and support key points.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine relationships between identity style preferences, attitudes toward marriage, and marital satisfaction among Black people in the United States. This study was designed to determine if identity style preference was a predictor of attitudes toward marriage or marital satisfaction among Black people in the United States. In this chapter, I will review data collection, participant demographics, and the statistical results.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

RQ1: Is identity style preference (informational, normative, diffuse-avoidant), as measured by the ISI-5 questionnaire, a predictor of attitudes toward marriage among single Black people in the United States, as measured by the GAMS questionnaire?

*H<sub>1</sub>1*: Identity style preference is a predictor of attitudes toward marriage.

*H<sub>0</sub>2*: Identity style preference is not a predictor of attitudes toward marriage.

RQ2: Is identity style preference (informational, normative, diffuse-avoidant), as measured by the ISI-5 questionnaire, a predictor of marital satisfaction among married Black people in the United States, as measured by the EMS questionnaire?

*H<sub>1</sub>2*: Identity style preference is a predictor of marital satisfaction.

*H<sub>0</sub>2*: Identity style preference is not a predictor of marital satisfaction.

### **Data Collection**

The questionnaires in this study were available online to participants over a 2-month period beginning in late April and ending in early July, 2017. The sample consisted of 123 participants, exceeding the goal of 119 to ensure adequate statistical

power. The original recruitment plan was to use the Walden University Participant Pool program exclusively. However, that process only rendered a few participants. I was granted permission by the IRB to expand my recruitment efforts by using a participant recruitment program offered by SurveyMonkey.com.

A majority of the participants were educated females with a household income below the national median of \$55,411. The sample consisted of 123 participants (87 females, 36 males). All 123 participants completed the ISI-5 to measure identity style preference. The EMS was completed by 58 married participants to measure marital satisfaction. The GAMS was completed by 65 single participants to measure attitudes toward marriage.

## **Results**

### **Descriptive Statistics**

The sample in my study was not demographically aligned with the population. For example, in the sample, 29.3% were male and 70.7% were female. Within the U.S. Black population, 48.5% were male and 51.5% were female (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). In the sample, 82.1% had at least some college education. This was much higher than the U. S. Black population, in which only 47.5% of Black people in the United States over 18 years of age have acquired this level of education (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). In terms of income, the sample aligned closely with the population. In the sample, 53.7% reported household earnings of less than \$50,000 and 45.5% reported earning more. Comparatively, 65.5% of Black people in United States

over the age of 18 earned less than \$50,000 and 38.7% earned more (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Table 1 provides the demographic data for the sample.

Table 1

*Frequency Table for Participant Demographic Characteristics*

| Variable                       | <i>n</i> | %  |
|--------------------------------|----------|----|
| Gender                         |          |    |
| Female                         | 87       | 29 |
| Male                           | 36       | 71 |
| Level of Education             |          |    |
| Some School, no degree/diploma | 5        | 4  |
| GED                            | 1        | <1 |
| Completed High School          | 15       | 12 |
| Some College                   | 51       | 41 |
| Bachelor's Degree              | 28       | 23 |
| Master's Degree                | 19       | 15 |
| Doctorate                      | 3        | <1 |
| No Answer                      | 1        | <1 |
| Income                         |          |    |
| Less than \$25,000             | 27       | 22 |
| \$25,000 to \$34,999           | 20       | 16 |
| \$35,000 to \$49,999           | 19       | 15 |
| \$50,000 to \$74,999           | 24       | 20 |
| \$75,000 to \$99,999           | 14       | 11 |
| \$100,000 to \$149,999         | 14       | 11 |
| \$150,000 to \$199,999         | 4        | <1 |
| \$200,000 or more              | 0        | 0  |
| No Answer                      | 1        | <1 |

*Note.* Due to rounding errors, percentages may not equal 100%.

### **Evaluation of Statistical Assumptions**

Skewness and kurtosis were analyzed to test for normal distribution (see Table 2).

Scores for identity style were normally distributed, with a skewness of .195 (SE=.230).



Kurtosis was .422 (SE= .457). Scores for attitudes toward marriage were normally distributed, with a skewness of -.277 (SE=.302) and kurtosis of -.035 (SE= .595). Scores for marital satisfaction were normally distributed, with a skewness of -.278 (SE=.319) and kurtosis of .422 (SE= .457). The assumption of normal distribution was met.

Table 2

*Results of the Normality Testing for Identity Style, Attitudes Toward Marriage, and Marital Satisfaction*

|                           | Skewness | SE   | Kurtosis | SE   |
|---------------------------|----------|------|----------|------|
| Identity Style            | .195     | .230 | .422     | .457 |
| Attitudes Toward Marriage | -.277    | .302 | -.035    | .595 |
| Marital Satisfaction      | -.278    | .319 | -.763    | .628 |

A linear relationship between the independent variables and dependent variables was an assumption of multiple regression. Box plots were generated for the variables in this study indicating a linear relationship between the variables (See Appendix D). No outliers were identified in my data. The assumption of linearity was met.

It is also an assumption of multiple regression that independent variable residuals have similar variances relative to the dependent variable. This is known as homoscedasticity. Scatterplots were examined confirming the data were both homogenous and linear (see Appendix E). The assumption of homoscedasticity was met.

Multicollinearity is the assumption that two or more variables are closely related. The data were tested to determine if the assumption of collinearity was met. There was no multicollinearity among the predictor variables (diffuse avoidant style, *Tolerance* = .588, *VIF* = 1.700; informational style, *Tolerance* = .841, *VIF* = 1.189; normative style, *Tolerance* = .626, *VIF* = 1.597; gender, *Tolerance* = .882, *VIF* = 1.133; education, *Tolerance* = .633, *VIF* = 1.580; income, *Tolerance* = .811, *VIF* = 1.233). Therefore, the assumption of collinearity was met (See Table 3).

Table 3

*VIF Values for the Predictor Variables*

| Variable               | <i>VIF</i> |
|------------------------|------------|
| Diffuse-Avoidant Style | 1.22       |
| Informational Style    | 1.40       |
| Normative Style        | 1.60       |
| Gender                 | 1.13       |
| Education              | 1.58       |
| Income                 | 1.23       |

**Multiple Regression Analysis**

Standard multiple regression was used to analyze the data for this study. The three identity styles (diffuse-avoidant, informational, and normative) and demographic variables (gender, level of education, and income) were used as predictor variables. Attitudes toward marriage and marital satisfaction were the criterion variables.

### Multiple Regression: Marital Satisfaction

Relationships were examined between the predictor variables and marital satisfaction (See Table 4). Identity style was found to predict marital satisfaction ( $F = 5.34, p < .001, R^2 = 0.25$ ). Higher identity style scores predicted higher marital satisfaction. The informational identity style ( $B = .668, p = .001$ ) was a significant predictor of marital satisfaction. Higher informational identity scores resulted in higher levels of marital satisfaction. Diffuse-avoidant ( $B = -.186, p = .135$ ) and normative ( $B = -.078, p = .595$ ) identity styles were not found to be significant predictors of marital satisfaction. Level of education ( $B = -.205, p = .047$ ) and income ( $B = .175, p = .013$ ) were also found to predict marital satisfaction. Increased level of education and higher income both resulted in higher levels of marital satisfaction. Gender ( $B = -.207, p = .431$ ) was not a significant predictor of attitudes toward marriage.

Table 4

#### *Results of the Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Marital Satisfaction*

| Variable               | <i>B</i> | <i>SE</i> | $\beta$ | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> |
|------------------------|----------|-----------|---------|----------|----------|
| Diffuse-Avoidant Style | -.186    | .122      | -.201   | -1.52    | .135     |
| Informational Style    | .668     | .156      | .620    | 4.27     | .001     |
| Normative Style        | -.078    | .155      | -.083   | -.536    | .595     |
| Gender                 | -.207    | .261      | -.113   | -.795    | .431     |
| Level of Education     | -.205    | .101      | -.305   | -2.04    | .047     |
| Income                 | .175     | .067      | .333    | 2.60     | .013     |

*Note.*  $F = 5.34, p < .001, R^2 = 0.25$ .

Means and standard deviations of the EMS and identity style scores were also examined. All were found to be acceptable with standard deviations  $<2.0$  (See Table 5).

Table 5

*Means and Standard Deviations*

| Variable               | <i>N</i> | Mean | Std Deviation |
|------------------------|----------|------|---------------|
| EMS                    | 52       | 3.65 | .838          |
| Diffuse-Avoidant Style | 52       | 2.11 | .907          |
| Informational Style    | 52       | 4.04 | .777          |
| Normative Style        | 52       | 2.78 | .888          |

**Multiple Regression: Attitudes Toward Marriage**

Relationships were examined between the predictor variables and attitudes toward marriage (See Table 6). Identity style was found to predict attitudes toward marriage ( $F = 3.54, p < .001, R^2 = 0.172$ ). Higher identity style scores predicted positive attitudes toward marriage. The diffuse-avoidant identity style ( $B = -.411, p = .033$ ) was found to be a significant predictor of attitudes toward marriage. Higher diffuse-avoidant identity scores resulted in more positive attitudes toward marriage. Informational ( $B = .307, p = .123$ ) and normative ( $B = -.289, p = .162$ ) identity styles were not found to be significant predictors of attitudes toward marriage. Level of education ( $B = -.205, p = .047$ ) was also found to predict attitudes toward marriage. Increased level of education resulted in more

positive attitudes toward marriage. Gender ( $B=.558$ ,  $p=.080$ ) and income ( $B=.066$ ,  $p=.430$ ) were not significant predictors of attitudes toward marriage.

Table 6

*Results of the Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Attitudes Toward Marriage*

| Variable               | <i>B</i> | <i>SE</i> | $\beta$ | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> |
|------------------------|----------|-----------|---------|----------|----------|
| Diffuse-Avoidant Style | -.411    | .187      | -.346   | 2.201    | .033     |
| Informational Style    | .307     | .196      | .207    | 1.57     | .123     |
| Normative Style        | -.289    | .203      | -.221   | -1.42    | .162     |
| Gender                 | .558     | .311      | .229    | 1.79     | .080     |
| Level of Education     | -.322    | .149      | -.333   | -2.16    | .036     |
| Income                 | .066     | .083      | .107    | .795     | .430     |

*Note.*  $F = 3.54$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = 0.172$

Means and standard deviations of the GAMS and identity style scores were also examined (See Table 7). All identity styles had standard deviations under 1.0. The standard deviation for GAMS scores was 1.16.

Table 7

*Means and Standard Deviations*

| Variable               | <i>N</i> | Mean | Std Deviation |
|------------------------|----------|------|---------------|
| GAMS                   | 54       | 4.62 | 1.16          |
| Diffuse-Avoidant Style | 54       | 2.28 | .974          |
| Informational Style    | 54       | 3.91 | .779          |

|                 |    |      |      |
|-----------------|----|------|------|
| Normative Style | 54 | 2.66 | .886 |
|-----------------|----|------|------|

---

### Summary

Identity style preferences were examined as possible predictors of marital satisfaction and attitudes toward marriage. Standard multiple linear regression was used to determine if a statistically significant relationship existed between the identity style predictor variables and criterion variables. Gender, education, and income were also examined as possible predictor variables. A separate regression analysis was conducted for each of the two groups.

In the first research question, I asked whether identity style preference was a predictor of attitudes toward marriage among single Black people in the United States. I found that higher scores on the diffuse-avoidant identity style subscale was a significant predictor of positive attitudes toward marriage. In the second research question, I asked whether identity style preference was a predictor of marital satisfaction among married Black people in the United States. I found that higher scores on the informational identity style subscale was a significant predictor of higher marital satisfaction.

The demographic variables examined in this study (gender, education, and income) were considered as possible predictor variables. Gender was not a significant predictor of attitudes toward marriage or marital satisfaction. Household income was found to be a significant predictor of greater marital satisfaction. Married participants with higher income reported greater marital satisfaction. Level of education was found to be a significant predictor of higher marital satisfaction and positive attitudes toward marriage. Married participants with higher education levels reported greater marital

satisfaction. Single participants who had higher education levels had more positive attitudes toward marriage.

In Chapter 5, an interpretation of the findings, the limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research is presented.

## Chapter 5: Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine if identity style preference was a significant predictor of attitudes toward marriage or marital satisfaction among Black people in the United States. According to identity style theory, individual identity style preference affects the way in which people confront decisions, such as the decision to get married and decisions integral to a marital relationship (Berzonsky, 1989; Berzonsky et al., 2011; Phillips, 2008). I found that identity style did predict attitudes toward marriage and marital satisfaction. Informational identity style, education, and income were found to be significant predictors of higher marital satisfaction. Diffuse-avoidant identity style and education were found to be significant predictors of positive attitudes toward marriage.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

According to St. Vil (2014) and Yap et al. (2014), marital status is associated with self-identity. According to identity style theory, information regarding self-identity is processed in one of three ways (Berzonsky, 2003). I identified a relationship between identity styles, attitudes toward marriage, and marital satisfaction among Black people in the United States. It is also an assumption of identity style theory that gender does not play a role in the development of style preference. This assumption was also supported by the finding that gender was not a significant predictor of attitudes toward marriage or marital satisfaction.

The possibility that identity style preference was a predictor of marital satisfaction was examined in this study. The informational style preference was found to be a



significant predictor of marital satisfaction. Persons with an informational identity style preference are more likely to experience greater marital satisfaction. People with an informational style preference are more open-minded and willing to confront identity related information by actively seeking additional information (Beaumont & Seaton, 2008; Phillips, 2008). The informational style has also been associated with psychological hardiness, proactive coping, and forgiveness, which may be beneficial to the maintenance of marital satisfaction (Seaton & Beaumont, 2013). Comparatively, normative style preference has been associated with lower social coping ability, life management skills, and ability to develop positive relationships (Berzonsky, 2003). Diffuse-avoidant persons actively avoid information related to the self (Berzonsky, 2003). The diffuse-avoidant style has also been associated with higher likelihood of misconduct and a lack of commitment to goals (Adams et al., 2001; Nurmi et al., 1997; Phillips, 2008). The findings that the normative and diffuse-avoidant styles did not predict marital satisfaction are consistent with identity style theory. People with normative style preference tend to have lower social coping skills and are less likely to develop positive relationships (Berzonsky, 2003). People with diffuse-avoidant style preference generally score higher for depression and negative behaviors (Adams et al., 2001; Nurmi et al., 1997), both of which may have a negative impact on marital stability and satisfaction.

Income and education were also found to be significant predictors of marital satisfaction. This finding is consistent with the literature. Higher levels of education and income have been associated with higher marital satisfaction (Kim, 2012). Cutrona et al.

(2003) found that higher income predicts higher evaluation of a person's spouse, and financial strain predicts lower marital quality.

I also examined the possibility that identity style preference was indicative of attitudes toward marriage. The diffuse-avoidant style preference was found to be a significant predictor of positive attitudes toward marriage. Informational and normative styles were not found to be significant predictors of attitudes toward marriage. The open-minded nature of informational style would seem to lead toward an optimistic outlook and, therefore, positive attitudes toward marriage. The lowered ability of normative style to develop positive relationships inconsistent with the finding that normative style does not predict a positive attitude toward marriage.

### **Limitations**

I used an online survey method for collection data. The self-reporting nature of a survey is potentially vulnerable to inaccuracies of answers resulting from participant bias, such as idealistic distortion in which participants report the answer they want to be true and not necessarily the actual truth (Fowers & Olson, 1993; Nisbett, 1977). Although criteria for participation and the importance of truthful information was explicit in the process to enter the study, honest and accurate responses cannot be guaranteed.

The scope of this study was narrow. The decision to marry and marital satisfaction are complex issues among Black people in the United States (Johnson & Loscocco, 2015). External factors such as socioeconomic status (Straughn, 2012) and low employment (Chambers & Kravits, 2011), as well as internal factors such as religiosity (Brown et al., 2008) and perceptions of vulnerability (Chambers & Kravits,

2011), are noted in the Black relationship literature as having an influence on U. S. Black marriage patterns. These variables, as well as other potential affective variables such as sexual orientation, past social traumas, adoptive parental relationship, and parental divorce, were not collected. I felt that the inclusion of these variables would have brought the survey to such a length that participants would not have time to complete it or would be discouraged entirely from participating. This narrow scope limits the generalizability of the findings because the impact of those variables upon these findings is unknown.

The final limitation of this study is generalization. Ideally, a research sample will be representative of the population for generalization. The participants for this study were selected through convenience sampling using online participant pools. In the sample, 82.1% had at least some college education; while, within the population, only 47.5% of Black people in the United States over 18 years of age had acquired this level of education. With a majority having higher levels of education, the lower educated portion of the population was underrepresented in the sample. Reported income within the sample was similar to the population norms. In the sample, 53.7% of participants reported household earnings of less than \$50,000 compared to 65.5% in the population. There 45.5% of participants in the sample reported earning more and in the population 38.7% reported earning more.

### **Recommendations**

Consideration should be given to identity style preference when examining marriage related issues within the U. S. Black population. I found that identity style

preference was a significant predictor of both attitudes toward marriage and marital satisfaction. Further research is needed to deepen an understanding of the relationship between identity style preference as it affects attitudes toward marriage and marital satisfaction. Identity style is a developmental theory in which style preference changes over time as the as the development of self-identity progresses over time. Longitudinal research is recommended to determine if the predictive relationships identified in this study hold true over time.

Low rates of marriage and high rates of divorce among Black people in the United States inspired this study. At an individual level, the decision to marry and achieve high marital satisfaction while married are important issues regardless of race. Research examining a broader population may be beneficial to determine if the findings are universal or unique to the U. S. Black population. Studies on the relationship between identity style, attitudes toward marriage, and marital satisfaction using a sample of U. S. citizens from a variety of ethnic groups would help make this determination. Furthermore, multicultural studies would provide similar insight. Identity style theory has been applied to other cultures with marriage customs different than those of the United States, such as Italian (Crocetti et al. 2009) and Iranian (Corcetti & Shokri, 2010). However, identity style has not been examined as a predictor of attitudes toward marriage or marital satisfaction in those cultures. Studies such as these will give greater insight into the potential universal application of the findings in this study.

### **Implications**

There are many social benefits associated with marriage (Bryant et al., 2008; Herek, 2006; Webb & Chonody, 2014). The low marriage and high divorce rates among Black people in the United States leaves millions of people in this demographic portion of the U. S. population to not experience the associated benefits of marriage (Kinnon, 2003). The findings of this study do not provide a solution to the marriage trends among Black people in the United States. I did not show that identity style may play a role in these trends. This research adds to the empirical knowledge by examining the relationship between identity style, attitudes toward marriage, and marital satisfaction among Black people in the United States that was previously unexplored in the empirical literature.

The results of this study also have therapeutic implications. A counselor or therapist may find it beneficial to understand the identity style preference of their client, especially when exploring issues related to marriage. Identity style preference is a cognitive approach to confronting and processing information (Berzonsky, 1989). Purposeful self-awareness of how a person approaches information that may potentially affect his or her self-image, which may lead to the conscious alteration of cognitive processes and, in turn, increase the likelihood of marriage and marital satisfaction. For example, a person with diffuse-avoidant or normative preference experiencing low marital satisfaction may make intentional efforts to confront information and make decisions by actively seeking additional information. This is more in line with the informational style preference, which according to this study, is most likely to result in

higher marital satisfaction. Cognitive-behavioral treatments based upon identity style theory may be beneficial to Black people in the United States for whom a satisfying marriage is a goal.

### **Conclusion**

This study helps to fill a gap in the literature on Black relationships in the United States. Negative marriage trends among Black people in the United States have been consistent for at least 5 decades (Kinnon, 2003) with no solutions being offered. There are many personal and social aspects affecting the decision to get married and the marital satisfaction of those who do get married.

Although marriage may not constitute a singular solution to U. S. Black happiness (Besharov & West, 2011), the social, psychological, and financial benefits of marriage are well-documented (Bryant et al., 2008; Herek, 2006; Webb & Chonody, 2014). Barr (2014) and Blackman et.al. (2005) concluded that marriage remained a social goal among Black people in the United States, especially among Black males. Campbell and Wright (2010) found that marriage was a life goal among Black males. DeLoach (2010) concluded that marriage is also salient to Black females. Further, there are immediate and long-term negative impacts created in association with divorce (Cherlin et al., 2008). Sbarra et al. (2015) found that divorce can cause personal suffering for those involved. A failed marriage can quadruple the risk for depression (Rotterman, 2007). A divorce in which children are involved can have long-reaching impacts on marital outcomes of the affected children (Buckingham, 2012; Whitton et al., 2008).

I found identity style to be a significant predictor of both attitudes toward marriage and marital satisfaction. This research adds to the body of knowledge on marriage among Black people in the United States and expands the application of identity style theory to the social issues of attitudes toward marriage and marital satisfaction. It provides another aspect of marriage and attitude research to consider. Identity style theory has also been expanded by this study. Relationship development and outcomes are two areas which previous studies have not examined.

Positive social change may be realized through increased an understanding of marital satisfaction and attitudes toward marriage among Black people in the United States. Future development of therapeutic tools based upon identity style theory has potential for positive social change by increasing the rate of successful marriage among Black people in the United States and thus, many more people enjoying the social and financial benefits of marriage.

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## Appendix A: Participant Demographics

- I am 18 years of age or older
  - YES
  - NO
- I am Currently unmarried and have never been married (single participant survey only)
  - YES
  - NO
- I am Currently married (married participant survey only)
  - YES
  - NO
- Gender
  - Male
  - Female
- I am Black/African American
  - YES
  - NO
- Education
  - GED
  - Completed High School
  - Some College
  - Bachelor Degree
  - Master's Degree
  - Doctorate
- Annual Household Income
  - Less than \$25,000
  - \$25,000 to \$34,999
  - \$35,000 to \$49,999
  - \$50,000 to \$74,999
  - \$75,000 to \$99,999
  - \$100,000 to \$149,999
  - \$150,000 to \$199,999
  - \$200,000 or more

### Appendix B: Identity Style Inventory 5 (ISI-5)

Please select a number between 1 and 5 that best reflects how much each statement is not like you or like you. There are no right or wrong answers.

Your first reaction to each question should be your answer.

- 1= Not like me
- 2= Somewhat unlike me
- 3= Unsure
- 4= Somewhat like me
- 5= Very much like me

1. When personal problems arise, I try to delay acting as long as possible.
2. I'm not sure where I'm heading in my life; I guess things will work themselves out.
3. My life plans tend to change whenever I talk to different people.
4. Who I am changes from situation to situation.
5. I try not to think about or deal with problems as long as I can.
6. I try to avoid personal situations that require me to think a lot and deal with them on my own.
7. When I have to make decisions, I try to wait as long as possible to see what will happen.
8. It doesn't pay to worry about values in advance; I decide things as they happen.
9. I'm not really thinking about my future now, it is still a long way off.
10. When making important decisions, I like to spend time thinking about my options.
11. When facing a life decision, I take into account different points of view before making a choice.
12. It is important for me to obtain and evaluate information from a variety of sources before I make important life decisions.

13. When making important decisions, I like to have as much information as possible.
14. When facing a life decision, I try to analyze the situation in order to understand it.
15. Talking to others helps me explore my personal beliefs.
16. I handle problems in my life by actively reflecting on them.
17. I periodically think about and examine the logical consistency between my values and life goals.
18. I spend a lot of time reading or talking to others trying to develop a set of values that makes sense to me.
19. I automatically adopt and follow the values I was brought up with.
20. I think it is better to adopt a firm set of beliefs than to be open-minded.
21. I think it's better to hold on to fixed values rather than to be open-minded.
22. When I make a decision about my future, I automatically follow what close friends or relatives expect from me.
23. I prefer to deal with situations in which I can rely on social norms and standards.
24. I have always known what I believe and don't believe; I never really have doubts about my beliefs.
25. I never question what I want to do with my life because I tend to follow what important people expect me to do.
26. When others say something that challenges my personal values or beliefs, I automatically disregard what they have to say.
27. I strive to achieve the goals that my family and friends hold for me.

### Appendix C: General Attitudes toward Marriage Scale (GAMS)

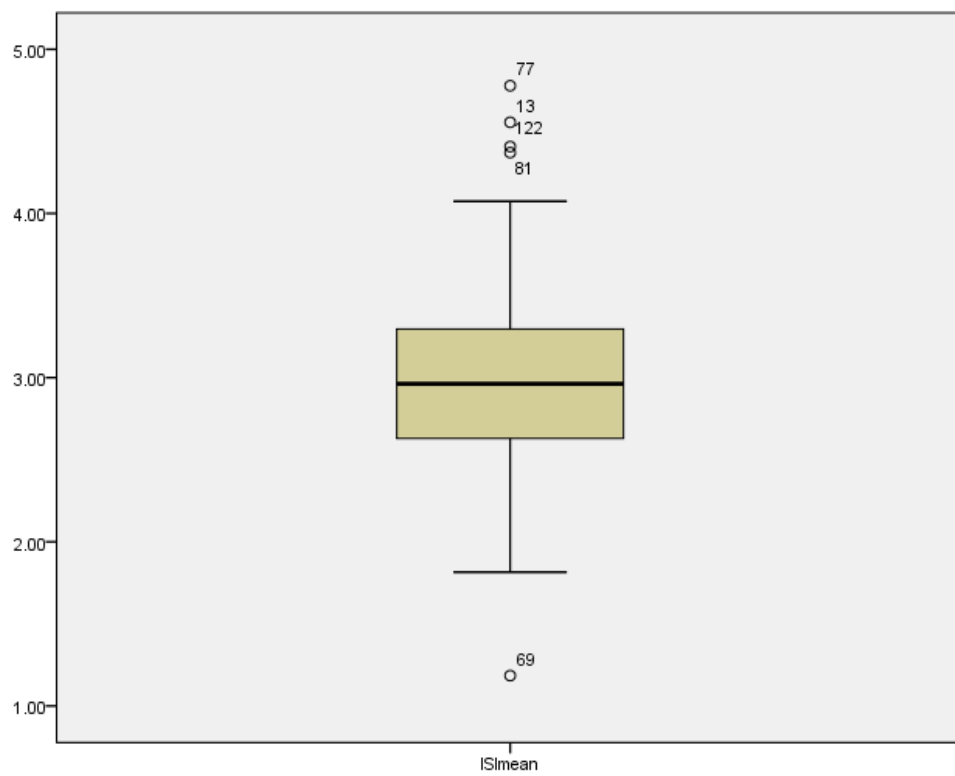
Please select a number between 0 and 6 that best reflects how much you disagree or agree with the sentence. There are no right or wrong answers.

Your first reaction to each question should be your answer.

- 0= Strongly disagree
- 1= Moderately disagree
- 2= Slightly disagree
- 3= Neither disagree nor agree
- 4= Slightly agree
- 5= Moderately agree
- 6= Strongly agree

1. Marriage is beneficial.
2. I am fearful of marriage.
3. People should not marry.
4. I have doubts about marriage.
5. Marriage is a “good idea”.
6. I do not have fears of marriage.
7. Marriage makes people happy.
8. Most marriages are unhappy situations.
9. Marriage is important.
10. Marriage makes people unhappy.

### Appendix D: ISI Box Plot



## Appendix E: Scatter Plots

