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An Exploratory Study of the Lived Experiences of Unmarried College-Educated Black Women

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Abstract

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MS, Nova Southeastern University, 2012

BS, Florida State University, 2005

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Although there has been a decline in heterosexual marriages, marriage is still an expectation for adults in the United States. Consequently, unmarried women feel pressured to explain their single marital status. Black women are the least likely to marry, compared to non-Black women and Black men, yet there is limited research addressing the experiences of unmarried Black women. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of unmarried, college-educated Black women and the effects of cultural and social expectations of marriage. Face-to-face, in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 women. The intersectionality theory was used as the theoretical framework to guide the data interpretation. By employing the Moustakas data analysis method for inductive data analysis, 6 themes emerged from the data: Me versus Them: Marital expectations, Marriage in the Black Community, Outsider Looking In, Single and Not So Happy, Single and Happy, and Perception of Marriage. The most significant emergent theme was Single and Happy because it depicted singlehood for this group and provided better understanding of the phenomenon in study. The participants pointed out various factors (see subthemes) that could cause insecurities and maladaptive symptoms but also indicated that unmarried degreed Black women are living satisfactorily while awaiting their marital opportunity, devoid of pressure from others to marry. The results of the study may promote positive social change by helping clinicians and society to understand this marginalized group of women. As such, more understanding and sensitivity will be rendered to these women as their lived experiences are reported, aiding in cultivating a society that is more accepting of single marital status for college-educated Black women.

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Dedication

Dear unmarried Sisters, be it, never-married, divorced, or widowed, I dedicate this research to us all. Sometimes it is challenging to be understood and accepted, specifically desired. We sometimes look around and notice the plethora of gorgeous single Black women and wonder why. However, I pray that if marriage is your desire, it will be yours one day, a healthy, successful, and beautiful matrimony. In the meantime, and beyond, let us continue to be positive contributories to our race and society.

To all my Sisters, regardless of your marital status, being Black and female is not an easy lifestyle. However, we were made for this; there is purpose in our existence. Let us continue to make indelible impacts in this world that cannot be erased. Let us continue to be the strong, resilient, beautiful women we are. We will not compete with one another, but we will ban together, continue to dominate in academia, and continue to be a force *not* to be reckoned with.

Remember all of my fierce Sisters, we help to make this world go 'round. We are needed. We are seen. We are heard. We are loved. We will not allow society to define who we are because it is clear and has always been clear that we are phenomenal women. We are BLACK GIRL MAGIC!

Acknowledgments

This doctoral journey began December 2013 and has been no easy feat. However, I am appreciative of the challenges because those challenges stretched, pruned and scholarly matured me for this Doctor of Philosophy title. Though, I would be remiss to not acknowledge those who encouraged me along this trajectory. Firstly, I thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ for giving me the wherewithal to accomplish such a task. My faith has certainly been strengthened because it was exercised very much throughout this process. To my parents, thank you for believing in me and for the countless words of affirmation that I needed to believe in myself and forge ahead. Mom, thank you for listening to my sobbing stories about this academic endeavor being too difficult, and thank you for never relenting on saying, "Courtney, this is what you really want; you can do it; I know you can!" Because of the faith of you and dad, I finished my coursework with a perfect grade point average and completed this dissertation. To my brother who has always believed in me, to my family, and loved-ones, THANK YOU. To my dear friends who also encouraged me through my weary times, THANK YOU. To Dr. Charles Profit and Dr. Teshawnia Thompson, this journey was success and worthwhile because we weathered this doctoral process together, THANK YOU. To my Dissertation Chairperson, Dr. Nina Nabors and Committee Member, Dr. Robin Friedman, thank you for accepting my request as committee members. Your guidance led me to this great accomplishment.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The rates for heterosexual marriage are on a downward spiral. Kreider, Ellis, and the U.S. Census Bureau (2011) reported that 8.8 years is the average lifespan of an American marriage. According to the CDC/National Center for Health Statistics (2017), the United States marriage rate is 6.9 per 1,000 total population (49 reporting States and D.C) and the divorce rate is 3.2 per 1,000 population (45 reporting States and D.C.). Yet, there is still an expectation for adults in America to marry (Cherlin, 2009).

The National Center for Health Statistics (2010) reported that heterosexual Black people in the United States have the lowest rate of marriage compared to other racial groups. Barros-Gomes and Baptist (2014) reported that Black women are pressured to marry within race as an homage to their familial male figures. Research showed several reasons for the decline of marriages between Black women and Black men. According to Wang (2012), one of the reasons was an increase in interracial marriage involving Black men. How and Myles (2013) suggested that marriages between Black women and Black men were declining because of an increase in interracial marriages. Another reason for the decline in marriage between Black women and Black men was a disparity in the socioeconomic status between Black women and Black men (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014). Barros-Gomes and Baptist (2014) also pointed out that Black women achieve a higher level of education than that achieved by Black men. This was supported by U.S. Census Bureau data, included in the following section, indicating that Black women completed a higher level of education than Black men (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015

American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates). Therefore, the desire for Black women to marry someone within race, whose socioeconomic status or academic achievements are equal to their own, presented a challenge when seeking a suitable partner (Barros-Gomes & Baptist 2014; Burton & Tucker, 2009). The compatibility of Black men and Black women is lacking, but more specifically lacking for Black women because the education attainments between the sexes are unequal (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Elliott Brown, Parker-Dominquez, & Sorey, 2000; Hurt, McElroy, Sheats, Landor, & Bryant, 2014; Parham-Payne, Dickerson, & Everette, 2013).

Not only are Black women the least likely to marry in comparison to non-Black women (Banks, 2011; Buchanan & Selmon, 2008; Duncan, 2012; Hurt et al., 2014), but finding a suitable Black partner is challenging. Nevertheless, Black women tend to feel obligated to marry within their race due to their familial ideals and cultural expectations (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014). Culturally, Black women are expected to marry and as a member of this collectivistic group, Black women may feel pressured to fulfill the marital expectation (Banks, 2011; Henry, 2013). Marriage isa societal expectation for all women (Buchanan & Selmon, 2008; Gordon, 2003; Wetherell & Reynolds 2003).

Marrying within race is not the only pressure that is experienced by these women; there is pressure that results merely from not being married at all. Earle, Smith, Harris, and Longino (1998) reported that marriage tends to lessen the prevalence of depressive symptoms in women. Therefore, the pressure to fulfill cultural and societal marital expectations could also impact the psychological well-being of unmarried Black women (Dingfelder, 2013; Earle et al., 1998; Elliott-Brown et al., 2000), creating a greater need

to research this population. To gain a better understanding of how college-educated Black women, with a set of unique circumstances, manage unfulfilled societal and cultural marital expectations, I conducted an exploration of their lived experiences.

The lived and told experiences of this group of women affords the opportunity to effect social change in the community. Mental Health Clinicians will gain a greater understanding of the challenges encountered by these women and how they maneuver through societal and cultural unmet marital expectation for them. This will create more sensitive therapeutic techniques for these clients. This will also enlighten society, as a whole and Black culture on the possible feelings of pressure to marry, whether they want to or not.

Throughout this study, the terms "unmarried" and "single" were used interchangeably, as they denote the same meaning but allows for the avoidance of repetitious use. This chapter includes background information, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research question and theoretical framework, the nature of study, definitions used to explain the study, assumptions, the scope and delimitations, limitations, the significance, and summary of this study.

Background

There are a number of studies that focus on unmarried individuals, specifically women (Buchanan & Selmon, 2008; Gordon, 2003; Wetherell & Reynolds 2003). Some studies reported that a large number of women participants find it challenging to provide an answer for why they remain single (Gordon, 2003;Wetherell & Reynolds 2003).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2015), there were 109 million unmarried (never-married, excluding cohabitators) individuals, aged 18 or older. Reportedly, there were 88 unmarried men to every 100 unmarried women in America (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). On average, 53% of all women in America were unmarried, compared to 47% of men who were unmarried in America (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Within the unmarried Black race, 45.1% were men while 54.9% were women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). The marital disparity between Black men and Black women is partly due to the increase in interracial marriages for Black men. Wang (2012) reported that 24% of Black men were marrying outside of their race. Also, the unequal academic achievements between Black women and Black men could be a factor in marital disparity for them. This is supported by U.S. Census Bureau data that indicates that 22.4% of Black women earn a bachelor's degree, compared to 17.7% of Black men (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates).

In a collectivistic race that is rooted in familism marriage is an expectation for Black women (Banks, 2011; Henry, 2013; Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014). Familism is defined as a hybrid between individuality and familial connectivity where independence is allowed "but is not exercised without due adherence to family obligations" (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014). Reportedly, Black women are least likely to marry, compared to other women (Buchanan & Selmon, 2008; Duncan, 2012). According to Copen, Daniels, Vespa, Mosher, and Statistics, (2012), White women held the lowest percentage of never-married women, 34%, next was 39% for Asian women, 49% for Hispanics born within the United States, and lastly, 55% of Black women were never married from 2006-2010.

Copen et al. (2012) indicated that 55% of Black women were never-married in 2010, currently the number is close to 50%, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2014).

The Pew Research Center reported that in 2013, 25% of Black men married non-Black women, compared to 12% of Black women married outside their race. According to Hurt (2013), Barros-Gomes and Baptist (2014), and Johnson and Loscocco (2014), Black men marrying outside their race is a contributing factor to why Black women represent the highest percentage of unmarried women. There are significantly more married Black men than there are Black women; this is most likely due to the outnumbering of Black women to Black men and the fact that Black men are more likely to marry outside of their race than Black women.

According to Ryan and Bauman (2016), over half of college attendees were women. In Table 1, the percentages for educational attainment of women compared to the educational attainments of Black women are provided.

Table 1

Educational Attainment of Women Aged 25 and Older by Race

	Attend college	Associates Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Master's/Doctoral Degree
All races of women	60.1	43.4	32.7	12.0
Black women	52.9	32.4	22.5	8.2

In relation to college degree recipients within the Black race, Black women outnumber Black men (Pew Research Center, 2014), as Black women currently earn two-thirds of all African-American bachelor's degree awards (Digest of Education Statistics,

2016). Black women earn 70% of all master's degrees, and they are recipients of more than 60% of all doctorate degrees (Digest of Education Statistics, 2016).

Braboy Jackson and Mustillo (2001) reported that intimidation may develop for Black men due to unequal educational achievements, causing them not to pursue educated Black women. For this reason, the disparity between Black women and Black men with college degrees makes it challenging for degreed Black women to find suitable Black mates, which is one of the unique set of circumstances for college-educated Black women.

According to Barr, Simons, and Simons (2015), the value of marriage has increased over time. Reportedly, marriage indicates a symbol of successful self-development (Barr et at., 2015) Therefore, the decline in marital rates within the United States has not changed marital expectations for adults, nationally nor culturally (Cherlin, 2013). Even though there is a decline in marriages, the value of marriage continues and there may still exist societal and cultural pressure to marry or provide an acceptable explanation to society and cultural (familial) influences why an individual is single. Reynolds and Wetherell (2003) and Gordon (2003) reported that some women felt pressured to explain their singleness.

There is an ongoing fight for equity for numerous groups within America, including women. However, the scope and experiences could be perceived differently when unmarried educated Black women are studied because Black women are members of groups that have a history of being unfairly treated due to gender and race. Race and gender are two social constructs that must be included when studying Black women, as

these are factors that identifies and categorizes individuals. From the perspective of this population of women who live with these constructs, uncertain interpretation of marital expectations from society and cultural might arise for them.

According to Barr et al. (2015) and Frech and Williams (2007), depressive symptoms are more prevalent in unmarried women than married women. Moreover, Dingfelder (2013) and Elliott-Brown et al. (2000) reported that there is a greater incidence of depressive symptoms for Black individuals who lack social support from a significant other. Martin et al. (2013) reported that college attainments did not lessen the probability of depression for college-educated Black women. The researchers reported that college-educated Black women experienced the same multiple jeopardies as non-college degreed Black women: racism, sexism, and classism (Martin et al., 2013). However, college-educated Black women will identify as middle or upper-class, which could cause a disparity in suitable Black male partners (Brown et al., 2000; Coleman, 2003; Elliott Henry, 2013; King, 1999; Parham-Payne et al., 2013). This factor adds to the increase of unmarried college-educated Black women and depressive symptoms among this population. Seccombe and Ishii-Kuntz (1994) reported that the psychological well-being of a person is enhanced by social support because it acts as a buffer to life stressors, which could aid in coping with major life adjustments. This could provide members of social networks with emotional, cognitive, or material support (Martin et al., 2013; Seccombe & Ishii-Kuntz, 1994).

Therefore, mental health clinicians will benefit from additional education on the psychological well-being of unmarried college-educated Black women. Reportedly,

societal expectations to marry are a constant reminder when unmarried women are asked "when are you going to marry?" (Gordon, 2003, p.2). These women could interpret this question to mean that there is a malfunction within themselves (Gordon, 2003). Some may internalize their singleness as self-sabotage and blame themselves.

While the literature has addressed the potential reasons why there is a larger percentage of unmarried Black women in the United States compared to other groups of women, very little is known about the specific lived experiences of these women. Specifically, there is a gap in the literature concerning the lived experiences of unmarried college-educated Black women living in a society and culture with marital expectations. Thus, an exploratory study is important to understand how these single women experience this phenomenon. Gaining more understanding of this population of women will aid society, Black culture, and clinicians with information that will garner more sensitivity and consideration for their daily lived experiences.

Problem Statement

The studies that I reviewed indicated that Black women are less likely to marry than their non-Black female counterparts (Banks, 2011; Buchanan & Selmon, 2008; Duncan, 2012; Henry, 2013). The likelihood of marriage for unmarried college-educated Black women who desire to marry men within race and who have obtained equal or better education is even more improbable (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Braboy Jackson & Mustillo, 2001; Duncan, 2012). However, there is a group of women who are ambivalent about marriage. Whether there is a desire for marriage or not, society and culture still expect marriage for them. Women feel the need to give an explanation for

their singleness, which is evidenced through literature regarding non-Black women (Gordon, 2003; Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003) The problem identified for this study was that unmarried college-educated Black women are affected by a very specific set of issues relating to marriage. There are issues of available mates based on level of education, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity. Black women are expected to find a mate with equivalent education, earning potential, and race (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014).

Black cultural familism supports the notion that Blacks should marry within the race to help sustain it (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014). Black women may feel that they are a disappointment to their cultural beliefs, cultural expectations, and familial influencers if they are not married; therefore, their experiences of not meeting societal and cultural marital expectations deserve exploration to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of this group of women. Their possible feelings of disappointment to their culture could morph into low self-esteem and low self-worth issues, causing an increase in depressive symptoms (Dingfelder, 2013; Elliott Brown et al., 2000; Martin et al., 2013). There is gap in the literature concerning the perspectives and daily management of living as unmarried Black women in a society and culture that expects marriage for them, yet the probability of marriage for them is low compared to non-Black women (Henry, 2013).

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of unmarried, college-educated, Black, heterosexual women and the effects of cultural and social expectations of marriage. An exploration of their daily encounters with this phenomenon

may lead to greater sensitivity in the way society views this group of women. I used a qualitative phenomenological approach to study a small sample of individuals to gather a richer and more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, as suggested by Creswell (2013). I interviewed a small number of women who fit this desired demographic to incite positive change in the community.

Research Question

How do single college-educated Black women experience the societal and cultural expectations of marriage?

Theoretical Framework

There are multiple jeopardies or social constructs (sexism, racism, and classism) that work against Black women. These jeopardies exist alongside societal and cultural marital expectations for Black women. The social constructs of race and gender are imperative inclusive factors when studying this group of women, as they are oppressive factors and intersecting relationships among sources of discrimination (Martin et al., 2013). These intersecting social constructs continue to have an indelible impact on the lived experiences of Black women (Parham-Payne et al., 2013). Intersectionality theory was well suited for my analysis.

In 1989, Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality. Intersectionality is a concept animated by the imperative for social change. The combination of Black feminist conceptions of power and identity and critical race theory created the foundation and analytical lens for intersectionality theory. Crenshaw created and used this theory to exhibit the confines of the single-axis frameworks that identified antidiscrimination

administrations, antiracist, and feminist discourses (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, &

Tomlinson, 2013). It is vital to recognize the many ways race and gender relate to form

the numerous dimensions of the experiences of Black women (Crenshaw, 1991). The use

of intersectionality theory does not single out any one social construct but realizes that

when studying Black women there are several entities that are essentially subsumed.

Parham-Payne et al., (2013) reported that these social constructs are reciprocating and

overlapping systems of power that work to generate a continuum of oppression.

Parham-Payne et al. (2013) posited that the employment of the intersectionality

theory provided an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges

experienced by 45-65 year old women who expressed ambivalence about marriage. The

researchers reported that 21 respondents (57%) believed that there was a societal and

parental (cultural) expectation for them to marry (Parham-Payne et al., 2013).

Intersectionality theory was applicable to my phenomenological analysis of the

lived experiences of unmarried college-educated Black women, when marital status

opposes cultural and societal marital expectations. The employment of this framework

will aid in effecting postive social change for this pheonomenon. In Chapter 2, I will

provide an analysis of the necessity of employing intersectionality theory.

Nature of the Study

I used a phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of college-

educated single Black women who have not met societal marital expectations. The age

range for this study was between 30 – 50. Nittle (2017) reported that 70% of college-

educated, Black, heterosexual women who are married, married in their 40s, which added credence to why this study will only interview those in the 30 – 50age range.

White women have a greater chance of marrying in their 20's versus Black women, who are more likely to marry in their 30s or later (Foster, 2017), which further supported the need for the age range because Black women, regardless of education level, marry later.

Phenomenological research is used when a researcher desires to explore and discover real meaning or gain a deeper understanding of human experiences as it relates to a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994); therefore, this strategy of inquiry maintains continuity with understanding the lived experiences from the perspective of unmarried college-educated Black women. The data analysis process that was employed was the modified Van Kaam Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data (Moustakas, 1994).

I obtained the perspectives of these single women by conducting individual interviews. The individual interviews provided a private and secured milieu for each participant to share her personally lived experiences with this phenomenon. The data analysis consisted of verbatim transcriptions of the audio-recording of each interview. The analysis process commenced after the completion of all interviews; this allowed for themes to be identified to help categorize each interview. I searched through those transcribed interviews for common themes that represented the essence of the experiences of the participants, suggested by Moustakas (1994).

The analyzed data helped to explain the growing phenomenon of singlehood from the perspectives of unmarried, college-educated, Black women's lived experiences. Sharing the stories of these women will aid in informing society and people who support

this group of women of how Black women percieve and conceptulize their single marital status, the challenges they encounter, and how they cope with the cultural pressure for marriage. This study will effect positive social change in clinicians and society for this understudied group of women by informing of their lived experiences with this phenomenon.

Definitions

The following terms are used throughout this study.

Black women: is any female minority who identifies as a member of the Black race, this study is not solely centered on Black women because the desire was not to exclude any ethnicity associated within the Black race; this study focused on any woman of an ethnicity within the Black race (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014).

College-educated: those who are the recipients of an earned college degree ranging from associate level to post-doctorate level (Ryan & Bauman, 2016)

Familism: identity only defined in relation to one's community, in this case, Black community, to include: family unit, clan, and nations or tribes. It is a hybrid between individualism and familial connectedness where independence is accepted but is not activated without adherence to familial obligations (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014)

Unmarried or single: those who are currently not married; this is only inclusive to those who have never-married, excluding cohabitators (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). For the purpose of this study, unmarried and single are synonymous and will be used interchangeably. Further, prospective participants could have been involved in a monogamous relationship; however, if they were cohabitating, those prospective

participants was not allowed to participate in this study, as the perspectives of

cohabitators may have differed from that of single/never married individuals.

Assumptions

I made several assumptions for this research study. I assumed that the women in

this study believe that there exists an expectation of marriage, culturally and societally.

This assumption was necessary in the context of this study because it supported the

notion that there are daily lived experiences of managing as unmarried college-educated

Black women when society and culture expects marriage for all adults, especially

women. It was important to understanding how these women cope with this expectation

whether they desire to be married or not.

I also assumed that unmarried college-educated Black women will feel

comfortable sharing their personally lived experiences with this phenomenon.

I made another assumption that all participants would be open and completely

honest about their daily experiences with this phenomenon during the interviewing

process. It was imperative to express the importance of openness and honest throughout

their involvement in the study.

Scope and Delimitations

This study was delimited to unmarried, college-educated, Black women in the

southeast region of Florida. According to the U. S. Census Bureau: Newsroom Archive

(2011), the Black population has the highest concentration in the south. Furthermore,

there is a higher percentage of Black women than Black men who receive a bachelor's

degree or higher in the south, specifically Florida. This study was appropriately delimited to college-educated Black women in the southeast region of the United States (U. S. Census Bureau: Newsroom Archive, 2011). Although the study was limited to the southeast region, as mentioned above, the high population of Blacks in the metropolitan areas of the southeastern Unites States provided participants that varied in age, economic status, and societal and cultural experiences. Transferability of the findings is not practical because the study was limited to college-educated Black women and the needs and experiences of Black women in metropolitan areas of the southeastern Unites States may be unique to this marginalized group of women. Generalization is not optional when conducting a qualitative study, as qualitative studies seek to provide deeper meaning and understanding from an intimate group of participants (Patton, 2002). Due to the qualitative nature of this study, generalizability was limited to the population of this study.

Limitations

A limitation to this study that I identified was that the participants were unmarried degreed Black women. Another limitation that I identified was that not every participant may feel comfortable sharing their personal experiences with this phenomenon due to social desirability bias (Krumpal, 2013). Therefore, researcher bias was an important aspect to be considered. I have personal experience with this phenomenon. I am a college-educated Black woman. It was imperative that I exercised bracketing and reflexivity, as suggested by several scholars (Starks & Trinidad, 2007; LaBanca, 2011; Tufford & Newman, 2012). This is so that focus was solely on the

experiences of the participants, also that my non-verbal and verbal cues did not sway the direction or opinion of the participants, resulting in skewed results, which Patton (2002) suggested to employ. LaBanca (2011) informed that the lack of bracketing on the researcher's part could result in response bias, again, possibly skewing the data.

Significance

The literature addressed the reasons why there is a higher percentage of unmarried Black women than other ethnic groups, but there was a gap in the literature regarding the experiences of this group of women and how they daily managed this societal and cultural unfulfilled expectation. Data gathered from this phenomenological study of the lived experiences of unmarried college-educated Black women, regarding the pressure of societal and cultural expectations, provides the community with insight into their perspectives and help to fill the gap in literature, as the number of unmarried college-educated Black continues to increase. Throughout this study, I provide more in-depth insight into the cultural and societal marital expectation that this group of women manage daily. Obtaining a greater understanding of this under-researched group of women aids in supporting that several social constructs must not be overlooked when analyzing why degreed Black women are single. Presenting and publishing the data of this study provides more current and in-depth knowledge that informs those who study and support this marginalized group of women. The findings of this study supports and promotes positive social change in the community, as it cultivates a community that is more aware and considerate to the needs of unmarried college-educated Black women.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of college-educated single Black women who have not met societal marital expectations. Among women, Black women are the least likely to marry (Henry, 2013). In addition to the fact that Black women are the least likely to marry, college-educated Black women found it more difficult to find suitable mates (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Parham-Payne et al., 2013). Given the factors listed above, it makes it more difficult for college-educated Black women to meet society's marital expectations. Therefore, an appropriate research question for this study was: how do single college-educated Black women experience the societal and cultural expectations for marriage?

For this study, I used a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of unmarried college-educated Black women within the southeast region of the United States. Moustakas (2004) informed that phenomenology is used to explore the lived experiences of the study participants. I selected the southeastern region because United States Census Bureau: Newsroom Archive (2011) informed thatthere is a higher concentration of Black women.

In this chapter, I discussed the phenomenon of unmarried college-educated Black women and the statistics reported concerning their marital status. I also included in this chapter the reviewed literature detailing data, statistics, and comparison of marital statuses, rates, and fates of non-Black women garnered from previous studies loosely associated with this phenomenon; this information supports the significance of the study.

Moreover, the research problem, purpose, and nature of this study were clearly stated in this chapter.

In Chapter 2, I discussed a detailed literature review of the problem and conceptual framework for the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

There are several unique problems that are affecting marriage possibilities for unmarried college-educated Black women (Carbado et al., 2013). Black women find it difficult to find a Black man with the same level of education or with equal or greater socioeconomic status (Parham-Payne, Dickerson, & Everette, 2013; Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014).

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of unmarried college-educated Black women who are affected by societal marital expectations.

There is an expectation in the United States that all women will marry (Cherlin, 2013; Gordon, 2003; Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003). Most of these women experience pressure to marry or provide reason for their singleness, whether they desire marriage or not (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003). Black women are less likely to marry when compared to women in different racial and ethnic groups (American Fact Finder, 2011; Banks, 2011; Buchanan & Selmon, 2008; Duncan, 2012; Hurt et al., 2014; Lincoln, Taylor, & Jackson, 2008; Taylor, Tucker, Chatters, & Jayakody 1997; Wanzo, 2011). Foster (2017) reported that 85% of White women marry, compared to 78% of Black women. Although there is only a 7% difference, it is important to understand the age differential for these two groups of women. White women have a greater chance of marrying in their 20s versus Black women who are more likely to marry in their 30s or later (Foster, 2017). Banks (2011) reported that of Black women who are not married, three out of 10 may

never marry. The phenomenon of unmarried Black women has received great attention in popular media (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Parham-Payne, Dickerson, and Everette, 2013).

There are several reasons for the marriage disparity between Black women and women of other racial and ethnic groups. One reason is that many Black women wish to marry Black men (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014), in part because Black men may have a greater understanding of the racial obstacles these women face in their daily lives (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014). However, the number of Black men available to marry is limited due to several factors, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

The likelihood of marriage or finding romantic love is even lower for college-educated Black women (Clark, 2011, Luke & Oser, 2015). Having an advanced degree may decrease options for marriage among these women (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Parham-Payne et al., 2013) because the independence that is gained from obtaining advanced degrees may imply that these women are self-sufficient and do not need a partner for socioeconomic growth. They can be perceived as intimidating and emasculating (Braboy Jackson & Mustillo, 2001). Unmarried, college-educated Black women find this challenging because it may decrease options for marriage (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Parham-Payne et al., 2013). Black women obtain more bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees than do Black men (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Parham-Payne et al., 2013). Thus, the pool of available mates with equivalent educational or economic status is less (Elliott Brown et al., 2000; King, 1999).

The number of college-educated Black women in the United States is increasing (Parham-Payne et al., 2013). Unmarried, degreed Black women must manage living daily in a society and culture that expects marriage for all women, even if the odds are against them (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Parham-Payne et al., 2013).

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of unmarried college-educated Black women and the effects that cultural and social expectations of marriage have on them. This chapter includes a review of the literature to support the need to study this phenomenon. The topics that I will address include: marital rates, societal expectations and norms, Black cultural marital expectations and norms, Black women, education, and social support, and psychological well-being of unmarried Black women. I covered an overview of the chosen theoretical framework: intersectionality theory.

Literature Search Strategy

Throughout this study, I explored the lived experiences of unmarried college-educated Black women and the effects of cultural and social expectations of marriage. The employment of phenomenology was applicable to this study, as this research method allowed for interviews and the collection of the perspectives of these women, which offered personal experience and possibly diverse perspectives.

Throughout this literature review, I cited peer-reviewed journals in effort to support the focus of this study. I used newly published articles to satisfy dissertation requirements and to highlight the current importance of this phenomenon. I used older

literature to provide an historical perspective to support to this growing, yet understudied demographic of women and to explain that unmarried college-educated Black women are not a newly developed sector of women.

I used several key terms to search the databases for applicable literature to explore the phenomenon. I employed several databases to gather literature to strengthen this study, such as: Walden University Library, PsychINFO, PsycCritiques, PsychARTICLES, psychEXTRA, EBSOhost: psychINFO: show all, and Google Scholar. I sifted of those databases to aid in locating reference lists of peer-reviewed articles and published doctoral dissertations.

I conducted database searches from December 2015 to June 2017. I did not restrict suitable articles to the past 5 years, but by whether they were original works and pertinent to the discussion. For instance, literature on intersectionality theory is considerably older than articles focusing on marital rates for women within the United States. Table 1 shows a summary of several key word searches that I used to locate articles relevant to the listed subtopics for the literature review. I used these key words are categorized by total results found, articles limited to 2011, and articles relevant for this study.

Table 1

Summary Results for Selected Searches

	Total Results	Limited to 2012	Relevant[1]
Marital Rates…	1,100	98	50
Societal Expectations…	1,458	120	30

Black Cultural Expectations…	10	3	9
Psychological Well-being…	181	25	17
Black Women, Education…	476	88	23

Footnote[1]. Some results are duplicated on multiple lines for the "relevant" line.

Theoretical Framework

Intersectionality Theory

Some researchers have sought to understand women through the employment of feminist theory (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003; Gordon, 2003); however, feminist theory was founded on the life experiences of White women, which does not embody the various nuances that Black women are subjected to because of their race (Crenshaw, 2000; Hooks, 2000). Thus, when studying single, degreed, Black women, there are several important factors that cannot be ignored and must be included. These women encounter judgement, prejudice, discrimination, negative portrayals, questioned adequacy from others, and many other daily reminders that they are members of a highly negatively stereotyped and persecuted race (Abrams, Maxwell, Pope, & Belgrave, 2014). To understand Black women, it is necessary to use a theory that takes into account the various social constructs that are involuntarily managed by Black women daily.

Several researchers that aimed to understand Black women employed the intersectionality theory, as it was designed to include various social constructs that must

be implemented in order to wholly understand this race of women. Intersectionality theory holds that race, gender, age, and social status are necessary social constructs that cannot be ignored when researching this group of women (Parham-Payne, Dickerson, & Everette, 2013).

Intersectionality theory is attributed to Crenshaw (1989). Crenshaw defined intersectionality as, "the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's…experiences" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244); this means that the intersectionality theory does not isolate specific social constructs but incorporates a number of them, because without the inclusion of these factors, gaps will be created, misinformation will possibly be reported, and/or the exclusion of some the social constructs will not allow for a sound understanding of Black women. These social constructs work together as recycling systems of power to continue oppression (Parham-Payne et al., 2013), which lends itself to causes of social invisibility for this stigmatized group of women.

The ongoing societal and cultural expectation of marriage for unmarried, college-educated, Black women may create feelings of oppression for them (Abrams et al., 2014). Although some of these women may or may not desire marriage, the realization that they are not manifesting the expectations of their communities of origin could elicit oppressive feelings. The perspectives of this understudied group are necessary as they are involuntary members of the Black race and female gender and are not excused from societal and their cultural norms. According to Hills-Collins (2000) and Lewis and Neville (2015), the level of oppression encountered by Black women, specifically, the

women of this study, is predicated on social class positions; race, gender and class are contingencies for their experiences with marginalization. Intersectionality theory is fitting for this study because there is literature about singleness and White women but less literature focuses on Black women. The assumption of previous researchers is that the experiences of White women are true for all women, which is not true.

Researchers conducting a study about educated Black women in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields employed the intersectionality theory to elucidate how race and gender function together to produce outcomes for individuals and society (Ko, Kachchaf, Ong, & Hodari, 2013). Ko et al. (2013) posited that intersectionality theory supports that the experiences of Black women can amount to more than the totality of racism and sexism. Therefore, intersectionality theory was employed to understand how salient and multiple identities, as in, race and gender, work congruently to produce outcomes for individuals and society. The researchers included a statement by Hammond (one of the participates in the study) that explained that race and gender are not separates for Black women. Hammond said, "I am always Black and female" (Ko et al., 2013, p. 222). This type of experience is what leads to or is the premise of why social constructs must be incorporated in a study of Black women. These encounters support the need to highlight how the social invisibility hypothesis relates to intersectionality.

The social invisibility hypothesis posits that individuals belonging to multiple subordinate social group encounter social invisibility due to their nonprototypical social statuses (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). This subintersectional prediction is grounded

on the premise that androcentricism (male-centeredness) and ethnocentricism (White-centeredness) is the manner in which American society operates (Thomas, Dovidio, & West, 2014). Therefore, when the term "Black" is used, the image of a Black man is conjured in the minds of individuals and when the term "woman" is used, the prototypical image perceived is a White woman (Thomas et al., 2014). There is literature about singleness or the unmarried and White women, but less literature focuses on Black women.

There is a conflict within Black women. The fact that they were born to a collectivist culture and live in the Unites States, an individualist society, distinguishes their experiences from White women. Intersectionality theory explains that race, gender, age, and social class cannot be excluded when studying Black women (Crenshaw, 2000), so when a study employs female ethnocentrism, it often neglects to identify the daily experiences of racial discriminations and intersectional invisibility experienced by Black women.

Schug et al. (2015) conducted a quantitative study on the invisibility of Asian men and Black women; the investigators reported that intersectional invisibility is when nonprototypical members of an overarching group are unrecognized or viewed as insignificant, making them invisible or unseen. Black women are unnoticed in relation to Black men and White women (Schug et al., 2015). Schug et al. (2015) posited that these women are members of two marginalized groups: Black race and female gender and are valued the least in both groups. Schug et al. (2015) employed intersectionality theory as a

means of understanding how a number of group memberships or social constructs (race, gender, class, and sexual orientation) engage with each other.

A researcher conducted a study on 12 Black women participants in an effort to understand their perspectives regarding the probability of Black women contending for nominees of a major, national political party (Parham-Payne, 2009). Parham-Payne (2009) highlighted that the vast majority of Blacks voted for President Obama and many White women voted of Senator Hilary Clinton. As a race, the majority of Blacks voted for the Black candidate and White women voted for the White woman candidate. The study highlighted the importance of White women by reporting their votes; however, the number Black women voters were not identified but were reported as a race majority, signifying their invisibility. Parham-Payne (2009) used intersectionality theory to provide strength to the study; the researcher found it important to include social constructs to explore the perspectives of Black women. Parham-Payne (2009) reported that intersectionality theory is the implementation of socioeconomic status, age, race, and gender concerning the oppressive experiences of women.

Furthermore, Hills-Collins (2000) posited that in the 1960's, Black women were minimized by male dominance during civil rights efforts, and mainstream feminism did not actively include African-American women. Hills-Collins (2000) commented that race and gender are intricate dynamics warranting analysis as they are equal and reciprocal factors of societal oppression. This study found that the perspectives of Black women concerning their probable positions in a major political office was indicative of the marginalization these women experienced on a daily basis. Intersectionality theory was

used to explore the roles of Black women in prime political positions, but it is also necessary in understanding the understudied experiences of sexual harassment for this group of women.

Richardson and Taylor (2009) conducted a study on sexual harassment for women of color. The researchers posited that the feminist theory is applicable to the sexual harassment experiences of White women; therefore, the employment of intersectionality theory is necessary when exploring minority women to demonstrate how race and gender interact and equally impact each other, in regard to experiences within sexual harassment. (Richardson & Taylor, 2009). Chen (1997) and St. Jean and Feagin (1997) reported that sexual harassment for women of color may pose more problematically as it is often rooted in racial discrimination. So, not only are these women dealing with the gender social construct, but they are also having to juggle race and career advancement contingencies, which brings in socioeconomic status glass ceilings. Past researchers have reported that poor Black women experience greater rates of sexual harassment but not deemed victims of sexual harassment (Buchanan & Ormerod, 2002; Fain & Anderton, 1987; Murrell, 1996).

As mentioned, I provided literature that indicated the race and gender-based plights encountered by Black women, through the lens of intersectionality theory. This theoretical framework has been employed to showcase the various nuances Black women are challenged with daily. It is not enough to focus on the unfair treatment and unequal rights women face, as a whole, but when studying Black women, it is imperative that the inexcusable social constructs be detailed. Reportedly, black women are least likely to

marry; however, the chances of marriage are even less likely for college-educated Black women (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Parham-Payne et al., 2013). This probability is partly due to the lack of suitable Black men, as it relates to racial injustices, resulting in, inequivalent socioeconomic status (Hurt, 2013). Therefore, I believe the inclusion of social constructs: age, race, gender, and socioeconomic status is necessary for understanding the lived experiences of unmarried college-educated women, which makes employing intersectionality theory appropriate for this study.

Literature Review

Marital Rates

Wang and Parker (2014) posited that there have been a significant change in marital rates since the 1960s for Americans; while, Cherlin (2009) reported that marriage in America is still highly respected and expected for adults. However, the rates of marriage in the United States of America for Blacks are not increasing; in fact, marital rates for Blacks in the United States are declining, despite the cultural expectations (U. S. Census of Bureau of Marital Status, 2010). According to Jagesic (2014), the probability of Black women marrying, in comparison with White, Hispanic, or Asian women is increasingly less likely. Because I centered this study on Black women, specifically unmarried degreed Black women, more in depth and pertinent information will be detailed later, for now, it is necessary to highlight other races and ethnicities marital rates within the United States.

It is important to understand the three major eras of marriage in America: the institutional era, the companionate era, and the self-expressive era. From 1776-1850 was the institutional era; marriages were founded on the premise of economic production (Finkel, Cheung, Emery, Carswell, & Larson, 2015). Marriages focused on familial ties of working together to provide the first two categories of Maslow's hierarchy of needs: physiological needs and safety needs (Anderson, 2014). During this era, the majority of Americans lived in agrarian communities; therefore, the sole purpose of marriage was to gain wealth by owning land and sharecropping (Finkel et al., 2015). Love and belonging

(one of Abraham Maslow's hierarchical needs; Anderson, 2014) and companionship

marriage were not the focus of marriages; rather, it was aimed at the physiological and

safety needs of providing for the family, during the institutional era. Next, was the

companionate era that span from 1850-1965. This era was grounded on gender type roles:

husbands entered the paid workforce and wives managed the household needs (Finkel et

al., 2015). As a result of those marriages meeting the physiological and safety needs

necessary to proceed up the hierarchy of needs pyramid, the marriages could focus on the

next level of the pyramid: love and belonging (Anderson, 2014). The spouses' needs

were fulfilled with being loved, giving love, and passionate romantic experiences; thus,

marriages were much more sentimental than those of the institutional era (Finkel et al.,

2015). Lastly, the self-expressive era was birthed in 1965 and is currently manifesting.

This era brought about diversity, such as civil rights, the feminist movements, and the

Vietnam War (Finkel et al., 2015). According to Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler and

Tipton (1985), this era nurtured self-discovery, self-expression, and authenticity. From

then and presently, the view of marriage in America has met the criteria of the

hierarchical theory, that states, after love and belonging is met, the next steps are self-

esteem and self-actualization (Anderson, 2014), which was and is exemplified by

individualism. This era is demonstrating an individualistic American culture, which is

infringing on the quality of marriages because citizens are focused on self-improvement

rather than familial growth and development (Finkel et al., 2015). The self-actualization

of this era also provided avenues for racial equality movements: first Black Elected U. S.

President, who was elected two consecutive terms: President Barack Obama (2008-

currently), the Black Lives Matter movement formed in 2013, and 2016, first female

presidential candidate, Senator Hilary Clinton. However, because of the self-expressive

era, marriages began to suffer as citizens were more focused on self-gained than

collective gain, often achieved through marriage (Finkel et al., 2015). Nevertheless,

DePaulo and Morris (2005) and de Botton (2012) believed that individuals have a greater

expectation of fulfillment through marriage than previously. These eras are necessary to

know in order to understand why marriage was and is still important in America (Burgess

& Locke, 1945; Cherlin, 2009; Coontz, 2005).

Marriage is still an important institution in America and one of the reasons is that

marriage is said to have an enormous positive impact on the well-being of married

individuals (Birditt & Antonucci, 2012). According to Birditt and Antonucci (2012), the

marital tie demonstrates one of the most powerful relationships in adulthood; marital

satisfaction is associated with scarcer psychological and physical health complications

(Birditt & Antonucci, 2012). A study focused on the meaning of marriage for Black men,

reported that married Black men are more satisfied with life, more religious, and

healthier, physically and mentally (Hurt, 2013). Hurt (2013) posited that married Black

men are less likely to be involved in crime and the criminal justice system. Although the

U. S. Census Bureau (2010) reported that only 32% of Black adults married in 2009,

compared to the 51% of their White counterparts, the desire for marriage and respect or

high regard for marital institution, is still revered by Blacks (Hurt, 2013).

St. Vil (2015) purported that the essence of social support, gained in marriage,

positively contributes to marital satisfaction and psychological well-being. Amiri et al.

(2012) discovered that social support positively influences the absence of major depression disorder in married women. The benefit of positive psychological health associated with marriage is a vital reason that marriage is expected of adults; therefore, promoting marriage to unmarried individuals is understandable. However, though studies indicate the benefits of marriage, the rate of marriage is not moving upward, instead it is on a downward spiral. DePaulo (2014) reported that individuals are spending more of their adult lives single than married. There are those that do not wish to marry and there are those who are married but are faced with no longer wanting to be married.

There is another side of marriage that should be highlighted, the downside. Marital rates, aforementioned, are regressing, this is largely due to infidelity, financial dilemmas, and lack of communication, usually stemming from lack of or lost interest (Blau, Kahn, & Waldfogel, 2000). Another challenge for marriages is that married individuals may begin to feel a loss sense of self and may begin to fight to change that. Married women are reported to seek more education and enter the workforce as a means or a need to establish or feel a sense of independence (Blau, Kahn, & Waldfogel, 2000). Furthermore, when married couples begin to procreate, another set of challenges may present, such as diverse parenting skills and the loss of intimacy between the couple (Volling, Notaro, & Larsen, 1998; Ippolito Morrill, Hines, Mahmood, & Cordova, 2010). Oftentimes, mid-life crises happen when couples become empty-nesters, when they realize that they grew apart while raising their children (Robinson & Wright, 2013). These are some challenges that being married might present. These challenges often lead

to divorce, which is indicative of the soaring divorce rate in America (Copen, Daniels, Vespa, Mosher, & Statistics, 2012; Cherlin, 2013).

Even though the rate of marriage is declining, it is still an upheld union and expectation for Americans. Cherlin (2009) reported that America has the highest rates of marriage and divorce of all Western nations. Cherlin (2009) purported that the projected number of Americans to marry is almost 90%; this projected marriage rate is higher than any other nation (Cherlin, 2009). This supports the fact that the American society still values marriage, as marriage is considered the most important peer relationship, which maintains glorification of marriage and family as an ideal (Morris, Sinclair, and DePaulo, 2007). Neugarten (1976) reported that marriage is seen as a normative developmental milestone; it is assumed that everyone desires and expects to marry (Neugarten, 1976). Therefore, living as a single or an unmarried person is stigmatized (Byrne & Carr, 2005; DePaulo, 2006; DePaulo & Morris, 2005a, 2005b, 2006; Morris et al., 2007).

Although, the American society honors marriage, singlehood is an uprising status for many, as Americans hold the highest divorce rate of any Western nation (Cherlin, 2009), accounting for the increasing number of singles. The US Census Bureau (2006) informed that in 2005 married couples were seen as the minority, as 41% of adults (18 and older) were single, including widowed, divorced, and never-married individuals. Slonim, Gur-Yaish, and Katz (2015) reported that 50.2% of Americans were single in 2014, which amounts 124.6 million people. This is an increased statistic since the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014) informed that in 1976, single individuals only accounted for 37.4% of the population.

A number of researchers have reported that unmarried individuals are ascribed with negative stereotypes (Conley & Collins, 2002; DePaulo & Morris, 2005a, 2006; Hertel, Schutz, DePaulo, Morris, & Stucke, 2007). The negative connotations that singles are given is what continues the need to meet societal expectations and norms, the questions that follow once single marital status is announced, "what's the matter with you? Are you too difficult to deal with?" (Gordon, 2003; Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003). Then, the sexual orientation question is asked, "Are you a lesbian or homosexual?" (Gordon, 2003; Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003). Because of these societal norms and expectations, most adults expect to marry and majority of Americans do marry (DePaulo & Morris, 2005; US Census Bureau, 2010; Spielmann et al., 2013). Though American society expects marriage for all adults, research has shown that marriage is not always available to everyone. Furthermore, because America is comprised of numerous cultures, there is a divergence in the variant cultures, concerning marital rates.

Reportedly, some cultures have a higher rate of women not marrying, if not married before 35: Blacks (42%), Hispanics (17%), and Whites (12%) (Copen, Daniels, Vespa, Mosher, & Statistics, 2012; Barros-Gomes, 2014). Goodwin, McGill, and Chandra, 2009). Raley, Sweeney, and Wondra (2015) conducted a study on the diverse racial and ethnic US marriage patterns. The study highlighted the age-specific rates of first marriage for various race and ethnicities. Reportedly, the first marriage age for White women was 26 years old, in comparison to Black women whose first time marriage age was four years older, 30 (Raley et al., 2015). The researchers further highlighted that nine out of 10 White and Asian/Pacific Islander women married, for the

first time, by 40 years of age; Hispanics represented eight out of 10 and American Indian/Native Alaskan represented 75% of women were married for the first time by their early 40s (Raley et al., 2015).

However, Black women represented fewer than 66% married by early 40s (Raley et al., 2015). The US Census of Bureau of Marital Status (2010) indicated that Black individuals constitute the largest population of never-married persons among all racial groups in the US from 1990-2010. Throughout literature, consistently reported, Black women are the least likely to marry, in comparison to non-Black female counterparts (Buchanan & Selmon, 2008; O'Hare, 1991; Raley et al., 2015; Sorenson & McLanahan, 1987); the percentage of never-wed Black women was greater than never-wed White women (Duncan, 2012). Raley et al. (2015) reported that Black women marry later in life, have higher rates of marital instability, and are less likely to marry ever. These statistics are based on women of various races and ethnicities as a whole, which does not provide likelihood of marriage for Black women. That said, including educational gains for unmarried women most likely narrows the probability of marriage even the more.

Educational gains and age, reportedly, lessen the opportunity of marriage for this demographic of women. Not only does educational achievements lessen the opportunity for marriage but age is also an important factor for this demographic of women. Copen et al. (2012) reported that bachelor's degree or higher degree women recipients' probability rate for marrying before 25 years of age was lower compared to women less educated: 85% for Asian, 84% for White, and 80% for foreign-born Hispanics; however, Black women held the lowest percentage, 58%. By age 35, notable differences for college-

degree women recipients marrying for the first time indicated an 84% higher probability than women with a high school diploma, 78%. Purportedly, Asian women who haven't married before age 27 or older are least likely to marry (Larson, 2012).

The researcher also reported that educated Asian women are less likely to marry, and those in doctoral programs have a very slim chance of marrying. Larson (2012) informed that the Chinese culture has three genders: men, women, and women with Ph.D's; furthermore, the Chinese culture has a saying, "men marry women; women with Ph. D.s do not marry" (para. 12). Larson (2012) continued to inform about the fate of educated Asian women. A third of Japenese women 30 years or older will not marry, 20 percent of Taiwanese 30 or older will not marry, 27 percent of Singapore women 40-44 years of age remain unmarried. Palós et al. (2013) reported that in 2005, 27.5% of the women in Colombia were unmarried, and only 12.2% of the women had obtained over 13 years of education. From 1970 to 2000 the number of single women grew exponentially in Brazil and Colombia; 9.3% to 48.7% and 28.3% to 72.7%, respectively. Reportedly, college-educated Black women are still more likely to remain unmarried than other cultural women (Banks, 2011). Copen et al. (2012) further indicated that Black women, amongst all other race women, had a 58% least likely chance of marrying.

Regardless, of educational gains or not, Black women still held the lowest probability statistic for marriage (Banks, 2011). From 2006-2010, Black women represented the higher percentage of never married women, 55%, next were Hispanic (US born) at 49%, then Asian at 39%, lastly, White women with 34% (Copen et al., 2012). Although degreed women of all race groups, statistically, has a greater chance of

marrying (58% with bachelor's and 63% with master's degree) than non-degreed women (37%), Black women are the least probable to marry (Banks, 2011; Buchanan & Selmon, 2008; Copen et al., 2012; Duncan, 2012; Raley et al., 2015).

The literature has shown that women of all cultures are met with the expectation of marriage. The various cultures all demonstrated percentages of the probability of marriage and marriage by a certain age for their women. The important factor is that Black women are the least likely to marry of all cultures and when advanced education was included the probability of marriage was even less for Black women. Even though marriage is an expectation and a norm for adults, women are questioned and often stigmatized when not married. This study aims to understand how it feels to encounter these expectations of marriage from society and Black culture when studies report that marriage is less likely for Black women and even more less likely for degreed Black women.

Societal Expectations and Norms

Cherlin (2009) reported that Americans still highly value marriage and even though the marriage might end in divorce, the next step is to marry again because marriage is just that important in America. Cherlin (2009) described it as "marriage-go-round", which means that when individuals marry and realize that they are no longer satisfied, they divorce and began the marital quest again. The gender norms for marriage recently changed, in 2015, from heterosexual to both heterosexual and same-sex institution (Pinsof & Haselton, 2016). Loscocco and Walzer (2013) reported that gender

and typified gender roles are created in marital institutions. The researchers pointed out that gender as a social structure designed through interaction and the importance of the cultural device that continues to anchor it, could possibly foster a better understanding of the challenges on contemporary heterosexual marriage (Loscocco & Walzer, 2013). Loscocco and Walzer (2013) endorsed that heterosexual marriage is a gendered social reality and explained that marriage should exemplify an institution. Furthermore, gender roles and typified expectations are created by gender roles and these role expectations intersect with those that women and men maybe more accountably inclined (Loscocco & Walzer, 2013); this mindset perpetuates societal expectation of marriage for adults, specifically, heterosexual adults. Due to societal heterosexual typified gender roles within marriage, it is important to point out that these roles may be executed differently per race and class groups (Collins, 1990; Hill, 2005; Loscocco & Walzer, 2013).

Historically the roles of women were homemaker, spouse, and mother (not necessarily for Black women); however, the past few decades have demonstrated that women are taking on paid workforce opportunities, in an effort to increase personal development, financial independence, and mere desire to be employed (cf. Budworth, Enns, & Rowbotham, 2008; DeLauro, 2010; Elloy & Smith, 2004; Hegewisch & Gornick, 2011; Moore, Moore, & Moore, 2011); the desire to work created a movement of managerial and professional women, much different from prior decades (Bosch, de Bruin, Kgaladi, & de Bruin, 2012).

Now, that the norms and expectations for married individuals have been addressed, for alignment purposes for this study, the expectations of marriage for singles

must not be excluded. Because marriage is an expectation within America for adults, those that are single may experience challenges in explaining and/or defending their marital status, especially women. Unmarried women, reportedly, experience and feel pressured to provide reasons for being single (Reynold & Wetherell, 2003). Reynolds and Wetherell (2003) studied the lived experiences of singlehood for a group of women. The researchers focused on the consequences of living as unwed women based on the privileging of marriage contributing to the marginalization of unmarried women (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003). There were 30 women participants and interviews (consisting of four questions) conducted to study the identity that single women construct for themselves through their conversation. The women shared that they encountered negative reactions from society concerning their unwed marital status (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003). Reynolds and Wetherell (2003) reported that the women are asked to explain their "'condition'…story or 'circumstances' and 'missed opportunities' or one that blames herself for being 'unable to hold on to her man'" (p. 490). The participants of the study explained that they are oftentimes assumed lesbian or difficult women; therefore, these women are constantly reminded that their single marital status is "not a natural social arrangement" (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003, p. 492). The information garnered by the interviewed women provided the researchers with four main interpretative repertoires: singleness as personal deficit, singleness as social exclusion, singleness as independence and choice, and singleness as self-actualization and achievement (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003).

Through data analysist Reynolds and Wetherell (2003) elucidated that the first two and the last two repertoires were polar opposites, as singleness as a personal deficit and singleness as social exclusion were strongly vilified and the last two, singleness as independence and choice, and singleness as self-actualization were strongly idealized. However, these findings showcased that the inconsistent repertoires present unmarried women with a challenging ideological package, which has presented problematic consequences for their personal identity work (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003). Therefore, Reynolds and Wetherell (2003) argued for a feminist psychology of single women that will aim at the need for patterning of ideology as opposed to the hypothetical dysfunction of unmarried women.

Another study conducted on single women reported that an unmarried woman may be perceived as different or deviant in American society (Gordon, 2003). Lewis (1994) and Gordon (2003) informed that living as a single woman is not a desire for all unmarried women; however, it is a reality and one that comes along with questions and accusations from others in society (Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003). Some questions that are often asked to these women are: "why aren't you married?" or "why are you single" and "when are you going to get married?" (Gordon, 2003, p. 34). These studies provided insight into this current study, as they highlighted the introspective identity of single women. However, these studies do not focus on a specific race of women, which excluded the various nuances (social constructs) that certain race or ethnic groups of women manage daily, specifically Black women, nor did these studies focus on the

marginalization that is ascribed to unmarried college-educated women, specifically, single degreed Black women.

According to literature, American society is biased and favors marriage (Cherlin, 2004; Cherlin, 2009). Even in 2016, marriage is still the expectation for adults in America. However, the depiction of marriage is very rarely viewed through the lens of non-White groups. Loscocco and Walzer (2013) reported that the prototypical image of marriage is framed as White and middle to upper-middle class couples, which lends to a biased viewpoint. Nevertheless, there are other cultures who share in the same marital ideals. Southeast Asians (Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians) and Hispanics (Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cuban American) regard marriage as a high value (East, 1998). According to Das & Kemp (1997) and Prathikanti (1997), Asian women are strongly encouraged to marry within their race and ethnicity; therefore, arranged marriages are still norms, within their culture, as parents hold the responsibility to ensure that their culture is not obliterated. Family is very valuable to South Asian culture (Inman, Ladany, Constantine, & Morano, 2001). However, Kim, Kim, and Joh (2015) reported that there has been an influx of Asian women migrating to Korea and marrying men of another culture, Korean men. Of the total marriages, 35,098 (10.8%) were international marriages, of that number, 66.3% were marriages between Philippines, China, and Vietnam women marrying Korean men (Kim, 2006; Kim, 2008; Kim et al., 2015; Yeoh, Huang, & Lam, 2005; Yoon, 2011). Iwasaki, Thai, and Lyons (2016) reported that in 1660 the antimiscegenation laws prohibited interracial marriages between Black and Whites and later between Whites and other persons of a color with the

inclusion of Asians. However, in 2010, Asian women were found to hold the highest rate of interracial marriage in America, 36% of Asian women wed non-Asian men (Iwasaki et al., 2016; Wang, 2012). Not only is marriage valued and expected in American culture, it is also highly regarded and assumed for sub-cultures in America.

It is important to understand that marital expectation for adults is not only an American societal norm and expectancy, but it is also expected within the sub-cultures of America. The women of those cultures are queried and stereotyped due to their single marital status, rather they desire marriage or not. It is necessary that empathy is employed in order to attempt to understand experiences of living as unwed women in a society and culture that does not expect for adults to live as singles. In an effort to gain a deeper understanding of the chosen population of women for this study, it is crucial to research the cultural norms and expectations of Black women, which will provide more meaning to their daily experiences and their perspectives.

Black Cultural Marital Expectations and Norms

There is an expectation that can weigh heavily on the mind of educated Black women as a result of her collectivist nature to satisfy the needs or goals of her parents or elders of her family concerning marriage. This creates a problem for unmarried degreed Black women in terms of finding a suitable peer. In America, the familial system can be described as an amalgam between individualism and collectivism, encouraging adherence to familial obligations, while also expressing individuality (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014).

Literature has informed that family is an ideal unit in America, even though the country is an individualistic culture (Barros-Gomes et al., 2014; Metz, 2015). The minority sub-cultures of America are steeped in togetherness; minority cultures are most often collectivistic (Banks, 2011; Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Henry, 2013; Parham-Payne et al. 2013). Collectivistic cultures are not built on separatism but are held together by beliefs in family. Due to the nature of this study, it is imperative to highlight Black culture, as it relates to marital expectations and norms.

Barros-Gomes and Baptist (2014) reported that Black culture is rooted in familyism, which makes the race collectivistic; this explains where and how marital expectations and norms were developed within the Black culture. The identity of Black culture familyism is defined as, "I am because we are, we are therefore I am" (Mbiti, 1990, p. 104). Some of the roots of familyism for Blacks are founded from Africa but not all; however, in America, Blacks have adopted the familyism as a "hybrid between individualism and familyism where independence is accepted but is not to be exercised without due adherence to family obligations" (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014, p. 287). Still, whether in Africa or America, marriage is an expectation for all, especially for women because of Black culture collectivistic roots, (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014). Black women are raised as nurturers, strong, and resilient largely due to slavery and the separation of the Black family (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Painter & Shafer, 2011; Parham-Payne et al., 2013). The women had to learn to fend for themselves and their children because the husbands were taken from them. This divide of family became a perpetuation of fatherless homes even after slavery was abolished (Painter & Shafer,

2011; Parham-Payne et al., 2013). Because of this, Black women were raised under a contradiction. According to Boyd-Franklin and Franklin (1998), during their clinical counseling sessions of Black women, Black women expressed that elders within the race emitted contradicting messages about monogamy. The clients reported that they are encouraged to be independent, provide for self, "God bless the child who has her own" but are also encouraged to marry a Black man who can provide for her.

Pettit and Western (2004) reported that Black women, for a long time, have accepted the responsibility of co-providing due to racial discriminations and disparities experienced by Black men that result in high rates of unemployment and incarceration. Clayton and Moore (2003) coined the term, "depletion effect", which is the reduction in employment for Black men. The "depletion effect" hinders formation of Black family, induces unemployment, and results in powerlessness in relationship for Black men (Clayton & Moore, 2003).

The separatism that generated as a result of slavery is the fundamental reason that Black women have been encouraged to and have excelled in academia (Elliott Brown et al., 2000); Black women were left with the responsibility of raising their children alone due to slavery that took away the husbands and fathers in the Black households (Parham-Payne et al., 2013). Because of the longstanding history of Black women solely raising their families, the pursuit of education was necessary; when equal rights for women were fought for Black women continued towards educational gains in order to successfully raise a family (Parham-Payne et al., 2013). Black women represent the vast majority of bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees recipients within the Black race (Parham-Payne

et al., 2013). Advancing in education was seen as a sure way for Black women to gain independence, but the educational attainments could be a leading reason why so many college-educated Black women are single. Regardless whether Black women were married or single, the desire to advance educationally and professionally was strived for because of generational learned behavior (Green-Davis, 2017; Painter & Shafer, 2011; Parham-Payne et al., 2013). For the reason Black women, historically, were made to raise families independently, which encouraged educational achievements, some Black women choose to remain unmarried, as they realize that they are not in need of partner to be successful (Painter & Shafer, 2011; Parham-Payne et al., 2013). This fact supports the need to answer the research question: How do single college-educated Black women experience the societal and cultural expectations of marriage?

Black Women, Education, and Social Support

Black women dominate in academia as degreed recipients, in comparison to Black men; this fact is reported throughout literature that this is a reason for the surplus of unmarried college-educated Black women (Banks, 2011; Chambers & Kravitz, 2011; Elliott Brown et al., 2000; Green-Davis, 2017; Jagesic, 2014; Parham-Payne et al., 2013). Banks (2011) and Chambers and Kravitz (2011) suggested that Black women have advanced more in education and occupational opportunities relative to Black men. Because of the vast difference of educational gains amongst Black men and women, Black women are offered more employment opportunities, as well as, greater salaries (Jagesic, 2014), only due to the fact that a larger percentage of Black women are more educated than Black men, which causes Black women to make more money, overall, than

their male counterparts. "For every three Black unmarried women in their 20s, there is roughly one unmarried man with earnings above the poverty threshold" (Lichter et al., 1992, p. 782). Braboy Jackson (2001) and Hurt et al. (2014) reported on the negative reaction sometimes experienced by Black women concerning their educational status, self-confidence, and intimidation. The researchers reported that some men are intimidated by an educated Black woman, which adds to the reason for the growing number of single educated Black women. A societal expectation of men is to provide for his family, so when the opportunity of meeting a potential wife is present a man of lower socioeconomic status may shy away from the woman out of intimidation and feelings of inadequacy in his ability to provide for her. Unfortunately, Black men are faced with this challenge often, as they constantly walk a fine line in society due to stereotypes, racial profiling and racial discrimination, which leads to a disadvantage in career opportunities for them and unequal socioeconomic status for Black women.

Jagesic (2014) and Raley et al. (2015) reported that the disparity between black and white women marrying is due to inability for Black men to afford marrying. The researchers indicated that there is a deficit of marriageable black men due the labor market disparities, as well as, other structural disadvantages encountered by Black people, especially Black men. Unemployment rates are consistently much higher for Black men than their White male counterparts; therefore, socioeconomic inequality factors heavily in potential mate availability (Jagesic, 2014). According to Lichter, McLaughlin, Kephart, and Landry (1992, p. 864), "the supply of economically attractive men plays an unusually large… role in defining young women's marital prospects or

incentives for marriage". Also, since the 1980's the rate of incarceration for Black men has exponentially increased, which is still a relevant factor today (Raley et al., 2015). Statistically, Black men are seven times more likely, to be incarcerated than White men (Raley et al., 2015).

Young Black men who have not attended college, reportedly, one-third of them were incarcerated and approximately double the number of 40 years of age and younger Black men had a prison record versus a bachelor's degree, in the early 2000s (Raley et al., 2015). These factors provide reason for the increased rate of unmarried college-educated Black women; however, these are not the only reasons why degreed Black women are single. Lincoln, Taylor, and Jackson (2008) reported that mate availability within the Black race is indicative of the low marital rates for Blacks, as the gender ratio (number of men for every 100 women) represents a chronic shortage of Black men to Black women.

It important to include a category of Black men that are available but are not marriageable to women, the homosexual men. Some Black men are homosexual or are not desiring a heterosexual marriage (Hurt, 2013; Lemelle Jr, & Battle, 2004). Reportedly, 2% of Black men have sex with men and women (Kimble, 2006). According to Lemelle and Battle (2004), Black women feel threaten by gay Black men because gay Black men are consuming the pool of Black male partners. The shortage of available Black men is not limited to incarcerations, death, employment disparities, socioeconomic disadvantages, and homosexuality, but it is also due to interracial marriages.

Hurt (2013) reported that Black men are more likely to marry outside of their race than Black women, reducing the amount of marriageable Black men. Manning, A. A. (2009) conducted a study on interracial parenting in the Midwest and reported that since the 1970s the number of interracial marriages has increased from 500,000 to 2 million in 1990. Of those marriages Black and White couples represent 26%, and 65% of those marriages are Black men married to White women. This accounts for a significant number of unavailable Black men for Black women. Rates of intermarriage is greater for Black men, as opposed to Black women, this too, narrows partner availability for Black women (Raley et al., 2015). Reportedly, there are 91 Black males for every 100 Black females (American Fact Finder, 2012). Because there are more Black women than Black men, the chances of marriage for Black women is poorer (Harknett & McLanahan, 2004; Hurt, 2013). Reduction in the number of marriageable Black males available to marry within race is exacerbated by the increased likelihood that Black men will wed outside their race (Banks, 2011; Hurt et al., 2014). According to Raley et al. (2015), the chance of marrying another race for Black men doubles, in comparison to Black women.

Reportedly, Black women not only desire to marry within, but they also sense an obligation to marry a Black man as an attempt to not betray culture and the other Black male figures in their lives: fathers, grandfathers, uncles, brothers, and other male influencers (Banks, 2011; Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Henry, 2013). Another reason Black women prefer to marry within, Black women believe that only Black men understand the struggles and obstacles the Black individuals manage consistently (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Emery & White, 2006). Although Black women are

more inclined to marry within, Black men are not. Black men marry outside of their race 24% to Black women, 9% (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Wang, 2012).

Historically, Black women have always been described as unattractive in comparison to the prototypical woman, White women. Black women were ridiculed for their voluptuous features: lips, buttocks, hips, thighs (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013). Traditionally, those features were not viewed as attractive features. The body-build and facial features of White women were considered beautiful; therefore, White women were the models of beauty for women, overall. That viewpoint could also be a reason why Black women are overlooked, experience intersectional invisibility, which farther limits their opportunity to marry, as they are perceived unattractive (Luke & Oser, 2015; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Wanzo, 2011). This viewpoint was not just from White males, but it was also adopted by Black men, farther decreasing the likelihood that Black women will marry within race due to unavailable Black males (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Luke & Oser, 2015; Wang, 2012; Wanzo, 2011). Aside from the fact that White women are considered attractive and beautiful, opposite of the depiction of Black women, there is a colorism factor within the Black race. There are members of the Black race who believe that only lighter skinned women are beautiful, as opposed to brown or darker brown skinned women (Hunter, 2008; Monroe, 2016; Wilder & Cain, 2011). Not only do Black women suffer from the negative stereotypes of unattractiveness, but they also deal with within race colorism continuing the negative stigma of being a Black woman (Monroe, 2016). The colorism mindset is also associated with why there is a higher percentage of Black males marrying outside of their race versus Black women, still

narrows down to what society views as beautiful, White women or lighter skin complected Black women (Monroe, 2016; Wilder & Cain, 2011). According to Wilder and Cain (2011), "light skin can … work as social capital for women of color; more specifically, lighter skinned Black women are more privileged in the areas of education, income, and spousal status than their darker skinned counterparts (p. 581).

Marrying within race provides understood experiences and social support, which are vital to Black women. Dingfelder (2013) and Elliott Brown et al. (2000) reported that greater incidences of depressive symptoms are probable for Black women who lack social support from a significant other. This supports the notion that togetherness and social support remain as staples for Blacks and the social support of a within mate will aid Black women counteracting depressive symptoms.

Evolutionary psychology would probably say the fact that Black women desire marriage and family is directly linked to their heritage (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014). The Black race was grounded on togetherness and familyism and collectivism (Barros-Gomes and Baptist, 2014). Because of the generational pass-down of the collectivistic mindset, it is no small wonder Black women seek to emulate their predecessors. Therefore, educational gains to better their culture and co-provide with their spouse is an example of collectivism and familyism. Thus, if social support is absent from a significant other, the psychological well-being of Black women could be disturbed (Lincoln & Chae, 2010).

Psychological Well-being of Unmarried Black women

Reportedly, Black women gain an understanding of themselves based on their cultural heritage; therefore, importance is placed on their interconnection to their culture for Black women to have correct perception of their position in the world, coping mechanisms, and how to advance in society that does not recognize them (Jenkins, 2000; Watson, Roberts, & Saunders, 2012). The psychological well-being and social health status of Black women is necessary for clinicians to understand when treating these clients. The measuring of self in a society that lacks visual acuity for Black women is one side of their struggle but to have limited opportunities to marry could also be another psychological detriment to Black women who wish to marry. A study conducted on 73 college-educated Black women purposed to uncover the relationships between life stress, perceived helpfulness of support, and well-being among of these women (Elliott-Brown et al., 2000). The researchers purported that supposed helpfulness of support systems had a positive key effect on self-reports of emotional and spiritual health, and a safeguarding effect on depression; however, Dingfelder (2013) reported that Black women who lack social support from a significant other, has a greater incidence of depressive symptoms. The findings of the study highlighted the importance of social support relationships, specifically from a significant other, to encourage well-being and cushion the strain of life dilemmas (Elliott-Brown et al., 2000). This information supports the notion that marriage is beneficial for women, specifically Black women.

Carimbocas and Falmagne (2014) reported that marriage enhances individuals' emotional, psychological, and physical well-being. These benefits are available to Black women, but the prospect for Black women to benefit from intimate relationships is slight

when likened to women from other races, as literature has indicated that Black women

are least likely to marry than their non-Black female counterparts (Duncan, 2012). Hurt et

al. (2013) also reported that marriage is beneficial to the well-being of Black women; the

researchers reported that marriage offers physical, psychological, and financial security,

which aids in alleviating stress that could lead to mental health complications, such as

depression. Futhermore, Black women reportedly account for a larger percentage of

unwed mothers; this fact supports the research that explains that children raised in a

marriage-based household demonstrate increased satisfactory developmental outcomes,

over time (Hurt et al., 2013; Marks et al., 2010). Moreover, striving to eradicate

intersectional invisibility as Black women, especially, in the workforce, and trying to

counteract societal racial discrimination could help to ease this daily task, if Black

women were married, particularly to Black men (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). The

ongoing endeavors of equal rights and fair treatment could cause psychological distress

on anyone. Women are reported to be more prone to depression than men (Kessler, 2003;

Frech & Williams, 2007); couple being woman with being Black and then add being

unmarried, there is a triple negative that could result in depressive symptoms (Dingfelder,

2013). Reportedly, the probability of depressive symptoms is greater for unmarried

women versus married women (St. Vil, 2015). This is presumably especially difficult to

accept for this group of women; thus, the literature attests to the lived experiences of

these women. Gordon (2003) reported on the psychological implications experienced by

female unmarried hopefuls. Although, Gordon (2003) aimed to focus on the societal

pressures that women are challenged with when choosing not to marry; the researcher did

not negate to describe the experiences of women who want to marry but are still single or who choose to be single. The researcher indicated the importance for clinicians to be more therapeutically sensitive with unmarried women, as Black women may have experienced negativity from society, culture, and loved-ones concerning their singleness.

If the chances of marrying are slim for Black women in general, then the chances of marrying as college-educated Black women may be a disheartening reality to accept, as Braboy Jackson and Mustillo (2001) purported that degreed women are much more intimidating to men than non-educated women. Nevertheless, there is literature that contradicts findings stating that educated Black women are less likelier to marry than high school diploma recipient Black women (Keels, 2014; Montez, Sabbath, Glymour, & Berkman, 2014). Keels (2014) reported that 43 percent of college-educated Black women are married compared to 32 percent of Black women with a high school diploma. Though there is a differing percentage of Black women with a high school diploma and those with college degrees, the findings still show that the likelihood of marriage for Black women compared to non-Black women is dim (Keels, 2014). Therefore, to be members of a race that literature reports are the least likely to marry, then to be women of that race, and finally, to be educated women of that race (which farther marginalizes them), greater lessens the probability of marriage for them. For this reason, a phenomenological study on the perspectives of unmarried college-educated women is imperative, as these women are often overlooked (Schug et al., 2015) but are not absent from society, and they strive to meet societal and cultural expectations, while experiencing intersectional invisibility within the workforce, in society, and within their race.

However, though research explained the benefits of marriage for women, specifically, Black women, it is necessary to highlight that marriage does not guarantee psychological healthiness. Brown, Birditt, Huff, and Edwards (2012) conducted on a mixed methods study on marital dissolution and psychological well-being and whether race and marital relationship quality impacted the mental health of the participants. "The purpose of the study was to examine the implications of marital transitions from well-being among Black and White Americans" (Brown et al., 2012, p. 159). The longitudinal study was conducted over a 16-year stint and included 373 couples: 199 Black Americans and 174 White Americans; of that, there were 114 Black males, 129 Black females, 140 White males, and 137 White females (Brown et al., 2012). This body of research informed that there can be some negative consequences to being married, such as arguing and tensions.

The important factor about marriage and whether psychological well-being is an inevitable outcome can only be assumed if the marriage is healthy, meaning, both individuals are satisfied in the marriage. Brown et al. (2012) reported that unhappily married individuals reported improved psychological health after the dissolution of the marriage, and those continuing in an unhappy marriage reported less psychological healthiness. White husbands reported the highest level of marital happiness and Black wives reported the lowest (Brown et al., 2012); however, Bulanda (2011) purported, in comparison of husbands versus wives' marital happiness (for Black and White race), husbands reported relatively higher marital quality.

Lincoln and Chae (2010) suggested that marriage, for Black women, acts as a buffer against negative psychological consequences because the partnership aids within-race couples with work-related stress, financial burdens, and discrimination, amongst other stressors. The researchers continued that poor psychological outcomes could be the result of losing the supportive partnership (Lincoln & Chae, 2010). Reportedly, Blacks regard marriage as highly valuable for companionship, raising children, and financial security (Lincoln & Chae, 2010). Still, studies report contradicting findings related to marriage and mental health among Blacks. Some studies report fulfillment, greater happiness, and less emotional uneasiness; other studies reported no relationship between marriage and psychological well-being amongst Blacks (Lincoln & Chae, 2010). Nevertheless, there are findings that indicate Blacks exhibit lower levels of marital satisfaction than Whites (Lincoln & Chae, 2010). Lincoln and Chae (2010) conducted a study on whether marital satisfaction moderates the influences of stress on mental health. Consistent marital strains for Blacks are financial complications, the lack of economic resources to create sustainability, racial discrimination and unfair treatment (Lincoln & Chae, 2010). These non-negatable factors limit resources that are key determinants in marital quality, for Blacks.

Throughout literature, Blacks are, reportedly, least likely to marry (among other races) and hold the highest divorce rates (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Brown et al., 2012; Duncan, 2012; Lincoln & Chae, 2010; Luke & Oser, 2015; Raley et al., 2015), this may be due to considerable distress from perceived discrimination resulting in fear of failure regarding marriage because of the uncertainty of stable and suitable financial

security. Psychological distress can result from experiences of unfair treatment (Lincoln & Chae, 2010). Concurrently, financial stress and experiences of unfair treatment operate to affect the lives of married Blacks (Lincoln & Chae, 2010). Therefore, marriage does not guarantee psychological well-being for Blacks, specifically Black women.

Per studies, marriage does not promise happiness; there are educated Black women who consider, remaining unmarried, sustainable happiness and psychological healthiness. Previously noted, researchers Barros-Gomes and Baptist (2014) shared their findings of educated Black women who were ambivalent to marriage. The study centered on five 45-year-old college-educated Black women, who identified themselves as single, middle-class women. The purpose of the study was to uncover how these women focus on personal happiness versus feeling pressured to succumb to cultural expectations of familism and community. The participants shared that they were raised to marry and to marry within; there were also raised to obtain a college education. One participant expressed that her father advised her to attain an education because "I don't want you to ever be dependent on a man. If you don't have a man, I want you to be able to take care of yourself" (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014, p. 297). These women reported that earning a college education aided in solidifying their identity. One participant decided to take a sabbatical from dating, while seeking her education. She reported that became more aware of her personal strengths because of her dating sabbatical. The participants all gave account to self-admiration achieved through finding ways to cope with the challenges of singlehood. Though they successful and desired marriage, the women were ambivalent (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014). The researchers concluded that being single, for these

women, did not inhibit these women. The participants utilized their familial connections, friends, and community as avenues to their successful achievements and buoyancy; the participants shared that their desire to marry did not outweigh the risk of losing themselves and feeling pressured to submit to culturally expected marital gender roles (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014). Liken to Barros-Gomes and Baptist (2014), Parham-Payne et al. (2013) reported that degreed Black women were choosing to live unmarried, in comparison to prior generations, as they are financially able support themselves; therefore, they are not dependent and looking for a partner to provide financial sustainability for them. This is largely due to 66% percent of all college degrees among Black Americans are attained by Black women (Keels, 2014). Not all Black women desire marriage or exhibit impatience towards marriage, especially college-educated Black women because they are willing to forego marriage if they do not find a mate who is more successful professionally (Parham-Payne et al., 2013). What is necessary to understand is how are these college-educated women coping from day-to-day as singles.

Literature informs much about the marital fate of Black women, more specifically unmarried degreed Black women but not enough information about how these women are coping with societal and cultural marital expectations. Some educated Black women are happily single, and some are not finding satisfaction as a single. In a society and culture that expects marriage for both sexes, especially women, attention should be rendered to the group of women who are, reportedly, least likely to marry, who experience continuous intersectional invisibility, and who manages racial discrimination frequently, all while still being expected to be strong and resilient because they are women, Black

women. For these reasons, amongst others, it is imperative that clinicians and society understand the plight of unmarried college-educated Black women. These women are born to a culture that expects togetherness and marriage and they live in a society that still honors and expects marriage for adults (Cherlin, 2009). Whether they desire marriage or not, Black women, do not have a choice in the matter of what race they are born in and must learn to cope with living in a society and culture that expects marriage and demands answers when adults are unmarried (Reynolds and Wetherell, 2003). Literature reports the experiences of single women and their psychological health, but there is a gap in literature that narrows the scope to study unmarried degreed Black women and their psychological well-being. Because Black women are dominating in academia (Parham-Payne et al., 2013), it is necessary to understand their perspective of living in a culture and society that expects marriage for adults.

Methodology

There were several quantitative studies that I reviewed to gain understanding of unmarried women, specifically, unmarried Black women (Braboy-Jackson & Mustillo, 2008; Buchanan & Selmon, 2008; Elliott Brown et al., 2008; Lewis & Neville, 2015; Schug et al., 2015; St. Vil, 2015). However, the studies that I reviewed were only successful at determining the mental health statistical outcome of living as single Black women. Specifically, Braboy-Jackson and Mustillo (2008) conducted a study on the psychological implications associated with living as unmarried Black women. The researchers created four categories to aid in understanding the plight of this group of women: "body image, the quality of family and relationships, perceived racial and/or

gender discrimination, and social class position" (Braboy-Jackson & Mustillo, 2008, p. 34). The researchers reported that individuals who experience rejection based on their skin color and poorly performed primary social roles may need to employ their psychological resources in order to effectively cope with these traumatic experiences. Braboy-Jackson and Mustillo (2008) posited that it is important to include the intersections of race, gender, and class that Black women enduring daily. The inclusion of these social constructs supports the theoretical framework of this study. Nevertheless, Braboy-Jackson and Mustillo (2008) purported that social support of a significant other is much more beneficial for Black women than Black women living single. The researchers provided an understanding that social support from a significant and family is what Black culture is rooted in, collectivism; they continued to inform that psychological well-being of Black women is largely dependent on this (Braboy-Jackson & Mustillo, 2008). Reportedly, educational attainments aided in positive psychological health for Black women, but nothing provided better psychological support for Black women than having a significant other (Braboy-Jackson & Mustillo, 2008). Though the researchers of these quantitative studies provided statistical findings for the psychological well-being of Black women, they did not provide personal perspectives of the participants' daily experiences of living unmarried and college-educated in a culture and society that expects marriage.

To gain an accurate understanding of unmarried degreed Black women, I believe qualitative studies should be conducted that will garner lived, personal experiences of this group of women. Like the literature on quantitative studies, there were several qualitative studies referenced for this study (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Davis & Tucker-

Brown, 2013; Gordon, 2003; Hurt et al., 2014; Parham-Payne, 2009; Parham-Payne et al., 2013 Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003). In one of those studies the researchers conducted interviews on five unmarried Black women, aged: 45-65. The study was focused on gaining an understanding of this phenomenon of women to better educate clinicians on their daily copings with their culture and society (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014). As I will employ the phenomenological approach for this study so did Barros-Gomes and Baptist (2014). The researchers described the definition and essence of the personal experiences of singlehood for Black women by employing the voice-centered relational approach (VCRM), by way of tape recorded interviews. The researchers reported that the employment of VCRM "calls for an epistemological shift from "reading" to "listening" during the analysis, sparking a more active process for the researcher-analyst (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014, p. 290; Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Betsch, 2003). The use of VCRM afforded the researchers the opportunity to engage more with the participants rather than writing every word spoken, which could have caused the researchers to miss non-verbal cues necessary to ask more questions for more in-depth information. This qualitative study demonstrated the benefits of interviewing participants because it provided the participants a platform solely focused on their experiences in an effort to enlighten clinicians on the complexities of living as unwed Black women. Different from Barros-Gomes and Baptist (2014) study conducted on women 45-65 years of age, this current study will not specify an age range, as individuals seek advancing their education at varying ages. For this reason, this study will only focus on Black college-educated

women, meaning women who have at least earned a bachelor's degree. Not declaring an age range will allow for a spectrum of experiences from varying ages.

A qualitative approach is deemed suitable to understand the various perspectives of unmarried college-educated Black women (Creswell, 2013). The expectation of conducting individual interviews will aid in capturing the lived experiences of this group of women that will help to enlighten Black culture and society of the daily coping strategies these women must employ to remain cognitively intact and socially acceptable behavior. The hope is that this information will generate a better understanding, warranting more sensitivity from society and culture and will inform the current research and theories of this area and field of study. This approach is most applicable for the proposed study as it will provide an avenue for semistructured that will allow for the necessary inclusion of the essences of what it means to live as unwed degreed Black women, from their perspective.

Summary

In chapter 2, I provided literature to support this study's research phenomenon. Throughout the literature review marriage is still a highly respected and expected institution for adults in America. Additionally, the research aided in informing that all cultures have marital expectations for adults, especially women. The researchers included data that provided understanding for the experience of living as unmarried women in a society that assumes marriage is a goal for every woman. Some of those women reported that they felt pressured to give an answer for their single marital status and felt that they were then blamed for being unmarried (Gordon, 2003; Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003).

Moreover, it was important to provide literature about the marital expectations of various cultures, as America is comprised of several different cultures. Though there were diverse marital expectations for women based on age and education, it was important to highlight that those cultures value marriage and presumes that all individuals will marry, especially the women. Therefore, like American society marital expectations, sub-cultures within America share in the same marital hope for their women.

During the literature review, I provided a wealth of data on White women and the probability of marriage for them, but when researching marital probability for Black women, data informed that Black women are least likely the marry. However, research shows that there is a population of women that are not readily researched, which presents the gap in literature. The gap in literature that needs to be addressed is the experiences of unmarried college-educated Black women and the unique circumstances surrounding their inability to find a suitable mate, while being affected by societal marital expectations. Thus, the research question that will be asked is: How do single college-educated Black women experience the societal and cultural expectations of marriage?

I believe that gaining an understand of this research question from the perspectives of these women will aid in informing society, Black culture, and clinicians of their daily experiences. I hope is that more sensitivity and consideration will be exercised towards women, especially this marginalized group of women. In the next chapter, I will provide information on how this study will be conducted, the selection of the participants, the formulated interview questions, and the method employed to organize, synthesize, and analyze the collected data.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of unmarried, college-educated, Black women and the effects that cultural and social expectations of marriage have on them.

This chapter contains an explanation of the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, methodology, participant selection logic, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation and data collection, and data analysis plan. Also included are issues with trustworthiness and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

The central research question employed for this study is: How do single college-educated Black women experience the societal and cultural expectations for marriage? To gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of unmarried degreed Black women, I employed a qualitative research methodology.

According to Hatch (2006) and Patton (2015), when a researcher uses qualitative research the endeavor should be to discover how humans participate in their lived experience, which aids in better understanding how they rationalize their world. The central research question for this study aligned with the qualitative research approach that provided an understanding of how the participants explained their lived experiences. Qualitative research does not seek to generalize a target population but depends deeply on comprehensive inquiry of a specified target audience to construe and provide meaning

to the responses of the participants (Creswell, 2012). Patton (2015) stated that qualitative research is used when the researcher seeks to explore, understand, and become more enlightened about the studied phenomenon; whereas, quantitative research designs are used to investigate the phenomenon of study to forge generalizations and predictions. According to Creswell (2012) a qualitative researcher is deemed a vital instrument employed to garner data, as opposed to quantitative research that relies on the use of created instruments.

Qualitative inquiry is advantageous for affording the researcher systems and contexts that add to the subjective experiences of the participants, coupled with gaining a better understanding of the participants (Crowe, Inser, & Porter, 2015). Moustakas (1994) reported that qualitative research seeks to discover; it seeks to understand human experiences using scientific research. According to Ponterotto (2010), qualitative research focuses on respect and in-depth listening to the lived experiences of the participants. The tradition of qualitative research is to ask questions about the participants' real world, seeking more insight into their past encounters with the phenomenon of study (Frost, 2011). Creswell (2013) reported that a qualitative design was created to understand the essence of personal encounters and life events. This approach allowed the lived and told experiences and perspectives of living as single degreed Black women to be heard to effect positive social change,. From this study, a deeper understanding and meaning of this phenomenon was gained, which is the essence of the phenomenological approach.

When interested in describing the meaning and essence of a population, a phenomenological approach should be used (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative design offers a variety of approaches for research, such as grounded theory, ethnography, narrative, case study, and phenomenology.

Grounded theory was not suitable for this study because the goal of this study was not to establish a theory. Grounded theory studies are developed from the interviews and has a samples size of 20 to 60. The data from the interview is analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding (Creswell, 2013). The premise of grounded theory is to develop a theory grounded in field data.

An ethnographic study was not applicable to this study because this study was not aimed at describing the function of Black culture but on understanding the true essence of a common experience. Researchers that employ ethnography are focused on the shared patterns of cultural groups. During an ethnological, data is primarily collected from interviews, various sources garnered from time spent in the field, and from naturalistic observations (Al-Busaidi, 2008). From there the data is analyzed from the detailed, shared experiences of the culture-sharing group, then themes are created to describe the workings of the group.

Narrative research was not appropriate for this study because the purpose for this study was to provide a rich detailed interpretation of an experienced shared by unmarried college-educated Black women. According to Creswell (2013), Narrative research purposes to provide an analysis of the stories collected from documents and during interviews, which is followed by a collaboration of the researcher and participant to re-

story the data. Furthermore, Creswell (2013) informed that the story is usually arranged in a chronological order to develop a detailed story. The intent was not to tell a chronological story about unmarried degreed Black women.

Case studies was not fitting for this study because the phenomenon, in research, is not isolated to a single geographic location, the unit of analysis was not a single case, and the aim was not to develop a detailed analysis of an individual case, rather a group of twelve unmarried college-educated Black women. Creswell (2013) informed that case studies collect data over a period of time, in a naturalistic environment within the case boundaries. It involves collecting numerous types of data, like: documents, observations, reports, and audiovisual material. The analysis strategy for case studies involve an analysis of provided descriptions, construction of themes to create a detailed analysis of one or more cases. However, the scope of this phenomenological study is wider than a single case.

Creswell (2013) posited that a phenomenological approach is suitable for study when the objective is to describe the personal experiences and perspectives of the participants concerning the concepts and/or phenomena of this study; therefore, a phenomenological study is well suited for this study because the goal was to provide a deeper and richer meaning and understanding of unmarried college-educated Black women. By using the phenomenological approach, I was able to capture an understanding of each woman's unique experience of singlehood and the process of living it daily. I employed this approach to uncover the core of their experiences by fully describing, explaining, and interpreting their experiences and the meaning the women make of them,

which is suggested by Barros-Gomes and Baptist (2014). It is the responsibility of the researcher to listen to the narrative of the participants, while bracketing personal biases and/or assumptions in addition to suppressing any prejudgments (Pattons, 2002). To achieve this, Moustakas (1994) employed techniques of epoché, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation.

Epoché is a mindset that refrains from judgement. Moustakas (1994) stated that epoché does not eradicate everything, only the personal opinions and feelings, biases of common knowledge, as a basis for truth. The process of epoché generates a focus, clarity of thought, and an opportunity for researchers to develop a new perspective to approach the phenomenon as a blank slate, free from assumptions about what ought to be. There is no position taken when practicing epoché. According to Moustakas (1994), the researcher is positioned to view what is present and attain the truths of the experiences told through reflection and meditation.

Phenomenological reduction is produced by employing epoché to create a textural description (what the participant experienced) of a phenomenal essence (Moustakas, 1994; White, 2013). Phenomenological reduction is often referred to as "pure consciousness" or "transcendental ego," as it challenges the researcher to revisit the story multiple times, with each return reaching deeper into the layers of the nature and meaning of the experience, initially considering its singularity and then its totality to create brackets that center on the topic and research question (White, 2013). Reduction is a lengthy, itemized process, further scrutinizing established brackets by composing textural

meanings and invariant constituents (important data that can be elimnated), then enacting and organizing horizons (Moutstakas, 1994; White, 2013).

Moustakas (1994) stated that imaginative variation creates a structural description of an experience by identifying the "how" of the condition, that will, in turn, highlight the "what" of the experience by addressing it from various aspects and functions. At this point, the textural-structural themes will be synthesized into a representative essence of the phenomenon that includes the study sample (White, 2013). According to Moustakas (1994), the essence of any experience is replete; its reflection is only distinct to a selective time and place.

Because I decided to use the phenomenological approach, the research question was better answered: how do single college-educated Black women experience the societal and cultural expectations for marriage? Therefore, a better understanding of this group of women is available.

Role of the Researcher

In this study, I endeavored to gain a greater understanding of the perspectives of unmarried, college-educated, Black women. I filled numerous roles during this study: participant recruiter, interviewer, data collector, interview transcriber, data analyst, and interpreter of findings. I sought to collect and report the narratives and rich details of the lived and told experiences of each participant.

I identified with the demographic of study, as a single, degreed, Black woman. My goal was to gather information about the lived experiences and perspectives of the participants through semistructured interviews. Asking open ended questions and creating

probing questions, if necessary, allowed the participants an opportunity to freely share descriptive answers about their lived experiences with this phenomenon. Throughout the interview, I also voice recorded the interviews as a means of capturing inflections, pauses, reflective listening, and possible necessary corrections. Each of these components added value to data, as they warranted probing questions for sharing more heartfelt experiences, which aids in informing social change for this demographic of women. The sole purpose of this study was to ask specific questions aimed to collect the information needed to better understand the daily management of living as unmarried, college-educated, Black women in a society and culture that values and expects marriage.

According to Tufford and Newman (2012), each qualitative researcher will be challenged with some form of bias; therefore, bracketing is necessary. Tufford and Newman (2012) reported that reflexivity aids in safeguarding against reporting biases. I employed reflexivity to avoid writing from a bias standpoint, as I personally identified with the demographic of study. The strategy of reflexivity mandates that the researcher actively engages in serious introspections concerning biases he or she may possibly have by self-reflecting, self-identifying, and monitoring (LaBanca, 2011). Per LaBanca (2012), this works as a buffer to reporting biases and aids the researcher in collecting accurate accounts of the participants' experiences with this phenomenon without the intrusion of projection.

After data collection, I analyzed the data and determined if enough data had been collected. If there were not enough data, more interviewing would have been conducted. Before reporting the findings, I contacted each participant for member checking to ensure

that my interpretations were accurate and approved by each participant. I endeavored to report as accurately and sufficiently as possible.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

In a phenomenological study, the participants must personally identify with the phenomenon of study and possess the ability to articulate their lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). When selecting participants, it is permissible to locate participants from a single site (Creswell, 2013); however, the participants were recruited from publicly posted flyers (Appendix A) in numerous locations such as churches, local libraries, and college campuses. The logic for choosing these locations for recruitment was to garner women from diverse backgrounds including a range of ages which made for a variety of experiences for data collection.

An approved flyer about the study (Appendix A) was posted in the aforementioned locations, after receiving approval for my research proposal from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The approval number for this study was 10-19-17-0467618. I recruited 12 participants using purposeful sampling. Creswell (2013) reported that purposeful sampling in qualitative research is employed to assist in recruiting participants possessing knowledge of the phenomenon under study. Furthermore, Moustakas (1994) suggested that study participants must share a predetermined set of characteristics (e.g., unmarried, college-educated, Black women) and have experienced the phenomenon to be eligible for participation in phenomenological studies. Credibility to the sample was added when participants were

selected through purposeful sampling; however, this was not a representative of the population, which limited generalizability of the data, which was suggested by (Creswell, 2013).

To better understand this phenomenon, the participants of this study were women within in the age range of 30 – 50, who self-identified as Black, a recipient of a college degree, heterosexual, and unmarried. I coordinated and advertised the study by posting flyers at local venues previously mentioned. When coordinating with various locales, I asked them to advertise the study on their social media channels, such as website, newsletter, and Facebook page.

The posted flyers provided my Walden University email address at which potential participants could contact me. Once I receive an email from the interested participants, I emailed the potential participants the screening questionnaire (Appendix B) to ensure that they met the criteria for participation. Once I received an email with the completed screening questionnaire from the prospective participants, confirming that they met the required criteria for participation, I coordinated a mutually agreed upon time and location for the interview. For the approved participants, an electronic version of the Walden University IRB-approved consent form was attached to the email confirming the mutually agreed upon interview meeting time and location. The participants were asked to respond to the email stating, "I consent," which documented and confirmed that they understood the study and agreed to participate. The consent form included information regarding the design of the study, rights of the participant, and data reporting, which

included debriefing. Once the confirmation to the consent form was given, a number was assigned and given to each participant.

Due to the nature of phenomenological study sample size, for this study, I proposed to recruit 12 participants. As the sample size can increase or decrease due to saturation, there is a need for a sample size range. Reportedly, the sample size should have enough participants to embrace the experiences of the group, leading to data saturation (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological studies often collect sufficient data from in-depth interviews of five to 15 participants (Creswell, 2013). A researcher has reached saturation when breadth and depth of information has been garnered (Bowen, 2008). Data collection should be centered on ensuring that the information is exhaustive and insightful; the goal was to collect quality data.

Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) reported the more similarities the participants have with this phenomenon, the sooner saturation is expected to be reached. Themes are identified when the researcher sifts through the data for saturation (Creswell, 2013). When very little change to no change is produced when new information has been added, saturation has been achieved (Fusch & Ness, 2015). According to Fusch and Ness (2015), when no themes have emerged after four more interviews, saturation can be determined the sample size is as important as the sampling strategy when collecting data; it is imperative to collect detailed information about the participants, as well as, study the participants (Creswell, 2013). As reported by Pinnegar and Daynes (2007), the motive of qualitative research is not to provide a generalization of the information collected from the studied population but to elucidate the specific, the particular.

The next portion of the study was data collection, which consisted of individual face-to-face semistructured interviews. In the email informing about the study, as well as, in the consent form, the participants were be made aware that the interviews would be recorded; however, they were reminded, again, before commencing the interviews. Creswell (2013) indicated that one or a number of interviews are allowed when conducting phenomenological research. The sample size will suffice for a minimum of 10 and maximum of 12 interviews; this provided quality and sufficient data for the study. There were a series of questions asked throughout the semistructured interviews and specific questions were devised as probing questions to influence a deeper sharing of the personal experience with the phenomenon. Each interview question aimed to uncover the perspectives of living as an unmarried college-educated Black woman, in a society that still expects marriage for adults. The same open-ended interview questions were asked to each participant during the individual face-to-face interviews (see Appendix C). Member checking aided in determining if follow-up interviews were needed for participants to share input on if what they shared is accurately reported and correctly represents their perspectives. This also assisted with creating themes and determining if saturation had been reached.

Instrumentation

Chenail (2011) and Xu and Storr (2012) reported that the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing data is the qualitative researcher. The role of the researcher as the primary instrument comes with challenges, as well as, advantages. During the data collection process, the researcher and interviewee are vital components. The researcher

will gain more understanding of the participants' perspectives and experiences with the phenomenon, while also affording the participants the opportunity to share their accounts in hopes of being involved in effecting social change for this group of women (Xu & Storr, 2012 Through open dialogue the researcher can ask open-ended questions that will foster a richer understanding of the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013). During the face-to-face interviews, the researcher will be able collect data from verbal and nonverbal cues (although observation is not a requirement; it's a beneficial additive to enrich the process); furthermore, the researcher will be able to ask more probing queries to obtain a deeper meaning of perspectives and personal encounters of the participants (Creswell, 2013; Xu & Stor, 2012). The body language, verbal communication, and the ability to ask more probing questions, during the interviews, will also afford the researcher the opportunity to clarify any uncertain answers provided by the interviewees, and the researcher will be able to immediately summarize data to ensure accuracy in interpretation of what was shared during the interview (Creswell, 2013). These are the benefits availed to the researcher during the data collection process.

As opposed to the advantages, the challenge that the researcher may encounter is objectivity, the ability and need to bracket out personal encounters and perspectives with the phenomenon, to ensure that biases are not reported. Bracketing aids in safeguarding against possibly skewing data, which could have a negative impact on the research (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002; Xu & Storr, 2012). The personal experiences of the researcher with the phenomenon was only be included as a source of reference. The researcher was forthcoming with any personal experiences with the phenomenon as a

means of monitoring any potential biases; therefore, the goal was not to eradicate the researcher's experiences with the phenomenon but properly position them and remove biases (Moustakas, 1994). Whereas, Husserl (1970) believed that the researcher should exercise epoché, which safeguards against reporting biases.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Once approval was granted by Walden University's IRB, the data collection process commenced. Upon approval for data collection, the prospective participants provided consent to understanding and participating in the study by stating, "I consent" in an email response. I interviewed all participants.

The lived experiences of being unmarried college-educated Black women was shared during the in-depth face-to-face semistructured interviews; this data provided a deeper understanding and meaning of their unique set of circumstances that accompany these women's and how they manage, daily, while society still expects marriage for them. According to Patton (2015), phenomenological interviewing provides the participants a milieu to share their personal encounters with the phenomenon in study. According to Seidman (2013), building rapport with the participants will help the participants with possible anxiety or uneasiness; the participants should feel secure and comfortable before commencing the interviews, which aided the participants in feeling safe to share deeper, heartfelt experiences. Creswell (2013) informs that it is vital that the participants feel non-threatened during the conduction of portions of the study, this allow for a more genuine sharing of their perspectives, therefore, truer data can be reported.

Phenomenological study researchers are widely known to incorporate semistructured interviews and views this as a vital component of data collection (Creswell, 2013). The interviews were conducted at the local main library in a private study room, which was reserved prior to each interview. However, if the reserved interview location was not feasible for the participant and after trying to mutually agree upon a feasible location, an over the phone interview would have been feasible. The length of each interview spanned from 20-30 minutes. To establish a comfortable environment and to prepare the researcher for the in-depth interviews, a list of interview questions (Appendix C) were created and used as a framework (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The questions asked assisted the researcher with maintaining focus and ensured that the pertinent questions were asked for rich data collection. A welcoming environment that was well-suited for interviewing, such as appropriate environmental temperature, well-illuminated area, safely assembled and positioned electronics (recorders, cameras, etc.), comfortable seating, and a prepared researcher (who may have anxiety but does not exhibit it) were some things that aided in the participant feeling secure and comfortable with sharing their lived experiences with this phenomenon; this also aided in building rapport between the participants and the researcher that made for a conducive atmosphere for interviewing.

Another benefit of employing a list of interview questions were to aid in consideration of time; the interviews were conducted in a timely manner so that the participants did not tire out and did not create attrition if further interviewing was needed (Patton, 2015). The in-depth interview questions were used to aid the researcher in

obtaining a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the participants. The endeavor was to ask thought provoking questions that allowed each participant to search inwardly and provide their most honest, personal accounts with this growing phenomenon to enlighten society on their experiences, whether it was good, bad, or indifferent.

Before commencing each interview, the participants were reminded that each interview will be transcribed verbatim and that they will be given a summary of their data to ensure accuracy and proper portrayal of their experience, as suggested by Creswell (2013) and Patton (2002). Furthermore, the participants were informed that the researcher may take notes, if necessary (Janesick, 2013).

Member checking was employed by providing each participant a summary of their data description to ensure that all portrayals of perspectives and experiences were accurately reported, as well as, if there was need for clarification of data. Shento (2004) reported that this will ensure trustworthiness, which will establish credibility for the researcher.

All instruments utilized, and data collected, during the conduction of the study were password protected and stored in a locked file that only I have sole access to. After five years, all data will be destroyed. Content validity was accessed and established throughout the data collection process.

Data Analysis Plan

Phenomenological data coding and analysis reveals the significant statements from the interviews of the participants and themes are created from the clusters that are discovered (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) informed that data is able to be organized when the researcher studies the transcribed interviews through the methods and procedures of phenomenal analysis. Phenomenal analysis entails identifying expressions relevant to the experience, then creates meaning or units of meaning to develop textural descriptions of the experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

I employed the modified van Kaam methodology developed by Moustakas (1994), for this study. After completing the semistructured interviews and transcription process, the transcribed interviews were uploaded into NVivo qualitative data software. The utilization of NVivo assisted with identifying the thematic categories and invariant constituents of the phenomenon of study.

NVivo is a Microsoft Word compatible qualitative research data analysis software (Singh & Kaur, 2016). As mentioned above, NVivo 10 was used to transcribe all data collected from the interview (Nash & Miller, 2015). Although the use of a computer software in not mandatory, as the researcher can analyze the data by hand; however, it was very helpful in simplifying, organizing, and streamlining the collected data (Creswell, 2013). According to Castleberry (2014), NVivo is a user-friendly software that can store qualitative data that will also provide simple retrieval of stored data. NVivo assists with sifting through the data to categorize the data into codes or themes, also

known as, parent and child nodes (Castleberry, 2014). The software availed the opportunity for the researcher to create and edit transcriptions of the collected data.

Castleberry (2014) informed that NVivo is used to tabulate the frequency of themes identified when the researcher creates various nodes from the collected interview data. This feature documented any relationship that appeared throughout data analysis. For instance, focus was provided to data that reveal negative emotional experiences of living as unmarried college-educated Black women.

The use of NVivo also offers single file storage, which creates nodes that will highlight as themes (Castleberry, 2014). The researcher was able to manage, control, and access collected data easily. The use of this software provided a less arduous data analysis process with secure storage of collected data. The time-consuming task of hand coding the data was reduced by employing NVivo. Furthermore, it was used to efficiently create templates for coding data for phenomenological study, advised by Castleberry (2014).

The following steps were used to generate the requisite themes to answer the research question, and to uncover the lived experiences of the participants, as prescribed by Moustakas (1994, p. 120-122):

1. List and group relevant experiences;

2. Reduce and eliminate extraneous data to capture the essential constituents of the phenomenon;

3. Cluster and thematize the invariant constituents to identify core themes of experiences;

4. Final identification and verification compared to the entire record of the research participants to ensure explicit relevancy and compatibility;

5. Construct individualized textural descriptions grounded on the verbatim transcripts using applicable and valid invariant constituents and themes, for each participant;

6. Construct individual structural descriptions centered on individual textural description and imaginative variation, for each participant;

7. Construct a textural-structural description of the meaning and essence of the experiences for each participant; a complete textural-structural description will be developed representing a composite description of the meaning and essence of the experience for the entire group of participants.

The data analysis was conducted and the results provided answers to the research question based on the lived experiences of unmarried college-educated Black women. The results of the data analysis are presented in Chapter 4.

Issues of Trustworthiness

There are four vital aspects of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Trustworthiness is an essential component of qualitative inquiry because it provides reliability and validity to the researcher, which are not separate entities as opposed to quantitative research (Lietz, Langer, & Furman, 2006).

Shenton (2004) and Creswell (2013) suggested various validity strategies for establishing credibility; some of those suggestions were member checking, triangulating, and reflective commentating by using thick and rich descriptions of the experiences shared by the participants. Credibility is a key factor in establishing trustworthiness (Johnson & Rasulova, 2017). A qualitative researcher must demonstrate ability and effort, in order to establish creditability in his or her research (Morrow, 2005). Robust data collection and analysis aids in maintaining focus and ensuring that the research centers on the intended focus.

Collecting data from 12 participants, helped to provide an array of experiences with the research phenomenon. This aided in further establishing creditability through the employment of data triangulation because the data provided a more in-depth telling of the feelings, behaviors, and needs of the participants (Frost, 2011). The use of triangulation was combined with member checking. Morrow (2005) reported that rigor and trustworthiness is afforded by employing member checking because it searches accuracy through findings, interpreting, and reviewing themes. I confirmed with each participant that my summarized interpretations of their responses are accurate and acceptable by them. This also ensured accuracy, creditability, and validity of the data collected during the interviews. Member checking involves summarizing the data into one or two pages and providing the participants the opportunity to review my interpretation before reporting. After receiving approval from the participants that my interpretation of their experiences was correct, additional validity of the findings were provided when I reported rich, in-depth, and detailed descriptions of the experiences per participant.

Transferability is another facet of trustworthiness. According to Golafshani (2003), transferability is contingent upon if the research findings are transferrable to other settings or groups. Offering a transparent and in-depth description of the lived experiences of the participants assisted in providing meaning of the experience. The reader will be able to transfer meaning to areas beyond the confines of this research, when the findings sufficiently detailed the research setting, the descriptions of each participant, the procedures, and the interactions between the participants and the researcher (Golafashani, 2003).

Another entity of trustworthiness is dependability. Dependability guarantees that each interview was conducted in the same manner, establishing consistency and reliability (Frost, 2011). The purpose of dependability is to ensure consistent data collection that is void of unnecessary variations to guarantee repeatability in the research process (Johnson & Rasulova, 2017). This means that the data, methods and decisions that were created in the fieldwork were traceable sources of the retrieved data (Johnson & Rasulova, 2017). Therefore, consistency was present throughout the research process to achieve dependability. According to Johnson and Rasulova (2017), dependability and credibility are closely related; hence, establishing dependability ensured credibility. Dependability centered attention on the researcher-as-instrument and the extent to which interpretation was created in a consistent manner (Johnson & Rasulova, 2017).

Lastly, confirmability was employed to establish trustworthiness. Confirmability was used to ensure that the real-lived and told experiences of the participants were accurately reported versus misconstrued interpreted perspectives of the participants by

way of the researcher (Morrow, 2005). This is where bracketing is necessary. The researcher must be able to extract his or her personal experiences with the research phenomenon in order to not skew the data collecting from the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Reflexivity was vital during confirmability because it, too, safeguarded against misinterpreted collected data. It allowed the researcher the opportunity to understand how his or her personal experiences can shape his or her perception and interpretation of the phenomenon, which can create biases (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Reflexivity allowed for introspection to ensure that the researcher was not leading or misleading during the interviews and data analysis, which could have skewed findings. It was important that the researcher exercised self-awareness through the data collection and analysis process.

Ethical Procedures

Prior to collecting data, the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was provided with a proposal of the study, seeking approval. Once approval was granted, the interviews commenced. Each participant received an attached consent form detailing the rights of the participants, also mandatory reporting issues and confidentiality. Each participant signed the electronic consent form before beginning the interviews.

According to Keen and Todres (2007), researchers are ethically responsible for safeguarding against reporting data that will reveal the identity of any participant. As only I have access to the personal identities of the participants, an assigned number (Participant 1 [P1], P2, P3, and so on) will be given to each participant to protect their identity throughout the study. All information pertaining to the study that is maintained on my computer is password protected. No one else will have access to this computer. All

study related material, such as copies of interviews and external hard-drive and any other back-up copies of materials is stored in a locked fireproof box for the mandatory five years and then destroyed.

To be in accordance with guidelines concerning the proper treatment of human subjects, I informed each participant that, although their complete participation in the study is greatly appreciated, it was not mandatory. The participants were informed that participation in the study would not warrant any incentives.

During the interviews, participants shared their personal experiences that may conjure negative emotions. Due to this possibility, The United Ways of Northeast Florida 2-1-1 toll free number was provided on the consent form and accessible at the participant's request.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore and gain meaning of the lived experiences of unmarried college-educated Black women and the effects of cultural and social expectations of marriage. In this chapter, I focused on justifying the employment of a phenomenological design (Moustakas, 1994), provided the steps taken with recruiting volunteers, and detailed the specific criteria mandated for study participation. Furthermore, I discussed the data collection process, the handling of all study-related information, and explained the steps that will be followed during the data analysis (Smith et al., 2009; Smith, 2015). Moreover, I gave attention to the ethical measures created for the study to ensure the protection of the voluntary participants and issues of trustworthiness. In chapter four, the findings of the study are reviewed and reported. In

chapter four I discussed the setting, demographics, and specific information detailing the results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of unmarried, college-educated, Black, heterosexual women and the effects of cultural and social expectations of marriage. More specifically, in this study, I examined the experiences of living as unmarried, degreed, Black, heterosexual women and the effects of cultural and social expectations of marriage on them. By using intersectionality theory as a guide, the following research question for this study was answered: "How do single college-educated Black women experience the societal and cultural expectations of marriage?" An exploration of their daily encounters with this phenomenon could lead to greater sensitivity in the way society views this group of women. This chapter includes the results of the study. I also will present details related to the setting, participants, data collection, management and analysis. Moreover, I discussed, in detail, the evidence of trustworthiness and the emerging themes.

Interview Setting

Data were collected through face-to-face interviews with 12 unmarried, college educated, Black heterosexual women. I conducted every interview was at the Duval County Public Library, in a reserved study room to ensure privacy. Every participant of the study participated voluntarily. I made disclosures about the voluntary nature of the study, their right to stop participation in the study at any time without any need to provide explanation, and the assurance of confidentiality. Before the commencing of each interview, I relayed all disclosures, again. Furthermore, the participants were informed

that if they began to feel distressed during the interview process, I would stop the interview immediately and refer them to the counseling service provided to them on the consent form. Lastly, I informed the participants that any data collected prior to the interruption would be discarded, and not used for the study. None of the interviews were stopped and discarded due to distress or any other incidences during the process. Additionally, no unexpected events occurred that might have skewed interpretation of the data.

<p align="center">**Participants Demographics**</p>

The criteria for participation in this study were that volunteers must be (a) unmarried (never-married and non-cohabitating), (b) college-educated (having earned any level of a college degree), (c) identify as a member of the Black race, (d) of heterosexual orientation, (e) within the 30 – 50age range, (f) and a woman. Information for all 12 participants is listed in Table 1. Each name listed has been assigned a number to preserve the identity and privacy of each participant.

Table 1

Participants Demographics

Participant	Age	Level of Education
1	35	Doctorate
2	44	Bachelor's
3	40	Bachelor's
4	35	Master's
5	39	Associates

6	30	Associates
7	38	Master's
8	35	Bachelor's
9	42	Master's
10	35	Master's
11	41	Master's
12	37	Bachelor's

Data Collection and Management

Nineteen participants volunteered for the study. Of the volunteers, 12 fit the demographic criteria for participation in the study. The 7 volunteers were not qualifiers for this study because they were either not within the age range, had not obtained a college degree, or they were unmarried but divorced. I sent an email of gratitude to those who did not qualify to participate in the study. I also explained, in the email, that they were not able to participate in the study because they did not meet all the criteria required for participation. The remaining volunteers met the criteria for participation; therefore, I set interviews for 12 participants.

Each prospective participant emailed me once they saw the recruitment flyer (see Appendix A) to inform me that they were interested in participating. I then emailed a screening questionnaire (see Appendix B) to the interested prospect. If the potential participants met the screening questionnaire requirements, they were emailed the consent

form to review and reply to the email with "I consent" as means of signature. After consent to participate was given, a date and time for the conduction of the interview was agreed on. The in-depth, semistructured interviews were face-to-face and conducted at the local public library, in a large city in the southeastern United States between December 4, 2017 and December 21, 2017. The interviews were all audio recorded to ensure accuracy for transcribing purposes. When not in use, the audio recordings were password protected on my personal computer.

Data Analysis

The data analysis technique that I employed for this study followed the van Kaam methodology created by Moustakas (1994). I utilized NVivo qualitative data analysis software after the completion of all interviews to organize the transcripts into codes. Lastly, I applied van Kaam's modified version of Moustakas's data analysis steps.

The coded data assisted with the identification of the horizons, which helped me identify the invariant constituents. Statements not relevant to the phenomenon under investigation or statements I could not code were eliminated from the analysis. I, then, used the invariant constituents to develop the main themes for the study. Invariant constituents fell into one of the six themes derived from the interview questions during the first analysis: (a) me versus them: marital expectations; (b) marriage in the Black community; (c) outsider looking in; (d) single and not so happy; (e) single and happy; and (f) perception of marriage. After I generated the themes, I began to examine the themes against the dataset to ensure that the themes were representative of the lived experiences of the participants.

Dependent on the thematical categories identified (Appendix D), I composed the textural-structural narrative for each interview; refer to Appendix E for an example. Appendix D showcases the full list of themes and subthemes. The textural-structural narrative for each interview enabled me to summarize the data based upon my understanding of the essence of the lived experience of unmarried college-educated Black women.

A member check provided validity to the contents of the narratives. I sent an email to each participant with the narrative attached asking for the participant to review the narrative for accuracy and to identify areas that needed correcting or clarifying. Each participant verified accuracy in the representation of their story. There was only one correction requested from a participant due to a typing error on my part.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

I adhered to the approved study protocol during the data collection and analysis processes. Polkinghorne (1989) stated that there are four qualities to aid in evaluating the power and trustworthiness of a phenomenological study: vividness, accuracy, richness, and elegance. To confirm the data and narrative accuracy, the participants reviewed the analyzed narration of their personally told experiences. For readers who do not personally identify with this phenomenon, the textural-structural narratives were told in story form to explain each participants' experience. The story form narratives placed the reader in the center through the four qualities of which Polkinghorne suggested. The thoroughness

of the individual textural-structural composites also allowed the reader to assess the transferability of results.

While collecting and analyzing data, I made notes of any personal thoughts or reflections that surfaced, then set them aside to focus on the story that was currently in front of me. I address these thoughts in the discussion of the results in Chapter 5. Finally, a thorough review by Walden University dissertation chairperson and panel further enhanced the trustworthiness of this study.

Furthermore, I achieved dependability for this study by maintaining the audio recordings, transcribing the data from the interviews, and importing the data into the NVivo software package. I created an audit trail by utilizing the software package. I used a few confirmability strategies, which were the use of triangulation, checking and rechecking the data throughout the study, examining the transcripts and coding structure by the dissertation chairperson, and I used data auditing to examine the collected data and analysis procedures and made judgements about the potential for bias or distortion.

Data Analysis Results

I sought to understand the lived experience of unmarried, college-educated, Black women within the age range of 30 – 50 who live in north Florida,specifically, by exploring the effects of cultural and societal expectations of marriage for them. I employed nine interview questions to answer the following research question: How do single college-educated Black women experience the societal and cultural expectations of marriage?

The age of the women varied, but their perspectives of this phenomenon were very similar, which allowed for prominent themes to be identified. Upon closer analysis, several secondary or more latent themes emerged from the interviews. Throughout this chapter, verbatim quotes will be provided to substantiate the themes that emerged.

Theme 1: Me versus Them: Marital expectations

Theme one emerged from the participants comparing their lived experiences of the phenomenon of singleness with marital expectations from society. The following subthemes emerged as the participants of this study explained their perspectives and some of their experiences of living as unmarried college-educated Black women in a society and culture that expects marriage for adults.

Subtheme 1: Generation versus Generation. Some of the participants explained how the younger generation views marriage in comparison to the older generations. These participants share their feelings on marriage based on a generational outlook:

P1 stated that, "As far as society, well, I think for millennials, no. I think it's very acceptable now for women to get married-women in general, to get married later, later, later." P3 and P7 agreed, saying:

Generationally, I guess my parents-that's what you did…you grew up, as a lady, you grew up and prepared yourself to be a wife and a mother. I'm learning with my generation, it's more or less the "wifey" thing. It's ok not to be married; it's okay to just co-habitat and not be married and what's the difference between that? (P3)

They [my parents] have always instilled in me that marriage is what you want in life, to have a companion, a partner, an equal. I guess what I'm trying to say is, the 'old school' was about marriage and the 'new school' is not so stuck on the idea of marriage for one to have a prosperous life. (P7)

These quotes reflect agreement that the younger generation is more accepting and understanding of marrying at a later age, which differs from older generations. As indicated, the younger and older generations have opposing perspectives and expectations about when to adults should marry.

Subtheme 2: No Persuasion. The next group of participants explained that they are not influenced by societal and cultural marital expectations; therefore, they are not allowing society to dictate their marital status. P2 expressed her feelings about not meeting societal marital expectations when she stated:

Doesn't faze me. It doesn't faze me because singleness is viewed as a blessing in the Bible, so it doesn't faze me how society views it. It doesn't faze me as much in terms as how society views it. Culturally it doesn't faze me as much because I've watched families, I've watched the work of families. (P2)

P6, P11, and P12 agreed, saying:

If you let society define any aspect of your life, you will never be happy. There's always going to be some expectation added to whatever it is that you just wasted 6 months trying to achieve. No, be happy with your body type, be happy with the skin that you're in, be happy with your hair and its texture, your skin complexion, height, whatever. (P6)

Ooh, well, to be honest I really don't care about those. I'm not trying to be funny, but I really don't. I don't really follow rule-sets. When it comes to not meeting societal and cultural expectations, I'm ok. I think it's more so me-how I deal with my perception of where I'm supposed to be at 41. I think marriage can be a good thing if you're doing it for the right reasons- not being pressured by society. (P11) Honestly and truthfully, society's view of marriage is so different from what it used to be. It doesn't really bother me that I'm not married. So, I'm okay with not meeting society's expectations of marriage or what I should be. I'm not bound by what society expects. (P12)

These participants informed that they are not influenced by the expectations of others. They are living according to their own personal goals and expectations.

Subtheme 3: The Pressure is On. There were some participants who felt pressured to marry from either society, family, or both; these participants expressed how they have experienced pressure from others to marry:

P1 stated that, "Living as this demographic is extremely difficult. There are so many expectations, coming from all sides. It's hard". P3 and P5 agreed by saying:

Back then, there was a lot of pressure from the family to be married. My younger sister had gotten married, my friends, my cousins. My parents were married until the day my dad died. Then, my sister got married and I started to feel like I'm disappointing them. I felt bad (P3).

I think those pressures in our community come about and instead of teaching you what is to be expected in marriage, it's just like, "welp, we're giving out tickets… get married!" but, how do you be a wife? How are you to be a husband? (P5)

These quotes reflect that these participants are feeling pressure from others concerning their marital status. They realize that they have not met the marital expectations set for them by others.

Theme 2: Marriage in the Black community.

The following excerpts focus on the horizons emerging from the descriptions of societal, specifically, cultural marital expectations, which yielded one subtheme: Black on Black expectations. The first set of statements present the participants who were raised in a family where their parents and or grandparents were married, which created an indelible impact on the marital perspectives of these participants. The second set of statements share the perception of marriage in the Black community from participants raised in single-parent homes. Thirdly, this set of participants mentioned infidelity as a factor in marriages within the Black community. Lastly, some of the participants shared unique perspectives on marriage in the Black community.

P3 stated that, "I was, more or less, told, "you grow up and get married". P8 stated, "But, I can't say that I've learned specific things, but growing up, I was fortunate that my parents, two Black people-they've had a good marriage; they've been married for a long time". P9 and P10 agreed, saying:

I have been engaged in a family where marriages have lasted and have been

prioritized. My father passed away last year, but he and my mother were married

for 44 years. My grandparents were married for 63 years before they passed away. So, I've had really good examples of what that [marriage] looks like. I mean, my values stem from my community [family]. I would have numerous conversations with my grandparents and parents about how to have a successful marriage. My beliefs are heavily impacted by what I've been taught and what I've been demonstrated. My thoughts are very much aligned with what has been taught to me. My grandmother taught me that she realized early that she would learn something new about my granddad every day. My mom taught to maintain a mystery…a chase. (P9)

The views and attitudes I've learned starts from my family. My parents have been married 41 years. Being in a family with married parents, I've seen the ups and downs and have learned that marriage is not be taken lightly. The same with my family-my extended family my uncles have married 30+ years. So, I've seen that marriage is a beautiful thing and that it takes work. It also helps to shape, and mold children brought up in it, as well. (P10)

These participants reflected similar perspectives because they were raised in a two-parent household. Their perspectives on marriage are based on how they were raised, either by what they were taught or what they saw.

The next set of statements are about single-parent families within the Black community. P1, P4, and P11 shared their perspectives, stating:

You know, as we know, with marriage they fail, overall, but they also fail in the

Black community. I don't want to be a part of that statistic…My parents divorced.

I know a lot of other people who have divorced. (P1)

The views that I have is that there are a lot of single families and not a lot of kids

that grow up in married homes. Absent fathers. The divorce rate is high. Those

are my views. And, it can be a little discouraging and a little hope is lost because

of that. (P4)

I tell people that I never saw a true foundation of marriage while growing up, so I

was always under the impression that I can do it by myself because I grew up with

single Black women who were head of the household. By the time I came into this

world my grandparents were divorced and my grandmother was holding it down

on her own. My mom is a single parent. (P11)

These quotes reflect the perspectives of the participants whose parents were not

married. These participants shared different perspectives about marriage than those raised

in a household where their parents were married.

These participants mentioned infidelity as a factor of marriage in the Black

community. P5 stated:

I think the Black community also have learned to adapt and put up with certain

things that don't mimic that of loving oneself. I think in the community or what I

have experienced is that we're taught that if he cheats on you that's ok, it's almost

like, turn the other cheek. (P5)

P6 and P11 also spoke about infidelity within the Black community by saying, "Whether it's Black, White, or whatever, you see a lot of people who go through so many different things, whether it's infidelity or financial…no one really values marriage anymore" (P6), and "I have a couple of friends who did that [married young or because they had children] and they're miserable. They stepped out and stepped back in…cheated" (P11).

The quotes reflect agreement from these participants. These participants believe that infidelity is present for most marriages within the Black community.

Lastly, are miscellaneous statements about marriage in the Black community. P2 stated that, "I think from the black community marriage is far more conditional". P8 also provided her thoughts about marriage in the Black community by saying:

Something that I think a lot of people see (I'm not against interracial marriages), but I don't think it's as common to see a Black man with a Black woman. It seems less and less common. Even my mom will say things like, (because I would like to marry a Black man), "well, a lot of those Black men like white women." My brother dates mostly non-Black women and I'm not against it. But, for a Black woman who wants to date Black men, I think we feel like our options are limited because of that. I think specifically for Black women-I don't know if society see's it this way, but the way I see it, Black women tend to get married later and I think more people are recognizing that, and I don't know if they're ok with that. I don't know why people desire to see marriage. I think they mostly mean well. I think that the people that I'm closest with want to see me married. (P8)

These quotes reflected perspectives about marriage in the Black community that should not be overlooked. Therefore, these quotes were included to demonstrate multiple perspectives about marriage within the Black community.

Subtheme 1: Black on Black expectations. Within the Black community, there are expectations for one another. Following are some of the participants shared perspectives of Black on Black expectations. P1, P2, P7, and P8 stated that,

In the Black church, there is some-they do touch on it a little bit. Like when you hear about the Single and Saved conferences or the Single Women's conferences and all of that. but what I get from that is again, "there's something wrong", um, and "we're here to fix that" (P1)

I think they have some very unreasonable expectations. Married black women are more apt to perceive each other as a threat no matter what and it's because of the scarcity of black men willing to commit in that capacity. There is such a scarcity of black men willing to commit for a black family and so when you get a black man, you hold onto him tightly. I would consider that just to be the black woman's struggle. (P2)

Well, I feel like, you know, in the Black community, even if it's not marriage, people expect you to be with someone. So, I never felt pressure around my White friends or non-Black friends about being single. I felt it more when are my Black friends or family-the older people in my family. (P7)

"You watch TV, like the show Blackish; it's just different [the Black community]. Different things, different inside jokes." (P8)

This theme encompassed the lived experiences of the participants concerning their perspectives of how society and culture views them. Some of them shared that society's and their culture's marital expectations effected their outlook on their marital status; however, there were a few who were not influenced by others marital expectations of them. The subthemes aided in providing a breadth of how the participants' perspectives have been shaped.

Theme 3: Outsider Looking In

Living as unmarried college-educated Black women is a challenging trajectory that perpetuates many negative outcomes such as being stigmatized by others, emotional issues, and being associated as a group of women who are least likely to marry. In understanding the lived experiences of single degreed Black women, theme 2: Outsider Looking In materialized in the interviews. This theme describes those who do not identify as a member of this demographic but are those who have influence because of their personal relationship with the participants, such as family member or friend. P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P10, and P11 shared their perspectives by saying:

> There's just a question in the back of peoples' mind. And, I think it could probably be even narrowed down to like the family. You know, like parents, grandparents, aunties… that kind of thing. Where it's like, "well, what's going on? What's wrong?" "You have everything all together. You shouldn't want to do everything alone; you should want to share your life with someone". "Why has nobody snagged you, yet? …something's special about you." And, I think the perception is because I am single with no living children, I'm not as busy…I

think that is the perception that a lot of married women have about single women. (P1)

It depends. It depends on who, it really depends. There are some in the black community I feel like I'm negatively perceived. But in the white community, I don't think it matters. I feel more received in the white community among couples than I have in the black community. I can be perceived as a threat and I don't even have to open my mouth and say anything. In addition…several black men are now choosing women of other races and some of them choose, and it's because of who they fell in love with, others of them choose because they don't want to be with a black woman. There's a stigma about a black woman. Their [educated Black men] perception of black women is very different. (P2)

"You're lucky that you are single'" Or, they act like they want to be in my space. "I think you are awesome. You're handling this thing and doing it by yourself…that's good". You know, I have had friends who have tried to hook me up with people. They're like, "oh you're such a good person, you should have somebody". And, I guess they feel like if I had somebody I'd be happier or something, sometimes. I think they feel like I'm incomplete. And, I am not. (P3)

Well, the cliché is, "single women want to be married and married women want to be single." I think married women do view the freedom that single women have and especially, those of us without kids, we have even more freedom. I think it's just more-so, they maybe admire the flexibility that single women have, but I don't think it's something that we necessarily choose to have. From a non-

relationship status-career wise, I think when people don't know our credentials,

we're treated differently but when they know our credentials, they're like, "oh!",

as if we didn't have the capability of advancing in our education. I've been told a

lot that I'm a feminist and I don't believe that. I think that men are getting it

wrong. (P4)

I feel as a single woman, I'm perceived by married women as arrogant to some

people. I guess because of my independence…So, with married women, they're

like, "well, how can she do that without having a mate". I feel another thing is

that they might think there's something wrong with me! I feel, they weren't able

to do these things before they got married. They [loved ones] always want to try

to find me a mate, or ask, "why are you single? Why don't you want anyone?

Don't you like having someone around?" yes, I do! I do get lonely, but I am not

alone. When people don't know your story, they can look at you and pass

judgment. (P6)

There are the questions, "oh, are you gay?" or older family members question my

parents because I don't have kids or wasn't in a relationship. So, I never felt that

kind of pressure about single from non-Black friends or associates than I did my

family. I feel like my family members and Black friends that are single are more

of pity, but I don't think that my non-Black friends really mention or think about

it. (P7)

There is the idea of the angry Black woman and it's not good. I think Black

women sometimes get a bad rep…and media doesn't help at times, not all of the

time. It's like, "the sassy Black woman" and that we're difficult. When I hear

Black men appreciate Black women and say that we're queens or "I love them",

I'm like "yes!" People can assume that you're unhappy or want to set you up with

everyone, and I don't want to be set up with anyone. [laughs] I think sometimes

people make you think that too, "your life is not as good because you're single".

(P8)

"You shouldn't want to do everything alone; you should want to share your life

with someone". (P10)

Again, I think I'm perceived by married women as lucky in my singleness. Many

say, "you just don't know, if I could go back and be single again I would". Those

are the comments that I get now from my married friends. I have told them, "it is

easy for you to say because you've either experienced it or you are experiencing it

now-marriage. So, for you to tell me that I'm lucky or don't rush it. I feel like it's

insensitive because you've had that experience. So, it's not fair to me and is

insensitive to me because that is something that I desire. So, you're trying to

downplay it; whereas, I want you to understand where I'm coming from because

at one point that's where you were. There's also being too independent, especially

coming from men. "She has everything without a man, why does she need me?

What do I bring to her life?" so, you get that. I think, honestly, Black men in our

society look at that as a threat, "she doesn't need me for anything" or maybe

because I might be the breadwinner. (P11)

Theme 2 provided the lived experiences with those who labeled, assumed, and questioned the sexual orientation of the participants. The participants also shared that their singleness was somewhat envied by those who are married because the marrieds missed their singleness and wondered why the participants would want to give up their singleness for more responsibilities. These told lived experiences led to the next theme that explains why this demographic of women, who maybe envied, are not satisfied with their single marital status.

Theme 4: Single and Not So Happy

The twelve participants of the study all spelled out specific experiences with not meeting societal and cultural marital expectations. While the participants remained encouraged and optimistic about their single marital status, they explained that there are times that they are not so happy with their marital status, mainly because of how members of society and their culture treat or respond to their marital status. There were three subthemes that emerged from this point of the interviews: Blame Game, Education Matters, and Time Limit.

Subtheme 1: Blame game. The participants shared that they experienced feeling blamed for their singleness from others, whether the blamers were family members, friends, and or strangers. The questions and assumptions from those individuals created the feelings of persecution. P1 stated:

What's wrong with you? Why haven't you got this yet? Why aren't you married?

You should be married by now! That's like the last thing you need, so what's

going on? (P1)

P2 followed with her perspective saying that, "Yeah. I think there's a perception there's something wrong with you…you're either bossy or you're mean or there's something wrong with you if you're still single".

P3, P4, P6, P7, P9, P10, and P11 also shared their perspectives of feeling blamed for their singleness by saying:

People say, "you're so nice, you must be crazy on the inside; you must do some crazy stuff or, "you're too pretty, you must be crazy" and, "you haven't dated anybody?". So it's like-family wise "are you trying? Are you trying to let us down? Are you ever going to get married?" My friends or other people might say, "so, what's really going on with you?" and, I'm like, "what do you mean?" "There must be a side of you that we're not seeing". And, I'm like, "noo, I'm just not going to take the first person that comes along" (P3)

"I just need men to get it together and not feel like all successful women, all educated women are feminist". (P4)

I guess because of my independence…why are you not married? it's either, "there must be something wrong with her" or "she thinks she's all that" or "she doesn't want to talk to this person because he doesn't have…" but, that's not my mindset. That's your opinion of me. (P6)

"There are the questions, "oh, are you gay?" or old family members question my parents because I don't have kids or wasn't in a relationship. Sometimes when you are introduced to someone or getting to know a guy, people question you. "well, if you have a master's degree and you don't have any kids, then what's wrong with you?" People feel

like if you've excelled with your education and if you don't have that love that something must be wrong with you. "is she crazy? Is she psycho?" (P7)

I hear it all the time- people will say, "well, she's in her 30s and she's single" or "she's in her 30s and not married, there's something wrong with her"- and the same with men. I'm like, "well I haven't met the person, yet". Then people say, "you're too picky". People asks-sometimes it's a nice asking and sometimes it's overbearing...sometimes it's like, "why aren't you doing this? Why aren't you doing that?" I'm like, "I know how to live my life. Thank you." [laughs] It has been implied to me that I shouldn't be so picky and be open to men of other races. I think that was their way of saying, "maybe if you'd be more open to other men, you'd be married by now". (P8)

I'm sometimes asked, "why I'm not married?" or "why are you single" sometimes I'm annoyed because I don't know why it hasn't happened yet. I think sometimes they want me to say that I'm crazy and a little psychotic. [when a guy asks why I'm single] I mean, I don't want to be single and I'm hoping you are [single] too because you're talking to me. Even older people ask, "girl, what are you waiting on?" Well, I'm waiting on the right one. The way it's asked is as if there's something wrong with me. Because I don't think any asks others, "why are you married?" but, because I'm single, you ask me and that's aggravating. (P10)

Then there's the flip side where people are asking, "when are you going to get married?" And, I'm like, "well, no one has presented himself or it's not like I don't want to or it just hasn't been that moment yet." You just have to be mindful

about how you approach people, especially as you get older. You don't know if

I've been trying; you don't know if I have been putting myself out there. It's not

like I'm just staying in the house, being a recluse, or going on dates. (P11)

These quotes reflect the outlook of these participants when they are asked about

their singleness. Almost every participant of this study was quoted feeling accused by

others for their unmarried status.

Subtheme 2: Education matters. The participants explain how their educational

achievements are sometimes a factor in initiating and sustaining a relationship. P1, P2,

P3, P4, P7, P9, P11, and P12 had this to say about the factors associated with their

educational attainments:

Of course, as Black women and we become more educated, our pickings become

slimmer. I don't have too much to choose from, as far as, marriage. I have had to

really, I won't say "settle" but yes, settle for someone who isn't as educated as

myself. (P1)

The more educated a black man is and the more educated black men are that I talk

with, that's not their perception. Their perception of black women is very

different. And, I think they're more willing, I think they're more willing to get to

know you as a friend without giving you an ultimatum of more than that. They're

willing because there are some black men who they don't do the friend thing at

all. It's all or nothing. However, I feel the more educated black men are willing to

want to know who I am as a person. (P2)

I feel that as Black educated women, I wonder if men are more afraid of us than we are of them? The relationship where I experienced mental abuse, a lot of this abuse stemmed from the fact that I had just graduated college and he didn't have a GED. Some of the guys are more fearful of us as educated Black women. I've had guys downplay who they are because they didn't feel like they measured up. (P3)

I think that with the level of education and as a Black woman, the men can be a little threatened, but I feel like that deals with a lot of their insecurity in who they are because if they were secure they wouldn't be threatened. Letting men know where we are in life and we're treated differently because they feel like we don't need them, like we don't need them to pay for our food or we don't need them to pay our light bill. No, we still need you because we still have responsibilities and bills to pay. So, I need somebody to come take my trash out. [laughs] So, you feel that just because I'm educated I don't have desire or needs? So, I feel like that's unfair…because I decided to go a different route in life, I shouldn't be punished from a relationship and a non-relationship perspective. (P4)

I also found that I would not tell a guy that I just met about my education and/or profession. Because sometimes when I would tell them about my master's degree, they were sometimes turned off because maybe they weren't at the same level of education. So, they thought they weren't good enough for me. To me, I don't care if you don't have a degree. If you're a hard worker and going to bring something to the table then, I'm fine with that. (P7)

I've had a lot of struggles with relationships, in large part because, the guys just really feel threatened. I was engaged once and his words to me were, "it's just easier for me to be with someone who's where I am in life or worse than to be with you because being with you comes too much expectation to be successful." A lot of guys are intimidated by my career because I work with athletes. (P9)

It's the ego that sets in [for Black men] …so, sometimes I feel like that can be a disadvantage. Being college educated and having no one to share the load, I don't want to do it all by myself. (P11)

I think being a single educated Black woman, I intimidate those uneducated and even educated Black men, so they don't even approach me. Not that they find me unapproachable, but just that I'm out of their league for whatever reason. I have had people tell me that I would not want to be with them because, "I don't have what you have or I didn't go to school or I've been married before; I have kids", but let me give you that opportunity to not be what I'm looking for. The fact that they see me as an educated Black woman with all my stuff together, they don't want to approach me or talk to me or whatever the case maybe. (P12)

These quotes reflect the lived experiences of being unmarried as it relates to education. They are aware that their advanced education has an effect on their marital status.

Subtheme 3: Time limit. The participants shared feelings about how society, culture, and themselves have put an age or time limit on when they should be married.

The age expectation adds to the overall theme, 'single and not so happy'. P1, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9, and P11 said this:

> Maybe it be that I won't get married at all, maybe it will be that I get married in my 40s…at a really late time, where-outside of the bounds of the expectations of when a woman is supposed to get married. (P1)

> [Uncle implying that it's taking a longtime to get married] "I'm just waiting on you; they're going to have to wheel down to give you away". I had to tell him that I was cool with being single. (P3)

> Because we're women, we have a biological clock and a lot of us still desire to have a family and to be married and have kids to carry on our legacy. If fears me a lot because the older I get, I feel like I'm not going to have that. (P4)

> "I think from how I was raised, you're supposed to be married by a certain age roughly between the ages of 25-30". (P5)

> "Now, it's getting to the point where I'm not sure about the mother thing because I'm getting older". (P7)

> Then, I can cave into that idea…I have to pick myself up and be like, "it's ok to be in your 30s and single", but that's not a normal thing in society. Sometimes it's hard because I expected to be married by now-I figured I'd be married in my 20s, you know? I'm 34. I still think there is-within the Black society or community, "why aren't you married, you're in your 30s?" and, I'm like, "well I haven't met the person, yet". (P8)

> "I do believe that at 41 it [marriage] will happen very quickly". (P9)

Now that I'm getting older, I would like to have someone that I can have a

romantic partnership with. Someone I can grow old with and just enjoy the

remainder of life, as far as getting older. I think now at this point in my life it's

aggravating. Because in the beginning I could laugh it off because I felt like 'I'm

still young…"it'll happen one day". Now, I'm starting to feel like, "will it

happen?" Because I tell people, "you couldn't have told me at 25 that I wouldn't

be married by now", but I never thought I wouldn't be married at this point. (P11)

The subthemes of this section helped to support the main theme. The participants

explained how they have been assumed to be the fault of their own singleness. The

participants provided lived experiences of how educational achievements negatively

effects their marital status. Some of the participants also shared that they had a plan for

when they would get married, and they have surpassed that timeframe or the timeframe

set for them by others.

Theme 5: Single and Happy

The participants shared that they are "single and happy", even though they do

desire marriage one day. From this theme, three subthemes emerged: Confident, Living

with No Restrictions, and Not on a Timeclock. However, it is important to share the

commentary that did not fit into the subthemes, which will be detailed first. The

following are miscellaneous quotes for this theme from P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P9, P10,

and P12:

I do like being single. I think being single, right now, for me is allowing me to

learn myself more, it's also allowing me to do things that I really want to do.

People fear you and I don't mean that in a negative sense. It's like, "what's up with her? She's a unicorn", "there's something about her; she's enticing! I need to know more; I need to be around her. I need to pick her brain. I need to figure something out. WOW!". I think people respect you a little more…"because you're Black, 1. 2. You're educated. (P1)

I love being a single. I like the fact that um I have so much freedom to explore so many different things as a single that I may that able to do as a married person. And I still view my singleness as a gift, if I want to change jobs I can. If I want to relocate at any point, I can. I set the pace for where I go financially, what I accomplish, no one else dictates that pace to me, I set that pace. (P2)

"I can kind of do what I want to do, when I want to do it and not have to consult anyone". (P3)

"I love it because of my age…I'm used to being single". (P4)

Now, I embrace it. It is something to learn who you are and to know who you are and to finally come to a point where you love yourself. And, I can honestly say that I absolutely love myself and I enjoy this moment that I'm in. (P5)

"I cope with being not married better now that I'm in a relationship better than I did when I was not in a relationship. I don't feel as single or alone because everyone knows that I have a boyfriend". (P7)

"At times being single is great". (P9)

"I appreciate it." (P10)

Oh, I love it! You know, I have a lot of married female friends and they're always

like, "why aren't you married?" so, I feel like they feel that I should be married,

but again, I don't tolerate a lot of foolishness. So, I'm like I'm okay not being

married if I have to go through X, Y, and Z. I would rather be single. (P12)

These quotes reflect what the participants said about being unmarried. This was

important to include to gain a greater understanding of the mindset of unmarried college-

educated Black women.

Subtheme 1: Confident. Even though all the participants do desire to marry, they

are confident in who they are. They are not allowing expectations from society or their

culture to shape their perceptions of themselves. They have a healthy sense of self, and

they know the assets they will bring to a marriage. Each one of the participants of this

study are quoted in this subtheme saying:

I'm a good catch! ...in my belief…I hope I can say this…we, Black women in

general, make the world go 'round. But, when you add that education piece-their

head on straight…So, I've always grown up knowing that as a Black woman, I am

powerful, extremely powerful-I make stuff happen. The power comes from what

my dad instilled in me, that you are somebody, you are powerful, you are strong,

you will! (P1)

So, loneliness has been the issue, but I find the more that I hang out with diverse

people, the easier it gets for me and I don't see it as a negative. I see it

[singleness] more as a positive. I'm not rushing it and I'm not settling. So… and a

huge part of why I'm still single is my refusal to settle for anything. (P2)

I'm mentally so much better-self-esteem [wise] and don't want to jeopardize that.

I was bitter and afraid of to be in a relationship, but now, I think I can handle

myself, my emotions a little better. I'm little more mature in that. (P3)

I think because I'm single and because a lot of Black women in my age range…I

think we become complacent and comfortable in where we are because we've

dated so much and the outcome of the dating has just been, um, disappointing. So,

we stay in our single lives because we don't want to set ourselves up for failures

or supporting men that are not well off. We're [women] not just objects. (P4)

"That's not acceptable [cheating], not when you truly love yourself. I see myself

as an attractive female…caring about their perception [society and culture] of my

singlehood is not an issue for me". (P5)

There's nothing wrong with me and I know that! So, I'm a voice for young single

women and single moms, that you can do it. I do…I do get lonely, but I am not

alone! It's okay for me to be single. [laughter] I'm not anyone's expectations. I

don't let it get to me or let it make me feel bad or let it make me think I'm less

because I don't have a spouse. I don't let it get to me at all if someone says, "oh,

well there must be something wrong with you". I just say, "I guess so, in your

eyes" [chuckles] but, I know that it's not. And, I'm not going to debate you on it.

If you let society define any aspect of your life, you will never be happy. (P6)

"I feel like I've come to grips with it the fact that I maybe single for the rest of my

life, because I'm almost 40". (P7)

Most of the time I'm ok with being single because feel like I've accomplished a lot. Today I feel good. There's that thing, "you need a man" and, I'm not against help, but I don't want to look at a husband as a source…I'm proud of the fact that I have a degree, I have a job, I can take care of myself, I don't have debt, and I've done that all by myself. I didn't have to have a man do that for me, but again, I'm not against a man doing that for a woman. My faith is the center of my life. So, my thoughts are that you can't find your everything in man, only in God. That's how I approach that. Marriage doesn't fix everything. (P8)

I feel like if it's supposed to happen [marriage] then it will. I'm not willing to compromise-the non-negotiables: raising kids, spirituality. It's going to occur [marriage], so in my mind it's not going to be an impossibility. I think standards, compromise, and patience is necessary… we have to know that we are valuable. We are deserving of love. (P9)

"Though I want to marry, I'm not willing to settle just to be married. The thought of it [marriage] still excites me, but not willing to settle". (P10)

So, all of the women that had a very impactful part of my life when I was growing up were single parents. So, I always felt like I didn't need a man to help me do anything, if it happens, it happens. I feel like I'm very independent and have proved that and I've been blessed enough to maintain, but I also feel I'd like to have someone to help carry the load or to have that helpmate…I don't have that. (P11)

I don't feel like I'm lacking anything, except companionship from a man. For the

most part, I love it; I'm not opposed to it. I definitely would love to be in a

married situation, but if it means heartache and headache then I'm ok with that. I

mean, it's definitely something that I want, but I'm not in a rush to get. I feel like

if it's going to happen, it will, in the right term and perspective, it'll happen. (P12)

These quotes reflect the confidence that each participant stated about their

singleness during the interviews. Each of the participants expressed their perspectives

about being single and happy for this subtheme.

Subtheme 2: Living with no restrictions. In this section, the participants shared

their perspectives of living as a single and not having to consider anyone else, when

making simple or important decisions. A quote from each of the participants follows.

There is a freedom in being single. I feel like I am just so free! I don't have to run

anything by anybody. Or consider anybody else…Just do whatever I want to do!

So, I like that aspect of it. I enjoy my life. (P1)

But I love being a single, I like the fact that um I have so much freedom to

explore so many different things as a single that I may that able to do as a married

person. And I still view my singleness as a gift, if I want to change jobs I can. If I

want to relocate at any point, I can. And so, I now view my singleness as a gift as

opposed to a hindrance. I set the pace for where I go financially, what I

accomplish, no else dictates that pace to me, I set that pace. And at the end of the

day, I'm ultimately responsible for what I accomplish, and I don't accomplish.

And sometimes if um you can't accomplish something because you're a wife, at

the end of the day you may have regret towards that family or that husband for what you didn't accomplish. Based on the outcomes of the longevity of your family and the longevity of your marriage. I don't have that issue. (P2)

I guess the advantages are that I don't have to come home and talk to or entertain anyone. I can deal with my kids, only. I'm the decision maker in my house. I think those are some of the advantages because I get to make all of the rules and enforce them myself. [laughs] (P3)

I'm used to having my own space. I do want to be in a relationship. So, you know, if I find that person that I want to share that space with then, you know, I'm ok with breaking that single silence. I would rather stay single than feel controlled by a man that is threatened by femininity. (P4)

I don't have to ask anyone or consult with anyone for permission to do what I need to do. I can cook when I want to [laughs]. I only have one check book to manage. So, just the advantages of not having to consult with anyone before I make my move. (P5)

It gives me time to myself. You know, I'm not limited to who I can see or if I talk to you on the phone for an hour and I feel like this conversation is not thought provoking or we're not on the same level…I don't have to talk to you anymore. When you have different opportunities. You can either, take that risk and go with it and not have to worry about having to have a talk… maybe your husband might not agree. (P6)

I have more time to work and make more money. I have more time to travel and spend time with friends and family. I have the luxury of eating what I want, as a single person; however, when I'm married I don't know if I'll be able to eat popcorn for dinner because he might not want that. (P7)

I can go where I want, when I want. I can do what I want, when I want. I have a level of independence and freedom. I'm able to travel. I think I may have been able to do a lot of stuff that I know my married friends can't, or not so freely because they have kids. (P8)

When I talk to some of those married friends who aren't having much marital success, it makes me appreciate not having to be accountable to someone or having to justify the decisions that I make, in regards to my life. I also recognize that I like things my way. So, I like not having to compromise. Being able to live life the way that I want. I didn't have to ask my husband if I could get my 2nd master's degree. I didn't have to consult with anyone about adopting my nephew. I can live life how I want and how I need to live it. (P9)

There's time to learn yourself, to figure out what you like and don't like. I'm single, I think it's empowering that with God I'm still able to do things. For me, I have 5 jobs… I don't have to figure out what he's going to eat. I can eat a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. So, I like being able to do things that I'm passionate about. I like the spectrum; it keeps me very busy. I don't have anyone to question me. I can travel and go on sorority trips when I want. I try to see the positive in

my singleness and as a blessing. But, then I'm thankful that I'm still able to do these things, even alone. (P10)

At one point, I really loved it because I felt like I don't have to answer to anyone. If for some reason I need to do something, I don't have to worry about how the other person feels. So, I can definitely do what I need to do in regards to self and not feel like I'm obligated or pressured because I have to consider someone else.

My main one [advantages of being single] is being able to make moves and do things on my own without having to consult with anyone. So, having that independency and freedom allows me to do the things that I want to do without having to consult anyone's opinion or my family. (P11)

Oh my gosh, there are tons of them [advantages of being single]. Ok, I can spoil myself, I don't have to report to anyone, I can spend my money how I want to. It sounds so selfish, but truly this is my choice and I just feel like… (P12)

These quotes reflect that the participants are not living restricted lifestyles. They are living single and happy until marriage happens for them.

Subtheme 3: Not on a timeclock. The participants explained that they are not measuring their fulfillment or happiness on getting married by a certain age. They understand that society and their culture have marital expectations by a certain age, but they are not living on anyone's timeclock, only their own. P1, P2, P6, P8, and P11 were quoted saying:

"I value alone time…so, let me make sure that I get myself together first before I try to join with somebody for the long haul". (P1)

"Although I'm forty-four, no kids, I feel like this is a really great season for me as a single woman". (P2)

'As far as marriage, I plan to be married at some point. I don't know when. I'll be 31 in April, I don't know if I'll be married in the next 5-10 years, only God knows". (P6)

I'm learning to take on the mindset that, "it's ok", if I don't get married. It's ok if I'm 38 or 40 because people get married at all ages. So, I have to learn to just be ok with it. I have learned to come to the place of not knowing when it's going to happen. (P8)

"It's obvious, I'm 41 and I've never been married, so it's obvious that I'm not following that" [society's and culture's marital timeclock expectations]. (P11)

Although all the participants expressed a desire to marry, they informed that they are not discouraged by their unwed marital status. They explained that they have a level of freedom to live, travel, and do as they desire. They are using this time of singleness as an opportunity to better themselves educationally, financially, and in any other way they choose.

Theme 6: Perception of Marriage

In understanding the perspectives of societal and cultural marital expectations from the lenses of this group of women, it is also important to understand how they perceive marriage. Every participant shared their outlook on marriage, in doing so, two subtheme emerged.

I think marriage is a beautiful thing. My view on marriage, in growing up, is that they fall apart. That's only because I didn't have any healthy marriages to look at

growing up. But, that's it! So, there is some, like, "why even bother?" because if this is what I've seen, and the statistics are saying this, then the likelihood of me being in that situation is pretty high. It's just a symbol of people's… it's a contract… That says, "I'm going to love you for the rest of your life" but, contracts can be broken. I respect the institution of marriage from a biblical standpoint, societal standpoint… However, I can't be tunnel vision when it comes to it. There is no such thing as: graduate from college, get married straight out of college, 2.5 kids, dog and a white picket fence. (P1)

I think marriage is most beneficial when the two-married people share a vision. And what I mean for vision is we may share a vision as educators, we may share a vision with a company, we may share a vision with…I don't know, through a Christian platform. There has to be, I don't want to get married just to have husband, have a family or to be able to have sex whenever I want. There has to be some underlying vision that connects us, and I hope that that is a part of my future. (P2)

I think marriage is great! I believe in it and I believe that it can happen. I've seen that marriage can work because of my parents' marriage of 25 years. I still believe. (P3)

My thoughts of marriage, honestly, I think in today's age, it's more centered around sex and pleasures. I think the way marriage was then and the way it is now, is totally different and it just kind of turns me off a little bit because I don't want to get married just to please you, physically. (P4)

I believe that marriage is beautiful and honorable in the sight of God with the

right person and the right timing. I do believe it's work and I do believe it's a

willingness to grow and glean from each other and to compromise. I just believe it

should be continuous growth and the willingness to want the best out of each

other and to see each other happy. Learning each other's love languages and

honoring different perceptions. (P5)

I feel that marriage is commitment made by two people in front of God. And, if

you're not ready for that, then why pretend to be for your family and/or society.

Because at the end of the day, your household is not going to be happy. (P6)

"I feel like, in saying that Black community and marriage, I guess I've always felt

like it was ok if you didn't get married, but it's something that my parents have really

wanted for myself and my sister". (P7)

Marriage to me is two people who bring all of their lives together, every mundane

detail, their schedules, their likes and dislikes. That's hard work. I think marriage

is a good thing. I think for a very long time in my life, I romanticized it. It's not

going to solve all of my problems. I think it will enhance my life but not in the

sense that my life is better than this person or that person. (P8)

"I want to be transparent and upfront with my husband; we will have to be on the

same page. I think standards, compromise, patience is necessary". (P9)

Growing up in my family helps me to see marriage as love. I take marriage

seriously and value marriage. Marriage is beautiful and takes work and is

commitment between 2 individuals. I see it as fun. I believe both people have to bring 100%. (P10)

My thoughts about marriage is that it can be very rewarding. I think it's something that everybody should have that opportunity to meet that person that they feel like they can spend the rest of their lives with. I think that it's a beautiful thing. You meet and you grow old together, you build, the ups and downs, somebody you can't stand one moment but can't be too far away from him. I think marriage can be a good thing…(P11)

"I absolutely think marriage is beautiful, if you find that right person and if both give 100%, and if you feel like you are getting as much as you're putting into it". (P12)

These quotes reflect the perception of marriage for each participant. The participants provided their perspectives about marriage regardless of their upbringing.

Subtheme 1: Marriage is still in my view. The following quotes show that the participants still desire marriage even though they are not aligned with the marital expectations of society and their culture. Each of the participants shared their perspective on marriage, saying:

I do desire to be married. Absolutely! Yes, I do plan, I want to get married. There are some days that I think marriage is just some piece of paper. I mean, that piece of paper ain't gone make you love somebody anymore or any less, but at the end of the day, I still want to be married; I still desire it. (P1)

"I do hope that it's [marriage] something in my future". (P2)

I still have the cinderella idea from when I was a little girl. I still believe that it's worth a try [marriage]. You may go in there afraid, but it's worth a try. You have to walk by your faith. (P3)

I have a desire to be married and to have a family. I think that because I desire it, I should have it. I want to get married because he's my helpmate or he's my soulmate or this is the person that was designed for me, not so I can just please you when you want to be pleased. I want to be married but I don't want to be subjected to just pleasing you all the time. (P4)

"I believe that marriage is for me." (P5)

As far as marriage, I plan to be married at some point. I don't know when… only God knows. I can say that I do want to get married. I want to have family, a whole family unit. It is a goal. (P6)

"I would love to get married. I would love to wake up next to the same person every day and have face to face conversation and not be alone in my house every night". (P7)

I do want to be married, so sometimes it's hard because I expected to be married by now-I figured I'd be married in my 20s, you know? I'm 34. I really do believe that I will get married. I just don't know when. I do desire it because I desire that relationship and I do want to get married. (P8)

I mean, I think it will happen [marriage]. I still believe that it will happen. So, in my mind it's not going to be my reality. I feel like when God decides it's supposed to happen and with whom then it will happen. It's going to occur, so in

my mind it's not going to be an impossibility. Yes, I want to do it. Yes, I plan to

do it [marry]. (P9)

I would like to grow with someone and have helpmate. When I do get married I'll

be ready because I already know how to compromise and help my mate. I don't

want kids without the husband, so I would want to be able to share with someone,

be fruitful and multiply. (P10)

I feel like I would love to marry because I feel that it's a beautiful bond to have.

So, I'm looking forward. It is something that I plan to do and want to have happen

in my life. I don't know if it will, but it is something that I would like have to

happen in my life. (P11)

"I mean, it's definitely something that I want [marriage], but I'm not in a rush to

get. I feel like if it's going to happen, it will, it in the right term and perspective, it'll

happen". (P12)

These quotes reflect the opinions and desire for marriage from each participant.

They all stated that marriage is a union that they endeavor to have one day.

Subtheme 2: What if I do not get married? This subtheme emerged from the

realistic viewpoints of the participants. They were not unaware of the small likelihood of

marriage for them. So, they expressed their sentiments concerning the possibility of not

marrying. P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8, P10, and P11 are quoted saying:

I have come to the conclusion that I would have to be accepting of it. It's

definitely something I've thought about seriously that maybe I will or maybe not.

Maybe it will be that I won't get married at all…I've thought about it, and I think,

at this moment, I would be ok with it. Now, 10 years from now and I'm 44, I might go in a corner and cry…(P1)

If it's not a part of my future I feel, I don't think that's going to make or break anything for me. I think I will be able to still, I think my life will still be full, however I do hope that it's something in my future. (P2)

"It used to bother me a lot. However, after about 3 years ago, I started coming into terms with it myself and saying-I'm not shunning anyone away…but, if it doesn't happen then, I'm ok; I'm alright". (P3)

"It's disappointing because I have a desire to be married and to have a family. The heart wants what the heart wants and we all want companionship". (P4)

I don't think that is a possibility for me ok. I know that God has given me love in my heart and an ability to submit myself to a relationship or in a relationship. So, it's not a possibility for me. I believe that marriage is for me. (P5)

I've had this thought so many times in life. If the relationship that I'm in doesn't lead to marriage, I don't know if I'll put myself out there for a while to be in another relationship. Will I get the questions from my parents and family? Sure. I'll just have to deal with it. I don't want to have to defend myself and give reasons why. I'll probably focus furthering my sign language education. (P7)

I don't think that I should have the mindset of missing out, but it's something that I struggle with. I don't want to have the missing out-lacking mentality. I want to be comfortable with the life I have and leaning on God. It's a process of changing my mindset. (P8)

"Honestly, I would be disappointed and that's just me being truthful…That's always been the goal…to have that family unit. I would not feel like a failure, but I would be disappointed in my achieving that part of life". (P10)

"It's not meeting those goals of mine [marriage]. So, I set my own goals and expectations. That's where I would get the disappointment, not from societal and cultural expectations". (P11)

Some of the participants had good marital examples to desire and mimic and some of the participants did not. Whether the participants had exemplary couples to observe or not, they were still self-encouraged to marry. The reality from statistical data showcasing the diminutive probability of marriage for Black women, especially those who are educated inevitably surface during the interviews, which was explained as disappointment if the statistics will be true for them. Though some of their views of marital examples differed they have maintained their respect for the institution of marriage.

Additional Findings

Some of the additional findings emerged from the interviews that should be noted. Several of the participants expressed a spiritual component that aids in giving them guidance and peace, while single. They explained that spirituality is a key factor in why they have decided to enjoy their singleness and patiently await the arrival of their mate.

"Singleness is viewed as a blessing in the Bible, so it doesn't faze me how society views it. It doesn't faze me as much in terms as how society views it". (P2)

"As far as marriage, I plan to be married at some point. I don't know when. I'll be 31 in April, I don't know if I'll be married in the next 5-10 years, only God knows". (P6)

I think that within the faith-based community there's a little more acceptance-I feel in that community because they understand waiting on God to bring the right person. I think there's that understanding. I think outside of that, people have things to say, not all people. (P8)

Being in a family with married parents, I've seen the ups and downs and have learned that marriage is not be taken lightly. For us, we are a faith-based faith. So, we know to keep God in it and believe that prayer is huge, as well as, compromise. My dad is always joking and flirting with my mom. They respect each other. I see the compromise and that they put God 1st in the marriage. I've watched and learned from my mom how to overcome adversity. (P10)

The additional findings highlight where some of the participants gather their strength and peace to maintain until marriage happens for them. They explained that their spirituality provides comfort during the wait. They also shared that their spirituality aids in not rushing the process because they believe that their marital status is in God's control.

Composite Description of the lived experiences of Unmarried College-Educated Black Women

Moustakas (1994) suggested that a researcher develop a composite description of the themes identified from the individual participant analyses, creating a universal narrative, representing the group. This section details the composite description of the

experience, as outlined in the modified van Kaam phenomenological analysis. This composition will in aid in understanding how the participants as a group experience the phenomenon in study. The objective of this last step in the analysis of the data was to provide a summary of the meanings and essence of the phenomenon being studied.

Based on the themes that emerged from the interviews, the following provides a summation of the essence of the lived experience of unmarried college-educated Black women. The interpretation also provides answers to the research question: "How do single college-educated Black women experience the societal and cultural expectations of marriage?"

The women appeared to be self-aware, hopeful, resilient, and optimistic; however, as the interviews progressed, a sense of uncertainty and discomfort began to emerge. This was particularly present when the women began to speak about familial and personal marital expectations, which provided enough data to create emergent theme: me versus them: marital expectations. This also showed up when the women reflected on their choices not to settle marrying someone who was not of their standard, just for the sake of marrying.

A number of themes emerged throughout the interviews, highlighting the similarities of the lived experience of unmarried college-educated Black women who have not met societal and cultural marital expectations. Those with and without examples of successful familial marriages, appeared to still value marriage. This aids in supporting the development of the theme: perception of marriage.

Some of the women noted they had no good marital examples to mimic. P1 reported that all the marriages that were in her family ended in divorce, except for her aunts' marriages and grandparents, whose marriage ended due to death of her grandfather. P4 explained that a concerted effort has to be made by the individual to not repeat the cycle and better him or herself if they grew up in a single-family household. P11 shared that she was raised in an all-female household, which shaped her perception to believe that she does not need a man to provide for her.

However, there were a few participants that shared that their parents were married and provided an example of a good marriage to mimic. P3 explained that her parents were married until her father died and in her childhood household, she was raised to believe that marriage was expected for her as an adult. P7 informed that her parents are still married and expects marriage for her. P8 shared that her parents are married and also expects for her to marry; her mom even suggested that she should consider dating outside of her race and maybe her chances of marriage would broaden. P9 spoke very affectionately about her parents and her grandparents' marriage. She shared that her parents were married until her father died. They both wanted to marriage for her but encouraged her to take her time, not to rush the process. P10 spoke candidly about her parents' happy marriage and explained that her parents still flirt with one another. She continued to say that her parents expect marriage for her but understands that marriage is a serious commitment and wants her to take her time and choose her spouse carefully.

Though there were a few participants who did and some who did not have exemplary marriages to emulate, they still valued marriage and desire it for themselves.

They all provided perspectives of societal and cultural expectations of marriage, in which the participants expressed that they are not at all feeling pressured by society's marital expectation, but some shared that they feel the pressure from their family members. These descriptions of some of the participants perspectives helped in the formation of the theme: societal and cultural marital expectations.

P3 explained that she felt that she was a disappointment to her parents when her sister married but she had not married yet. P7 shared that it is disheartening when family members ask, "why aren't you married yet?" and sometimes questions her sexual orientation. As mentioned earlier, P8 informed that her mom suggested that she should expand the scope of her ideal partner by dating outside of her race, in which, the participant clearly expressed her desire to marry within her race.

Another theme that emerged was: outsider looking in. The participants shared their experiences with being judged by others, who do not fit within their demographic. For example, P3, P4, and P11 informed that several of their loved ones made comments like, "you're lucky" in regard to their singleness. They also shared that their loved ones expressed that they would trade their marital status so that they can live freely and not have to consult anyone before making a decision. P1 and P11 explained that they have been told that have it all together, what more do they want?

On the other hand, some of the participants shared that their loved ones often try to set up blind dates or ways for them to meet guys. P3, P6, and P10 expressed that this sometimes makes them feel as if being single and happy is not realistic. They shared that

it is often annoying and that they loved ones are often wrong about the type of guy the participants will find attractive.

Therefore, the next theme emerged: single and not so happy. The participants expressed that their singleness is oftentimes assumed to be the fault of the participants. P2, P4, and P7 shared that they have been asked why they are not married, suggesting that it is the participants are the cause of their singleness. P3 informed that she has been asked if she is crazy because she is too attractive to not be married. P11 explained that she is availing herself to being asked on a date by attending social events and not living as a hermit; however, it has not seemed to work in her favor. She, P9, P12, and other participants informed that education matters. They explained that some men are intimidated by their independence that sometimes stems from their educational attainments. The participants shared that males have said to them that they are unapproachable because of their educational accomplishments. However, the participants feel this is unfair because they were given the opportunity to decide that for themselves.

The participants also shared that they thought they would be married by a certain age. P1, P3, P8, and other participants expressed that they thought would be married in their 20s. P2, P3, P9, and P11 are in their 40s and stated that they have surpassed their predicted age of marriage. However, the participants of this study have found happiness in their singleness, which led to the emergent theme: single and happy.

All twelve of the participants explained that they have come to accept their singleness and if they never marry they will not be sorrowful or at least that is what they hope will continue as they get older. The participants shared that they experience

freedom, not having to consult a spouse or prepare dinner for a family or consider someone else in decision making. They expressed confidence within by explaining that they will not settle to be with someone who does not meet their standards for the sake having a spouse. P6, P10, and P12 informed that they are enjoying their singleness and will marry when the right opportunity presents itself, not to merely be married.

Summary

In this chapter, I offered extensive excerpts of the participants lived experiences in their attempt to cope with not meeting societal and cultural marital expectations. The narrative responses garnered from the interview data were used to address the specific themes that were identified as an area of concern for this population of women. Single and happy emerged as the most significant theme supporting the importance in addressing, not only the quality of life being single but also in addressing the phenomenon of not meeting societal and cultural marital expectations for this marginalized group of women.

The participants shared that along with blaming, judgements, unmet spousal standards and timeclocks, which could cause self-doubt and depressive symptoms; these unmarried college-educated Black women are living fulfilled lives and are still hopeful to marry but not pressured. These concerns along with the interpretation of the results, the limitations of the research, the suggestions for further studies, and the recommendations for social changes will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the findings presented in Chapter 4 about the lived experiences of unmarried college-educated Black women, particularly as they pertain to societal and cultural marital expectations. In Chapter 2, I reported research showed that while the literature on unmarried women, in general, is replete, there is a significant gap in research on the unmarried college-educated Black women population. There is limited research on the unmarried, college-educated, Black women who have not met societal and cultural marital expectations.

This study not only provides an understanding of the lived experiences of unmarried college-educated Black women but can also provide awareness to society concerning the plight of this marginalized group to enhance societal and cultural sensitivity to this population of women.

I conducted face-to-face interviews with 12 unmarried college-educated Black women between December 4, 2017 and December 21, 2017. I recruited all of the volunteers for this study by posted flyers of this study. I employed phenomenological research to explore the lived experiences unmarried college-educated Black women in the

northern Florida, urban area. For this study, I also explored societal and cultural marital expectations for this population of women. Rich interpretations were employed to understand the phenomenon.

I employed a purposeful sampling criterion, in which, volunteers met the criteria of (a) never having married, (b) identifying as a member of the Black race, (c) identifying as heterosexual orientation, (d) earning at least an associate degree, (e) being between the ages of 30 – 50, and (f) using English as their primary language (See Appendix B). I verified the criteria for participation in this study by each volunteer's completion of a screening questionnaire.

During the analysis six themes emerged. They were: (a) me versus them: marital expectations, (b) outsider looking in, (c) single and not so happy, (d) single and happy, (e) perception of marriage. Within the main themes, 12 subthemes emerged (Appendix D).

By using van Kaam's modified version of Moustakas's interpretative phenomenological method, I was able to present the essence of the lived experiences of unmarried college-educated Black within the theoretical framework of intersectionality. I used the theory of intersectionality to explain the importance of including the social constructs of: age, gender, and socioeconomic status when study Black women.

In the interviews, study participants shared their perspectives and experiences of living as unmarried college-educated Black women in society and cultural that expects marriage for adults. The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed and categorized into appropriate themes and subthemes.

I will present the six themes and 12 subthemes in this chapter I will also discuss the limitations of the study, future research recommendations, implications for social change, and conclusion.

Interpretation of the Findings

Living in a society and culture that still honors marriage and expects marriage for adults (Cherlin, 2013) can be challenging for unmarried Black women,especially when the probability of marriage for this group of women is the lowest compared to women of other races (Hurt, 2013). When education is added to Black women the probability of marriage is even less (Pew Research Center, 2014). In the literature review, I presented the fact that those college-educated Black women who are unmarried face the possibilities of not fulfilling societal and cultural marital expectations and the emotional challenges due to their marital status (St. Vil, 2015).

The experiences of 12 never-married, college-educated, Black women provided a glimpse into their world of living in a society and culture that expects marriage for them. Many of the participants focused more on their personal goals, like self-insightfulness and acceptance, education, career, freedoms, and personal marital goals and expectations. The following is my interpretation of the findings, in comparison to the previous studies.

Theme 1: Me versus Them: Marital expectations

This theme is a derivative of the lived experiences that most of the participants shared during the interviews about not meeting others marital expectations. There were three subthemes that emerged from the personal accounts of the participants. I indicated in the literature review that society expects marriage for adults. The never-married,

college-educated, Black women of this study are members of a race who has the lowest

percentage of marriages, compared to other races (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017), yet they

are still expected to marry. The participants purported that the ideals of marriage and

expected age of marriage has changed from generation to generation (Copen et al., 2012).

As reported in the literature review, Copen et al. (2012) and Larson (2012) provided

expected marital age ranges for women of various races, which is inconsistent with the

age range and data garnered from the participants of this study. The participants stated

that they did not marry at earlier ages because they were focused on educational

achievements and career advancements. However, Raley et al. (2015) reported that Black

women seeking marriage at a later age have an even smaller chance of marrying and a

more likely chance of divorce in comparison to Black women who marry younger; this is

consistent with the data obtained from this study. Nevertheless, some of the participants

felt the pressure to meet societal and cultural expectations; whereas, some of the

participants had opposing feelings.

Subtheme 1: Generation versus generation. Four participants spoke directly

about the generational differentiations of marital expectations. They explained that the

older generation valued marriage more and believes that marriage is obligatory for adults

and should primarily happen in young adulthood, especially for young adult women,

which indicates consistency from a previous study conducted by Cherlin (2014).

However, the participants believed that the younger generation is more accepting of

singlehood due to more advancements for Black women. They shared that Black women

are earning more degrees and holding higher positions in the workforce than before,

which is progressive and therefore excuses those women who are single because they chose personal educational achievements and career goals first. For example, P1 stated, "it's kind of acceptable for [millennial] women to get married later… It's like, oh okay, she's working on, you know, school or she's working on her career". Although, this generation of women is choosing to marry later, this is further supporting the literature review that degreed Black women are less likely to marry (Raley et al., 2015). Also, reported in the literature review, even the institution of marriage has changed with newer generations, such as same sex marriages (Pinsof & Haselton, 2016); therefore, it is not shocking that marital views and expectations of the younger generations differ from older generations.

Subtheme 2: No persuasion. This subtheme emerged because several of the participants explained they are not permitting others to dictate their marital goals. This is where inconsistency with the literature presents, because according to Barros-Gomes and Baptist (2014), Black women reportedly feel obligated to meet the expectations of their culture because of their collectivistic mindset. Four of the 12 participants stated that not meeting marital expectations of society does not negatively affect them. During the interview, P2 quickly stated that it "doesn't faze me." She explained that she values her singleness because singleness is seen as a blessing in the Bible. She also explained that societal and cultural marital expectations affect her because she has watched mothers around her and has seen how demanding being a wife and a mother is and is not quite sure if she is ready for the fulltime commitment. This was very honest information that P2 shared because even though she is not allowing society to pressure her into marriage,

she allowed herself to be vulnerable in admitting that even though she desires marriage, she may not be cut out for the varying spousal roles. This adds credence to one of the contradictory teachings within the culture that encouraged Black women to become more independent so that they will be self-sufficient, not reliant on a man (Metz, 2105).

The other participants informed that they are also not defined by societal marital expectations and norms. Further, they indicated that they operate and are motivated by their own set of personal goals and will not give society and their culture the opportunity to make them feel bad about their singleness. They will focus on what they can control and accept what is and what will be because they operate on their own terms.

Subtheme 3: The pressure is on. These three participants explained that they are currently experiencing or have experienced the pressure from society or family to get married. This speaks to the obligatory mindset of Black women, that they must uphold cultural marital expectations; they must marry a provider, a man who will take care of them (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014). They expressed that sometimes societal and familial marital expectations can be difficult to handle because they have or had parents that are married and feel that they parents expect the same for them. P5 explained that because marriage is expected, it is entered lightly and neither spouse has been prepared to take on spousal roles. She feels ill-equipped to be a wife. She has an idea how of the expected roles should be carried out but is unsure if it is accurate or enough to sustain a healthy marriage because society does not teach those important entities but still expects marriage to happen for all adults.

However, P3 explained that familial expectations for her to marry makes her feel like she is a disappointment because she has not fulfilled their marital expectations for her. This is important to note, because Black women are reportedly more likely to suffer with depressive symptoms than any other race of women due to their oppressive history and not yet resolved racial discriminations that they and their male counterparts endure daily (Dingfelder, 201; St. Vil, 2015). The negative effects of race for this group of women also supports why intersectionality theory was employed for this study, indicating that race is one of the social constructs that must be included when studying Black women (Schug et al., 2015), which will be discussed later in the chapter.

The findings in this theme were primarily inconsistent with the reviewed literature, as Barros-Gomes and Baptist (2014) and Metz (2015) illustrated that Black women feel the need to marry because of cultural marital expectations. However, majority of the participants indicated that they are not allowing society or culture to dictate their marital status. These women stated that their mental health is not negatively impacted by their singleness, and they are not permitting the marital expectations of others to pressure them.

Theme 2: Marriage in the Black Community.

This theme emerged as a result of one of the interview questions that asked each participant what they have learned about marriage in the Black community. The participants provided insight grounded in how they were raised. The participants that were raised in a household where their parents were married to one another shared that they were raised to believe in and expect marriage and there was no other option. They

explained that they are grateful to have an example of love and marital longevity. P10 shared that not only were her parents married, but she has several family members who exemplified extensive marital commitment. Also, P10 explained that her familial marital examples helped to shape her mindset about life and marriage, to know that it requires hard work and helps to positively rear children.

However, the participants who were raised in single-parent households believed that marriage is not necessary to be successful. Regardless of how the participants were raised, many of them believed that marriage is not taken seriously within the Black community. P6 and P11 shared that many Blacks marry out of obligation because they procreated outside of marriage, that it was not true love; it was "the right thing to do," which eventually ended in divorce or involved cheating because the couples were not married for love but for responsibility.

P2 and P8 spoke about interracial marriages when they were asked about marriages in the Black community. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Black women reportedly feel more obligated to marry within their race; however, Black men do not and marry outside of their race 25%, in comparison to 9% for Black women (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Wang, 2012). P2 stated, "Black men are now choosing women of other races to marry because they don't want to be with a black woman." P8 explained that she wants to marry within her race; however, she understands that marrying a Black man may not be as easy because Black men are looking elsewhere. She has even experienced it firsthand within her household as she has a brother who dates outside of his race. She stated that she is not against interracial marriages; however, it is not the type of marriage

she desires. P8 stated that the opportunity to marry within race for Black women is limited because Black men are marrying outside their race.

The perception of marriage in the Black community for these participants is influenced by the fact that some men of their race are not committed to marrying within their race, which supports the use of intersectionality theory, later discussed in the chapter. Black women are not only having to deal with not meeting societal and cultural marital expectations, but they also have to understand that some Black men will not choose to marry them because they prefer to marry non-Black women. This also speaks to why Black women have the lowest probability of marrying, because there is a deficit (88 Black men to every 100 Black women) in available marriageable Black men due to morality, morbidity, and imprisonment (Hurt, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). P2 shared that she is aware of the lack of availability of Black men for Black women. "There is such a scarcity of black men willing to commit for a Black family". (P2)

Marriage in the Black community as perceived by the participants of this study are formed by various nuances within the Black race. For example, being raised in an intact family household or a single-parent household, infidelity, and interracial marriage, which indicated the need to employ a theoretical framework that will aid in understanding this group of women. These perceptions will add support to the emergent subtheme: Black on Black expectations.

Subtheme 1: Black on Black expectations. According to the participants, there are Black on Black expectations for marriage. These expectations are not solely from family but are from religious affiliations, female to female, and friends. The literature

review explained that Black women were raised under the contradictory notion that they should advance educationally so that they would be able to live independently from a man because during slavery Black men were taken out of the Black family homes, which perpetuated a negative lifestyle within the race (Barros-Gomes et al., 2014). However, Black women were also taught to find a Black man who can provide for them (Metz, 2015). These contradictory upbringings are still true today and evidenced by the shared lived experiences of the participants of this study.

Regardless of the origin of the expectations, the participants are having to manage these expectations daily. Some of them expressed that they are tired of others feeling like they have to be in a relationship in order to be completely happy or fulfilled. For example, P3 and P6 shared that their friends often try to set them up on dates, which the participants appreciate, but it makes them feel that their loved ones do not believe that they are fulfilled in their singleness. P6 stated, "I feel like my thoughts on being single do not match the thoughts of the community. I have friends now who are always trying to set me up with somebody". The behavior of the friends is consistent with the literature, in that, societally and culturally it is expected that adults are married (Cherlin,2013). The loved ones are conditioned to marital expectations; however, the women of this demographic are not. This demographic of women are breaking barriers in education (Digest of Education Statistics, 2016) and not allowing others to influence their marital status.

P7 shared that she has always felt that there was an expectation from her family and Black friends for her to marry, but she does not feel that her White peers expect,

pressure, or question her singleness and why she is not married. She expressed that the expectations and various ways of dating are different from her non-Black friends' viewpoint and because of this, she stopped telling her Black counterparts her manner of dating, such as online dating so that she would not be discouraged. During the interview, I felt that she feels that her Black counterparts want marriage for her but when she chooses various methods of meeting a guy, they ridicule them by asking questions like, "oh my god, you getting on a dating app? People are crazy. Are you sure?" She then informed, "I kind of stop telling them. I'd be like, "oh, I have a blind date" but really it wasn't, I'd be meeting up with someone from the site". This is consistent with the literature review that explained familyism within the Black race that stemmed from the collectivistic mindset of the race (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014); the ability and obligation to function as a team, even if it means intervening in one's *love-life*.

These participants feel like they are expected to be in a relationship, married, or at least dating for others to believe they are happy. However, throughout the interviews the participants expressed that they are grateful that their loved ones want marriage for them, but it can be frustrating and disappointing when the participants do not meet those expectations. Yes, they desire to be married but are not suffering because they are single. According to St. Vil (2015), the psychological well-being of an unmarried individual could be negatively affected; therefore, marriage is advisable. However, the participants of this study reported differently by showcasing that they are not in psychological distress due to their single marital status.

P1 shared that in the Black church, there is an expectation of marriage for adults. She informed that there are conferences held for single individuals in hopes to educate the unmarried on how to become a marriageable partner. She posited that the conferences and sermons spoken over the pulpit indirectly and sometimes directly indicates that adults should be married and if they are not then something is wrong with them.

Some of the findings for this theme are consistent with the literature. For example, the participants explained that marriage is expected within their race, which supports literature that informed about the Black familial unit and how important marriage is (Metz, 2015). Reviewed literature also informed that marriage is not readily available because Black men are marrying 24% more than the 9% of Black women, outside of their race (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014). However, there was inconsistency identified when the participants shared their perspectives on how they do not believe marriage is taken seriously within their race, which indicated a change in mindset from how the Black race previously viewed marriage (Boyd-Franklin & Franklin, 1998).

The assumption of society that single individuals are miserable or "something" is wrong with them led to the next theme: Outsider Looking In. This theme helps to inform others how this group of women feel they are perceived and even treated by those outside of this demographic. The assumptions of others on this group of women is another reason why this study is imperative, to help eradicate the judgments for them.

Theme 3: Outsider Looking In.

Living as unmarried college-educated Black women is a challenging trajectory that perpetuates many negative outcomes such as being stigmatized by others, emotional

issues, and being associated as a group of women who are least likely to marry. Reportedly, Black women are more susceptible to depressive symptoms because of their oppressive history (Watson et al., 2012), which could present because of how they are perceived by others. Many of the participants shared how others have made assumptions about their happiness or lack of happiness.

P2 shared that her singleness has caused people to assume that she would participate in adulterous behavior. She stated that on more than one occasion married women have felt threatened by her, and her singleness has also been a topic of discussion between a married couple. She emphasized that the couple did not personally know her, as the assumption did not derive from interaction with her but from sheer misconception of this participant, which created a negative outlook of her. This speaks to literature that stated that Black women are negatively stereotyped and was historically viewed as sex objects (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Monroe, 2016).

P2 explained that this occurrence made her very uneasy to the point that she will refrain from befriending married individuals because she does not want to experience this again. This typifies how Black women are sometimes viewed in society (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2015; Hurt et al., 2014). They are often objectified and were historically viewed as sex objects for slave masters. Not only are they having to manage being members of the Black race, a race that has a history of oppression and racial discrimination, since they were involuntarily human trafficked to the United States of America, but they are also of female gender, of which, has been in a constant fight for equality, in comparison to men within the United States.

A Black woman is not envied by others; they are often depicted negatively (Holder, Jackson, & Ponterotto, 2015). They have been ridiculed for their physical features since slavery: curvy and voluptuous figures, oversized lips, wide noses, to name a few. The bodies of Black women were perceived as something that can be debased, exploited, penetrated, and subjugated to numerous inhumane conditions. They were even put in exhibits for their larger body parts, specifically Sarah Baartman. She was placed on display at a European "freak show" for years because of her larger buttocks (Mothoagae, 2016). Malcolm X shared his opinion of the treatment of Black women, "the most disrespected person in America is the Black woman, the most unprotected person in America is the Black woman, the most neglected person in American is the Black woman" (Aboulafia & Haley, 1996). So, the outsiders looking in is not a new phenomenon for this group of women. The misconceptions of Black women are ongoing, and they are speaking up about it for eradication.

P1 and P5 informed that they have experienced married women belittling their schedules because they are single. These participants expressed aggravation at the fact that they are assumed to be less busy because they are unmarried. Both participants felt that their singleness is at times envied by married women because they are able to make decisions without consulting anyone else. However, the participants are not akin to the assumptions that they have experienced more time on their hands than others. P4 also shared that others believe that being single means having more financial flexibility; however, the participants disagree with this assumption too. Green-Davis (2017) reported on the assumptions of Black women ascribed to them by society and how these

assumptions can affect the well-being of these women. These outsiders looking in have a misconception about the responsibilities that unmarried Black women endure.

Some participants shared that they have been or assumed to be lesbians because they are never-married individuals; P6 added that she has been assumed to be arrogant. She stated that some married women question why and how she can afford certain things while being single. P6 reported, "So, they look at me like, "if I wasn't able to do it, when I was single, how is she able to do it?" The labels and assumptions of others on this group of women supports the literature that Black women are the most misunderstood women, in comparison to non-Black women (Luke & Oser, 2015).

Many of the participants shared that they have been assumed to not want to marry because they remain single, reportedly by Gordon (2003). There was frustration from the participants when this was broached during the interviews, which leads to the next negative assumption this marginalized group of women experiences, the *angry Black woman.* Green-Davis (2017) reported that Black women are challenged with negative labels because they are understudied; therefore, they are misunderstood. The multiple roles that Black women carryout are reasons to why they may appear to be unhappy; however, this assumption will perpetuate if more research on these women is not ensued. P8 showed great disdain about this label, and it was demonstrated in her tensed body language and bristled tone of voice. She believes that media is greatly responsible for this negative stereotype. Black women have been labeled as angry, "the angry Black woman", women with 'lots of attitude'. Black women have been described as tough, resilient, and intimidating, simply because of their demeanor, also reported by Braboy Jackson &

Mustillo (2001) and Childs (2005). Black women, as a whole, are understudied or studied

from a negative viewpoint. They are often overlooked and because of this, they

frequently experience "intersectional invisibility" (Schug et al., 2015).

Lastly, P11 explained that many of her married female friends says that she is

lucky to be single because she does not have the responsibility of caring for someone

else. Although, P11 understands that her friends are attempting to give her a compliment

about her singleness, she sees it as insensitive because the outsider looking in has what

P11 desires. Again, assuming that she does not have others to care for because she is

unmarried is a misconception (Green-Davis, 2017); just having to care for one's self is a

great responsibility. She wants to share the responsibilities of life with someone else, a

spouse. She wants others to understand that when you tell someone who is single and

desires marriage "do not rush or do not get married or marriage is not all that great" it can

be received as unfair, inconsiderate, and deflating of her hopes and aspirations.

There is consistency with the literature identified in this theme. Literature that

indicated that Black women sexually objectified and are negatively labeled and depicted

in media, often described as intimidating (Braboy Jackson & Mustillo, 2001; Davis &

Tucker-Brown, 2013; Monroe, 2016). This consistency is needs to be eradicated because

no group should be stereotyped, grouping all members as negative. Black women were

not in control of how they were sexually mistreated during slavery; however, the stigma

carries on that they are only good for sexual pleasure (Holder et al., 2015). Men and

women of all races experience anger, but they are not negatively labeled and assumed to

be difficult or untrustworthy, which should be the same for Black women. The

participants are dissatisfied with these labels and assumptions; they just want fair treatment and equal opportunity.

Theme 4: Single and Not So Happy.

This theme provided insight into how this demographic of women are not always satisfied with their marital status. As Gordon (2003) and Wetherell and Reynolds (2003) reported that single women often feel that they are expected to provide causation and reason for their singleness. The women of this study explained that an explanation of their singleness is not a simple answer and the assumptions of others do not aid in cultivating happiness for this group of women. Consistent with the literature, there are several causal factors for the large number of single Black women (Hurt et al., 2014), which does not add to their overall happiness.

Subtheme 1: Blame game. When the participants were asked if there were any disadvantages of being single, they all expressed that they experience some unsatisfied moments of being never-married. However, a few participants told about experiences that made them feel blamed and accused by others for the unmarried identity.

Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, and 11 have all experienced being asked questions like, "why are you single? What is wrong with you?" or statements like, "you're too picky". The participants made it clear that if they knew why they were single, they probably would not be unmarried, as Gordon (2003), Green-Davis (2017), and Parham-Payne (2013) reported. So, when they are asked those questions, they feel as if they are being made to feel that they are the reason for their singleness. P1 was even asked, "why haven't you got this yet". P2 shared that she believes when those questions

are asked, the person asking thinks that she is bossy or mean. This adds more assumptions to those previously mentioned (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Gordon, 2003; Parham-Payne et al., 2013). Many of the participants wonder why they are negatively perceived and blamed for their singleness. They do not like the questions or the accusations. It actually aggravates them as P10 shared, "The way it's asked is as if there's something wrong with me. Because I don't think any asks others, "why are you married?" but, because I'm single, you ask me and that's aggravating". This is consistent with the literature review, which informed that unmarried women do not appreciate the attention, questions, and accusations that they often experience because of their singleness (Buchanan & Selmon, 2008; Gordon, 2003; Wetherell & Reynolds, 2003).

P11 explained that not only are you asked questions about your unmarried marital status, but it is a constant reminder that you are single and without a significant other to share your life. The numerous roles that single Black women demonstrate could be a predictor of subjective well-being (Green-Davis, 2017), in which, constant reminders of their marital status could render this outcome (Dingfelder, 2013). P11 stated, "I also get the, "well, why you not married? Sometimes it gets really hard…not having a confidant to share things with, then I have to share it with my girlfriend [ughhh, laughs]". When individuals already know that they are not fully measuring up to societal and cultural standards and expectations, it can be disheartening when asked questions about their singleness and somewhat blamed for it; this could make life for these women even more challenge, as no negative additions are helpful. The social support of a significant other

will aid in buffering the sometimes-unexplainable questions this demographic of women experience (Braboy-Jackson & Mustillo, 2008; Lincoln & Chae, 2010).

Subtheme 2: Educations matters. For many of the participants, they have experienced male counterparts shying away from pursuing them monogamously because of the educational achievements of this group of women. Educational inequivalence was reported as a reason for singleness amongst degreed Black women because the educational gains of Black women outnumber their male counterparts (Digest of Education Statistics, 2016; Pew Research Center, 2014). The unequal levels of educations Black women and Black men raises the possibility that socioeconomics may vastly differ between the counterparts.

However, many of them are not isolating themselves to only guys who have earned advanced degrees. Green-Davis (2017) informed that higher education has been the familial responsibility of Black women for the past 40 years, which means that the inequivalence of education for Black women versus Black men is understood. Therefore, the women of this demographic understand that they may not meet and marry a Black man with advanced education and they are not opposed to that possible reality. They are not seeing this as problematic, but some Black men are.

P1 stated that she initially desired to be partnered with someone degreed; however, she has since changed her standards, after earning a doctoral degree, and is open to marrying someone with lesser education as she has. She understands that her level of education is largely unmatched within society, so she is willing to marrying someone of unequal education. Although she is willing to marry someone who does not

possess the same scholastic achievements as she does, it is the intimidation factor

associated with the educational accomplishments of this group of women that deters men

from pursuing a relationship with them (Hurt et al., 2014; Monroe, 2016)

P3 and P9 experienced a break up with a significant other because of the uneven

educational achievements within the relationship. P3 shared that she was verbally and

emotionally abused by her significant other because he did not feel that he measured to

her advanced degrees. P9 was engaged to be married but did not wed because she

discovered that her fiancé was not being faithful to her and their relationship. She shared

that he told her that he was intimidated by her education and career. Braboy Jackson &

Mustillo (2001) reported that educational inequivalence is a negative predictor for

intimidation in men. P12 informed that she wants to be given the opportunity to decide if

she is interested enough to reconsider his educational inequalities, but she says that guys

will not pursue any farther once they are aware that she had advanced her education.

Clayton and Moore (2003) reported that Black men suffer from "depletion effect", the

less likelihood of employment for Black men because of racial discrimination. This

further creates differentiation in annual salary earnings for Black men versus Black

women (Jagesic, 2014), which could be the reason for the insecurities of some Black

men.

P7, like other participants, shared that she stopped telling guys, whom she is

interested, that she has a master's degree. She stated that she has learned to divulge that

information later. It has been her experience that guys are intimidated and will not further

a relationship when she told them about her degrees too soon. Although this group of

women are not dissuaded from men who does not possess higher education, they understand that this is concern for men (Braboy Jackson & Mustillo, 2001); therefore, they inform of their educational accomplishments once they feel it will not be a deterrent. P11 has experienced a heartbreak from the demise of her relationship, in which, she was engaged to be married because her fiancé was insecure about her education and career. His discomfort in her achievements led him to cheat, which ruined their marital plans.

As mentioned in the literature review, Black women are intimidating, but add education to those women and they are seen as a force to *not* reckon with (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Braboy Jackson & Mustillo, 2001; Parham-Payne et al., 2013). However, this additional assumption is unfair to this group because they decided to advance their education. This adds understanding to the disparity of marriages within the Black race because Black women are dominating educationally, and this is often perceived as a threat to their male counterparts.

Subtheme 3: Time limit. Some of the participants shared that they are aware that they have surpassed societal and cultural marital age expectancies (Raley et al., 2015). They, themselves, thought that they would be married by now. This realization has caused somewhat of a panic because they never suspected that this would happen to them. In the literature review, marriage is expected in younger adulthood for all races of women and if it is not achieved within that age range, it is unlikely that marriage will happen, especially for degreed Black women (Raley et al., 2015). P1 stated that maybe it will happen for her at a later age, around 40. P3 reported that even her uncle is suggested that she hurriedly gets married so that he can be around to see it.

P4 and P7 mentioned that they had and still have desires to become a mother; however, they are concerned that this hope will not happen for them because they are older than they expected to be for a first-time mother. This is understandably discouraging because they had hopes of marrying and becoming a mother by a certain age; however, life has not granted them their desires yet. So, it is a constant reminder when they are asked, "why aren't you married?" that they have not only met their aspirations and expectations, but neither have they met society's or cultural marital expectations. This is consistent with the literature, which informed that women feel obligated and pressured to meet societal standards and give reasons to why they have not accomplished the expectations (Wetherell & Reynolds, 2003; Cherlin, 2013) Again, the literature indicated that not meeting cultural expectations could result in depressive symptoms for this group because they are loyal and feel obligated to fulfill cultural expectations (Banks, 2011; Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Henry, 2013).

Lastly, P11 explained that her singleness is becoming aggravating because of the questions, no marriage, and no kids. Not because she has not met others marital expectations for her, but because she has not met the marital expectations that she set for herself. Her single marital status could be predicated on the various responsibilities and earlier focuses and accomplishments that she has, which could create self-disappointment, leading to disrupted mental health (Dingfelder, 2013; Green-Davis, 2107), but for now, she is not exhibiting any signs of psychological distress. She shared that she used to be able "blow off" the fact that she was not married because she was much younger and was living her life the way she chose. However, now at 41, she is

feeling like it is no longer her choice; she no longer has control. Now, she's starting to question will marriage happen for her. According to Copen et al. (2012) and Raley (2015), the chances of marriage for her are very slim.

Throughout this theme literature was supported because the participants informed that they often feel blamed for their singleness and often feel that they have to provide reason for their marital status (Gordon, 2003; Wetherell & Reynolds 2003). Furthermore, the literature indicated that educational attainments of Black is a factor in the disparity of marriage within the Black race because Black men are not educationally equivalent to them (Digest of Education Statistics, 2016; Pew Research Center, 2014; Ryan & Bauman, 2016). Lastly, the participants shared that they have surpassed the expected marital age for women, which was indicated in the literature, also (Larson, 2012).

Theme 5: Single and Happy.

This emergent theme manifested as the participants shared that they are not living in a sad and depressed state because of their unwed status, which is inconsistent with what was reported in the literature review that depressive symptoms are more likely for unmarried women, especially unmarried Black women (Barr et al., 2015; Dingfelder, 2013; Martin et al., 2013); they are living satisfied lives and using this time of singleness as an opportunity for more self-discovery, educational advancements, and whatever they choose to do with their time and money. Also, from this theme, three subthemes emerged that will define just how single and happy the participants are while waiting for marriage.

P1 reflected on how she perceives others to treat her because she is unmarried and enjoys it. She informed that people often make comments that she is unique and

intriguing because she is educated, with no children, and unmarried. She stated that others respond to her as if she is "unicorn", which is inconsistent with literature, which posited that Black women are perceived in a negative manner (Childs, 2005; Green-Davis, 2017). P1 appreciates that others see her as admirable. Even though she does desire to marry and has passed the age that she thought she would be married, she still enjoys her singleness because she has more opportunity to mature. This is refreshing information because there is not a wealth of literature that highlights the happiness of Black women, especially unmarried Black women. Barros-Gomes and Baptist (2014), reported on the ambivalence of marriage for some Black women, which correlates with this finding because the participants of that study who expressed an ambivalence to marriage was living a satisfied life with no regret to their single marital status. Much like the study Parham-Payne et al. (2013) conducted, which indicated that 11% of the women respondents did not desire marriage and were satisfied with the singleness. Although the participants of this study desires to marry, it is important to illuminate they are not allowing their single marital status to dictate their level of happiness.

P6 and P10 spoke about the personal growth opportunities that they have experienced and continue to utilize while single. According to P6, "I've learned a lot of things about myself being a single [woman] for so long. There are still some things that I need to work on within myself". This represents literature, which explained that Black women are constantly bettering themselves to be seen and more accepted in a society that is somewhat blind to them (Green-Davis, 2017; Schug et al., 2015). P10 is allowing her time of singleness to prepare her for her marriage partner, "when I do get married I'll be

ready because I already know how to compromise and help my mate. It'll be a more beautiful experience because I've had that time of being single and not reporting to anyone". P2 views her singleness as a gift rather than an issue, "I now view my singleness as a gift as opposed to a hindrance". She also informed that she is able to build more capital while single and enjoys that aspect, "more money [laughter] and it's my money [laughter]". The willingness to wait on the most opportune time and person to marry is consistent with the findings in Parham-Payne et al. (2013) studying. The respondents (97%) of that study desired to marry but wanted to finish their educational endeavors first, which indicates that the participants from this study and Parham-Payne et al. (2013) are single and happy. They are satisfied with the marital status until the opportunity of marriage avails.

Subtheme 1: Confident. It might be assumed that this demographic of women is living unfulfilled lives and may self-blame for their singleness because others expect marriage for them or tend to blame these women for their unmarried status. However, the each one of the participants informed that unmarried college-educated Black women are self-aware, self-accepted, and confident while being single; this is consistent with Parham-Payne et al., (2013) research study.

P1 affirmed her confidence by stating, "I'm a good catch". She understands that she is valuable and would be an asset to any man she deems worthy of her time. She demonstrates self-worth and patience to wait on the right person of interest. This is supported in the literature, which indicated that Black women are not pressured to marry and that some will choose to remain unmarried because it is their personal prerogative

(Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Green-Davis, 2017; Parham-Payne et al., 2013). She informed previously that once upon a time she desired to only date a man of equal or greater education; however, she has come to realize that her list of must-haves may need to be altered. Nonetheless, she is self-assured in her abilities of self-sufficiency. P8 shares the same sentiments as P1, and she is very proud of her personal accomplishment, "I have to say that I don't make 6 figures, but I'm proud of the fact that my debts are paid. I can take care of myself." These women chose to focus on their education and careers first; they are confident in who they are because they have done as the elders of their culture suggested, which was to advance educational to ensure self-sufficiency, just in case a husband is not available to provide (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Painter & Shafer, 2011; Parham-Payne et al., 2013).

The participants mentioned that they are not willing to settle for the sake of getting married. P2 informed that in her time of singleness, she will not allow loneliness to cause her to settle. She stated, "a huge part of why I'm still single is my refusal to settle for anything". She and many of the participants are aware that they could be married presently if they chose to "lower their standards". It is confidence, the self-assurance that Black women embody (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Green-Davis, 2017; Parham-Payne et al., 2013), which differs from the literature, which reported that Black women are more susceptible to depressive symptoms as unmarried individuals (Dingfelder, 2013). However, their singleness has not made them so miserable that they feel the need to alter their expectations in a mate. P10 stated that there are somethings that are non-negotiable, such as spirituality and parenting. The participants are satisfied

with singleness and will not jeopardize their happiness for the sake being able to meet

societal and cultural marital expectations; there is consistency in the data for Barros-

Gomes and Baptist (2014) and Parham-Payne et al., (2013).

P4 informed that her self-confidence has been strengthen in her singleness after

leaving unhealthy relationship. She no longer will allow herself to be emotionally abused

for the satisfaction of a relationship. P5 purported that when a person truly loves herself,

she will not accept unfair treatment, specifically, "cheating". She stated that

unfaithfulness is not permissible and if she has to choose remaining single over being

cheated on, she will choose singleness. Again, further supporting the notion that Black

women are not bound by societal marital expectations (Barros-Gomes, 2104) and are not

suffering psychologically due to their marital status (Dingfelder, 2013).

Not only are these participants upholding requisites for a mate, they are also not

allowing the opinions of others to determine their self-perception because they have

created a sustainable lifestyle for themselves (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Painter &

Shafer, 2011; Parham-Payne et al., 2013). P6 shared that statements have been made to

her suggesting that she must have some malfunctions causal to her singleness.

Nevertheless, her response to the assumptions and accusations is "I guess so, in your eyes

[chuckles] but, I know that it's not [me]. And, I'm not going to debate you on it". She

made it clear that she is not going to allow others to define her happiness.

P9 resolved her singleness to "what will be, will be". She believes that if marriage

is supposed to happen for her, then it will happen in the time that it is supposed to

happen. She, too, is not willing to rush into marriage for the sake of being married. She, like the other participants, wants what is real and long-lasting.

Confidence for P11 was rooted in how she was raised. She informed that she was raised by a single mother and grandmother. She saw them thrive independently and never questioned that she could and would do the same. She is proud to inform that she provides for herself and is not in need of a spouse to help her sustain. P11 informed that she desires a mate for the companionship, not to financially care for her. These personal accounts are consistent with what was taught to Black women during and after slavery, to be able to live independent from a man because he may not be around to provide (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Painter & Shafer, 2011; Parham-Payne et al., 2013).

Subtheme 2: Living with no restrictions. P1 stated that she enjoys her singleness. P2 indicated, "I love being single". P4 shared that she will remain single if that means that she will be controlled by a spouse who is intimidated by feminism.

All of the participants expressed that their single marital status affords them freedoms. Freedom to travel when and wherever, eat when and whatever, advance their education without having to consult someone else first, and to just have the liberty to make decisions about whatever they choose. The word "freedom" was a key word in emergent theme. The participants realize the possible restrictions that marriage might require, so they are allowing themselves to be single and happy with not restrictions until marriage comes, in which, they are willing to relinquish their freedom to. The women of this study help to showcase the importance of priorities. They were focused on educational and career advances before getting married, this too, is predicated on the

passed-down advise of their cultural elders that encouraged independent-ability (Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Painter & Shafer, 2011; Parham-Payne et al., 2013).

P10 informed that married individuals have mentioned the lack of freedom they have because of marriage. "I've spoken with several married individuals and they say that they sometimes miss their alone time and not having to report to anyone". She stated that she has learned to appreciate her singleness even more.

P5 stated, "I don't have to ask permission or consult with anyone for that. I've never been married, but those are the things that I think about when being in a marriage". P11 provided examples of living with no restrictions, as she stated that if she desires to start a business or relocate should can without having to ask the opinion of anyone else.

Subtheme 3: Not on a timeclock. Just as Parham-Payne et al. (2013) indicated in their study, Black women are choosing when they want to marry. This goes against literature that informed there is a certain age range of marriage and if Black women surpass that age, the will likely not marry (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014). Most of the participants are no living by the marital age expectancy from others. The participants are allowing themselves time to mature and enjoy their singleness before they commit to becoming a wife. These women understand that with marriage comes responsibilities and expectations (Green-Davis, 2017). P1 desires to be married until death, so she is enjoying her valuable time while she is single and not living by a time table. Furthermore, P2 purported that this is a really great time for her to be a single woman, who is 44 with no children. She is able to commit to others at her leisure, whether that is church activities,

friends, or work. She realizes that they she is not obligated or expected to perform or take care of a dependent.

P11 is also in her 40s and informed that she is obviously not trying to meet societal expectations of marriage for her because she is 41 and never-married, also with no children. P8 indicated that she it is okay if she marries at a later age. These participants are not living on a timeclock. Raley et al. (2015) would probably advise against marrying at a later age, as their study informed that unmarried Black women 40 and older will probably not marry because their chances of marrying become more narrow. Therefore, age is an important component of marriage for women, specifically Black women, highlighting the need to employ intersectionality theoretical framework, which is further discussed in later in the chapter.

Inconsistency with the literature was identified in this theme. Literature indicated that Black women are more susceptible to depressive symptoms because of their oppressive history and unlikeliness of marriage (Henry, 2013; Martin et al., 2013). However, the participants explained that they are steadily improving themselves by employing self-assessments and seeking betterment of self. They also indicated that they are enjoying the freedoms that singlehood allows; not having to consult anyone else on their decisions, was the most commonality. The participants informed that they are happy with who they are and what they have accomplished and will remain this way even if marriage does not avail itself. This level of confidence could be intimidating to others (Braboy Jackson & Mustillo, 2001; Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013; Monroe, 2016);

however, the women of this group are not allowing the insecurities of others to cause themselves to shrink.

Theme 6: Perception of Marriage.

This theme developed because of the commonalities amongst all of the participants, that is, they all believe that marriage is beautiful and an institution they desire at some point in life. This is consistent with the literature review indicating that the Black race still perceives marriage as honorable, even though the marital rate for them is the lowest compared to other races (Barros-Gomes et al., 2014; Metz, 2015). Therefore, it is imperative to capture the perspectives of marriage for these women. Although, they expressed that marriage is honorable and desirable, they have various outlooks and reluctances for this cherished and societally expected institution. The variation in perspectives are partly derived from the contradictory teachings from elders within the Black race (Metz, 2015). These varying perspectives led to two subthemes: marriage is still in my view and what if I don't get married?

During the interview the participants shared their feelings about marriage. P1 explained that she thinks marriage is beautiful; however, because she has not had examples of lasting marriages she is a little unsure if she will have marriage longevity. The lack of positive marital examples is indicated in the literature review, which stated that there is a scarcity of marriage, with the highest divorce rate, in comparison to other races, within the Black race (Pew Research Center, 2014). P1 mentioned that marriage could be simplified in terms of a contract, which can be broken. The ability and

frequency of breaking a contract is unsettling for her, making her question if marriage is worth doing. However, even in her uncertainties, she still wants to marry.

P2 sees marriage as a beneficial union. She believes that marriage will prosper more if the couple has likeness in visions for their family. She informed that she is not willing to marry just for the sake of being married but desires to marry someone who she can dream with, work as a partner towards betterment for their family. She, too, hopes for marriage one day. However, she is not self-loathing if marriage does not happen for her (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Green-Davis, 2017; Parham-Payne et al., 2013). Like P2, P4 desires marriage for more than what is permissible during marriage, such as sex. She desires to marry, not only for the physical and pleasurable aspects but the meaningful and growth opportunities that spousal support can provide. This speaks to the what was highlighted in the literature that marriage is expected within the Black race, continuing togetherness by marrying within the Black race, and marrying for spousal provisions to aid in raising a successful family (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Henry, 2013; Parham-Payne et al. 2013).

Several of the parents of the participants were married while they were raised, in turn, shaping their ideals of what marriage is and should be; therefore, the parents were aiming to perpetuate cultural teachings of togetherness (Metz, 2015). P3 and P10 spoke about the benefits of being raised by married parents. P3 explained that even though she has seen the demise of several marriages, she has also seen longevity in marriage between her parents and because of that she is able to look at marriage and still be hopeful that it will happen and be successful for her. P10 shared that she has learned by

watching her parents that marriage is not easy and takes work from both individuals. She also purported that faith-spirituality worked as glue to keep her parents' marriage connected (Profit, 2018). She indicated that faith is what she and her future husband will need, as well, to cultivate and sustain a healthy marriage. These participants correlate with what the elders of the Black race taught about familyism and togetherness. Collectivism has been a key component of the Black race, which the elders encouraged as a means of promoting the importance of family and connectedness (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014).

Very similar to P10, P5 also desires to incorporate God into her marriage. She is looking forward to maturing and learning and compromising with her spouse. She stated that she has witness the divorce of several marriages, and it mainly stemmed from marrying too young. P5 wants to take her time and get to know her future spouse and learn each other's love languages to aid in building a strong foundation for a lovely lasting marriage. This mindset was passed down from older generations that fortified females of the younger generation to advance educationally to be able to make a satisfactory lifestyle (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Painter & Shafer, 2011; Parham-Payne et al., 2013).

P8 explained that it is important to not look for marriage as a completion for yourself. She purported that true wholeness will only come from God. P8 believes that if individuals enter marriage thinking that it will complete them, they are entering with the wrong perspective and could be headed in the wrong the direction. However, Hurt et al. (2013) reported that marriage is valuable to the well-being of Black women, physically,

psychologically, and financially, which helps to counteract stress that could develop mental health complications, such as depression. Although the opinion of P8 is understandable, it contradicts reported literature.

P11 and P12 stated that marriage is beautiful, desirable, and can be rewarding. However, the participants are not interested in rushing into the institution too swiftly. P11 shared that she wants to marry so that she can have someone to share her life with and grow old with. She believes that marriage is something that everyone should have the opportunity of experiencing. P12 believes that if a person finds that right person for them then marriage is beautiful and will work; however, she believes that both individuals have to be willing to put in the necessary work. Cherlin (2013) reported that America has a high divorce, but Americans still revered the institution of marriage. However, this would indicate that marriage is not an easy commitment, but one that involves deliberate action to sustain.

Subtheme 1: Marriage still in my view. The various perspectives of marriage, from the participants, led to this subtheme because many of the participants informed that marriage is hard work. Although, Barros-Gomes and Baptist (2014) reported that there are some Black women who are ambivalent to marriage, this study indicates that marriage is still desirable for some Black women. Moreover, the participants explained that they thought they would be married by now and have seen some failed marriages along the journey of life; however, they all still find marriage intriguing enough to still have marriage in their view.

P3 purported that marriage might appear scary to some people because maybe they have seen failed marriages or were never exposed to marital relationship examples or maybe they have been heartbroken from a failed relationship of their own. Whatever the case, she believes that a healthy marriage is achievable. Moreover, she shared that she still has a *cinderella* idea of marriage. Parham-Payne et al. (2013) reported that there are Black women who have "traded in the picket fence" and are not looking for to a fairytale lifestyle. She believes that even though there maybe apprehension, initially, marriage is worth it. The psychological well-being said to be a derivative of marriage (Hurt et al., 2013) is a beneficial attraction to marriage, making the union *worth it*.

Like many of the participants, P7 informed that she would love to marry and have a companion that she can wake up to every morning. P11 described marriage as "beautiful bond to have". She plans to experience it one day, hopefully sooner than later. According to literature, the social support from a spouse helps to safeguard against the stressors that individuals manage day-to-day (Martin et al., 2013; Seccombe & Ishii-Kuntz, 1994). Therefore, to have the companionship and social support of a marriage-partner is a valid desire for anyone, especially women of this demographic who have prioritized their educational achievements and careers to prepare themselves to be an asset to a spouse.

The participants have clearly stated that they all want to marry one day. This is consistent with literature that states that marriage is respected by many, specifically within the Black race because of their collectivistic culture (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Cherlin, 2013; Henry, 2013; Parham-Payne et al. 2013). However, based on

statistical data (Raley et al., 2015; US Census of Bureau of Marital Status, 2010), it is not certain that their hopes of marriage will be fulfilled, which is why this study would be remised to not share the perspectives of the participants concerning if they do not get married. This is really the crux of the study because this possibility could be some of their realities.

Subtheme 2: What if I do not get married? This is a very important question, in that, reportedly Black women have the least likelihood of marriage (Green-Davis, 2017; Hurt et al., 2014). Just because they desire it, does not mean their wish will be granted. The women of this study all stated that they have asked themselves this question.

P1 and P2 stated that although marriage is desirable, not marrying will not negatively affect them. This brings attention to literature, which reported that Black women are the most susceptible to depressive symptoms because of their oppressive history in America (Henry, 2013; Martin et al., 2013), but the participants of this study are not allowing the statistical prediction of marriage for them to negatively impact them. P2 posited, "I don't think that's going to make or break anything for me". P3 reported that thought of not marrying used to bother her; however, "I started coming into terms with it myself…if it doesn't happen then, I'm ok; I'm alright". Evolutionary psychology would probably say that the historical upsets of this race of women have made them resilient and prepared them for the possible unmet marital goals (Henry, 2013; Martin et al., 2013).

Some the participants have come to a personal resolve within themselves about not marrying (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014; Parham-Payne et al., 2013). They realize

that it is not something did or did not do, it just was not their destiny. For the most part they are not grabbling with this undesirable possibility. Nonetheless, there are some participants who shared that they are not okay with the idea that they might never marry.

P4 and P10 expressed that they would be disappointed because marriage is something that they greatly desire because they want a family. P10 feels like, "it would be a waste of a good wife". The hopefulness that she shared about being a good wife differs from what Parham-Payne et al. (2013) reported from their participants. P10 explained that she would not feel like a failure, but she will be disappointed because that was the plan she created for herself. P7 indicated that she has had this thought of not marrying several times and if her current relationship does not develop into marriage, she will not date for a while because she deeply desires it and her parents, family, and friends desire it for her too. The relationship that P7 is currently in supports the literature that social support from a significant other is a beneficial component of a relationship (St. Vil, 2015), which adds understanding to why marriage is desirable for many people.

P8 informed that the thought of "missing out" on marriage is a struggle for her, thus, she is not exhibiting ambivalence to marriage, she greatly desires the institution (Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014). She continued to say that she does not want to look at not marrying as lacking or missing out; she wants to be accepting and comfortable with whatever God allows or has planned for her life. However, she has not reached the point of acceptance, yet. Like many of the other participants, P11 stated that she would be disappointed if she does not experience marriage, not disappointed because she did not fulfill societal or cultural marital expectations, but because she did not fulfill her own

goal for her life. This is important to note because she is not living by the standards and expectations of society, which correlates with the findings from Parham-Payne et al. (2013) study.

The overall understanding of the lived experiences of these participants based on the themes and their relationships to the literature reviewed is both agreeable and disagreeable. As the literature stated that Black women has the highest percentage of single marital status (Pew Research Center, 2014). The reviewed literature indicated that singleness for Black women was high due to mortality, comorbidity, and incarceration rates for Black men, as well as, unequal educational attainments, which was evidenced from what the participants informed of their lived experiences and perspectives (Parham-Payne et al., 2013). The literature also reported that Black women feel a sense of obligation to their culture (familial unit) to marry and to marry within their race. Those findings were consistent with the literature (Henry, 2013). However, there were inconsistencies when some of the participants shared that they are not allowing their single marital status to affect their mental health (St. Vil, 2015); they are living freely and enjoying their single lives until marriage happens for them. The findings were also inconsistent with the literature, in that, that most of the participants are not desiring marriage to meet the expectations of others (society or culture), only their own expectations, as Henry (2013) stated this was the mindset for all Black women.

The findings of this study indicated the importance of this study because this group of women is often overlooked and understudied, which is where the gap in literature exist. This group of women informed that even though the odds are stacked

against them concerning marital opportunity, they still desire it (Barros-Gomes, 2014; Green-Davis, 2017; Parham-Payne, 2013). They are not allowing the failed marriages of others or the diminutive statistical probability of marriage for them to deter them from their marital goals. They still believe in the institution of marriage and believe that marriage is beautiful. They informed that marriage is what they aspire to and if marriage does not happen for them, they will be a little disappointed but have already accepted that this maybe their reality, singleness. The most important thing to take from these findings is that this group of women are determined to work towards their goals (evidenced in academia and career achievements, evidenced in their resilience, Barros-Gomes & Baptist, 2014), self-accepting even in a society that has a misconception of them, and happy regardless of their present or future marital status.

Theoretical Framework and Findings Interpretation

The creator of Intersectionality theory posits that the social constructs of race, gender, class, and age are necessarily inclusive when studying Black women (Crenshaw, 2000; Parham-Payne et al., 2013). However, the demographic of women for this study creates an even further demanded focus on these social constructs because they are important entities to why this group of women maybe unmarried. Not only are these women members of a race with an oppressive history, they are also members of the female gender (which has its own discriminatory past and present protests); the educational attainments of these women set them in a different socioeconomic bracket, and because of their educational pursuits, they are a little more aged, bringing in the last important construct of age.

Race. One of the key explanations for singleness amongst this group of women is their race. Marrying within race is a desire for the participants of this study, in which Barros-Gomes (2014) mentioned that Black women feel obligated to marry within race as an ode to their male influencers. However, interracial marriages are on the up rise but not for Black women, for Black men (Hurt et al. 2014). P8 shared that she desires to marry within, but her brother only dates outside of his race. Her mom has also insinuated that she would probably be married by now if she would open her desire to marry outside of her race. However, P8 is persuaded to modify her standards of an ideal mate for the sake of marriage. The lived experience that P8 shared directs attention to the fact that Black women are sometimes not the first choice for Black men, which further lessens their chance at marriage. They are not only overlooked by their male counterparts but are reportedly invisible to other men outside of their race, which is referred to as intersectional invisibility (Schug et al., 2015).

Schug et al. (2015) suggested through intersectional invisibility that Black women are underrepresented in research, amidst their daily discriminatory encounters, which demonstrates that they are often unnoticed, overlooked, invisible. Therefore, this group of Black women who represent the premise of this study, experience intersectional invisibility even within race. Intersectional invisibility lends credence to the use of intersectionality theoretical framework for this study.

Gender. Women of all races have been fighting for equality for years. However, Black women have had weightier fight because of their race and intersectional invisibility. Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) posited that Black women reported that

they have to work extra hard to be heard in the workforce. They are not only fighting for race equality, they are also fighting for race-gender equality. Wetherell and Reynolds (2003) reported that unmarried women are often questioned about their singleness, which makes them uncomfortable. This was also shared by many of the study-participants that they are also questioned about their unmarried marital status. They informed that they often feel accused or blamed for their singleness. However, they might also experience judgments if they are the relationship pursuers and not wait on men to approach them, which could be perceived as too forward. So, they remain single Black women. Due to the scarcity of marriageable Black men, Black women are encouraged to pursue higher education to afford a financially pleasurable lifestyle for themselves (Metz, 2015). Because of the dearth of marriages within the Black race, Black women are earning more degrees than their male counterparts (Digest of Education Statistics, 2016) further separating them from Black men because of uneven educational achievements between the two. This directs attention to the next social construct, class.

Class. Class or Socioeconomic status is largely indicative of educational achievements amongst this demographic of women. When socioeconomic status is unequal, specifically when the woman is financially earning more, it can be a determining factor in her marital status. Reportedly, men are sometimes intimidated by educated or career driven women (Braboy Jackson, 2001; Hurt et al., 2014), which could act as a deterrent in approaching this caliber of women. P9 shared that her educational gains and successful career were specific influencers to the demise of her relationship

with her fiancé. She shared that her fiancé was uncomfortable with her achievements, in which, he honestly explained to her.

Jagesic (2014) and Raley et al. (2015) reported that the inequivalence of class or annual salaries often creates insecurities in Black men because the men feel that they cannot posture as the sole provider for these women. However, the unequal socioeconomic status has ties to racial discrimination that Black men often encounter and because of these unfortunate occurrences they sometimes experience incarceration, mortality, and comorbidities; hence, the ratio of 88 marriageable Black men to every 100 marriageable Black women perpetuates (Hurt, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

Moreover, living without restrictions also speaks to the social construct of socioeconomics because these marginalized women have worked hard to earn their education and careers they have, which affords them the opportunity to be independently financially secure. This factor also adds to the need for the intersectionality theoretical framework. So, all three constructs are identified here, providing better understanding to the plight of these women, leading to the last construct, age.

Age. Age is often how people measure the life goals and accomplishments, and it is no different for this demographic of women. Still, they are allowing themselves to be happy while single and not living by the expectations of others. P11 shared that in her younger years, she allowed herself to enjoy the freedom of singleness and accomplished some of her life goals before she begin to desire marriage. However, she never thought that she would still be a never-married woman, in the 40s. Now, that she has surpassed the age range of when she thought she would be married, she is beginning to wonder if

she will ever marry. This possible reality of hers is not what she hopes will be her fate; however, she is not letting her single marital status define her identity and life-purpose. Like P11, many of the participants of this study shared similar experiences about marrying by a certain age, as they explained that *age* encompasses a gamut of barriers, one being, birthing a child. The participants shared that they desire to have children; however, their age maybe causal to them not bearing a child. The social construct of age supports the need to employ the intersectionality theory.

Therefore, when studying unmarried degreed Black women, race, gender, socioeconomics, and age are vital entities warranting inclusion. These imperative social constructs aid in understanding the plight of this demographic of women, which is the premise of intersectionality theory. Employing this theoretical framework helped to discover the true essence and lived experiences for these women.

Limitations of the Study

I identified a few limitations in this study: (a) lack of generalizability and transferability because of the small sample size of the participants; (b) the information was self-reported; (c) the exclusion of men and divorced, widowed, younger and older women.

This was a qualitative study; therefore, the sample size for phenomenological studies are small in nature and limits generalizability and is inadvisable. Transferability may reduce limitedness. The study was comprised of a sample size of twelve unmarried college-educated Black women who reside in northern Florida, who are members of a society that expects marriage for adults. The findings of this study may not be widespread

to all Black women because this study called for specific criteria to be met to participate in this study, and the study was only conducted in one area of Florida, not nationwide. Other unmarried college-educated Black women who do not live in the north Florida area may have different lived experiences that are not captured in this study.

Furthermore, the information provided by the women of this study was self-reported; therefore, some of the information could not be verified. I conducted the face-to-face interviews in one session each. It was my intent to garner as much insight during the interview as possible and ask for clarification throughout the interview. I did not need to conduct follow up interviews, as I was able to gather sufficient information from each participant. I audio recorded all the interviews so that I could replay the audio, if necessary.

Men were excluded from this study as I only sought to understand the lived experiences of this demographic of women at this time. Women who were not within the age of 30 – 50, divorced, or widowed were excluded from this study. It is likely that their lived experiences could provide add additional information to the knowledge base about unmarried college-educated Black women.

Data Triangulation

The strategy of data triangulation was supported using my dissertation committee by quality checking the coding structure and the analysis. The Dissertation Chair and Second Committee Member reviewed the coding structure and ensured that the van Kaam modified version of Moustakas's data analysis method was properly utilized to analyze the data.

A Walden panel of qualitative experts verified that the interview questions were efficient and aligned with the research question and the purpose of the study. Lastly, I employed Intersectionality theory to guide the principles of the study.

Recommendation for Future Research

I believe that there are several opportunities for further research. These areas are particularly center around using a more diverse sample of unmarried college-educated Black women, such as: younger and older women, divorced and widowed women, women living in various geographical areas, and more.

Younger and Older Women

Repeating this study with a group of women that are more diverse in terms of age would provide a greater perspective of the lived experiences of unmarried college-educated Black women. The ages of the participants of this study ranged from 30 to 50 years old. Issues around younger women and older women were outside of the scope of this study; however, a more diverse sample could uncover some underlying issues that were not in this study. Furthermore, it is likely that if there were more individuals varying ages in the study would provide differing perspectives living with this phenomenon. As younger women may not be feeling pressure to marry as they have not surpassed the expected age of marriage. Older women could provide a deeper understanding of living as unmarried individuals and the possible labels assigned to them, such as spinster.

Divorced and Widowed Women

These women would provide a different perspective of living as a single in a society that expects marriage because they have already experienced marriage. They may

or may not be influenced to marry based on societal and cultural marital expectations.

They will help to understand if marriage is still a desire after divorce or the death of a

spouse.

Women Living in Various Geographical Areas

For this study, I focused solely on unmarried college-educated Black women

living Northern Florida; however, if other women outside of Florida are studied, the

perspectives might prove differently. This is questioned because Florida is a southern

state that still has southern values, such as marriage and family. However, though

majority of America still expects marriage for adults (Cherlin, 2013), will women living

outside of the southern mindset have the same experiences.

Parents of unmarried college-educated Black women

I believe that studying the perspectives of those that raise this demographic of

women is important. It will provide insight into what it takes to raise a Black female in

society and culture that has so many not easily attainable expectations for them. This

study will also identify some of the ways parents encourage their daughters to remain

positive and hopeful when the possibility of marriage for them is not readily available.

This could aid in cultivating positive perspectives for this demographic of women, while

also preparing them to interact with others who wonder why so many college-educated

Black women are unmarried.

Unmarried college-educated Black Men

Another area that I believe can benefit from more research is Black male

counterpart. Unmarried college-educated Black men deserves attention. These are the

men that this group of women are interested in dating and marrying. To gain an understanding of the lived experiences would possibly aid in an increased number of marriage within the Black race. Not only will this help to fill the gap in marriage disparity for the Black race, but it will also aid in reestablishing togetherness and familism amongst the race and raise new generations that believe in the institution of marriage and family, which is the foundation of the Black race.

Cultural marital expectations for Black women in general.

Black women, degreed and non-degreed, deserve to be studied concerning their lived experiences of cultural marital expectations. It is not solely college-educated Black women who have a less likely chance of marriage but all Black women (Green-Davis, 2017), largely for the same reasons as degreed Black women: interracial marriages, mass incarceration rates, death rates, and comorbidity for Black men. Socioeconomic inequivalence may not be a factor for this particular group, so how does that affect the lived experiences and perspectives of Black women in general.

Stereotypes of single Black women.

As indicated in this study, the participants informed that they were often assumed or asked about their sexual orientation. Many participants shared that they have been asked if they are lesbians, solely because they are unmarried. I believe this would be an important topic to research, as sexual orientation should not be in-question because someone is single. This will help to expand the perspectives of society to decrease the presumptuous nature of classifying others who are not pressured to follow societal norms.

Perception of Black women for eligible Black men.

This topic will help to raise the question of how important marriage to Black women is who desire marriage. Is she willing to "marry down" or alter her standards for the Black minimum wage-earning guy or the sanitation engineer-waste management professional. This may aid in broadening the perspectives and standards of single Black women who desire marriage. This study could cause a growth in marital rates within the Black race if mate standards and expectations are reconfigured, creating positive social change.

Dissemination of Findings

The findings of this study will be disseminated in a couple of ways. One goal for dissemination will be to submit the data and findings for publication and present at professional conferences. Furthermore, the findings of the study will also assist clinicians in creating more specific and sensitive therapeutic techniques for this class of women. These clinicians could educate women of society that identify with this phenomenon on the potential interplay of emotional wellness on their overall health.

Implication for Social Change

Black women unequally compare to the probability of marriage for other race women, as they are reportedly the least likely to marry (Duncan, 2012; Green-Davis, 2017; Hurt et al., 2014). Given the intersections of race, gender, and class of Black women, their experiences are distinctive from other race women (Carbado, et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1991; Green-Davis, 2017). Results from this study may support informing practitioners and clinicians on the cultural intricacies of this population. The findings and

results may be disseminated to communities and conferences suited for practitioners and clinicians and community members.

Practitioners and clinicians may be more informed in their therapeutic instruction when creating interventions to address this demographic of women. The results may enlighten helping professions on the academic training and education of scholars, practitioners, as well as, the community. Further implications for social change may be to cultivate dialogue about societal and cultural marital expectations for adults, in general, but specifically for this marginalized group of women.

Moreover, continuing the movement of Black Girl Magic and Black Girls Rock will help to build a greater sense of self-worth and self-acceptance in a society that often overlooks this population of women. Creating more forums, conferences, television shows, for example, will in aid in informing this group of women that they are not forgotten about and that they are special. Not only will those platforms aid in supporting these women, but those platforms will also aid in informing society of the lived experiences of these women and the strength of these women. By seeing more representations of this group will raise queries and interest in learning more about these women.

Lastly, more awareness of mental health for this demographic of women will help to eradicate the stigma associated with mental illness. The more education is available about this growing societal epidemic, the quicker help will be sought out to manage and possibly correct mental health complications. The mental wellbeing of this group of women is necessary to preserve the sanctity of the Black race and its cultural

fundamentals. This will promote positive social change within the Black race and society.

Conclusion

The passion that exuded about marriage from each of these participants adds weight to why this study is important. It is important because society has an expectation that may not be able to be fulfilled for women of this demographic. If these women desire to marry within race, probability of marriage is low due to a lack of available marriageable Black men. The chance of marriage is also lowered because of the growing rates of interracial marriage for Black men. Not only are Black women overlooked by their own male counterparts, but they are often invisible to non-Black men, supported by intersectional invisibility. Not to mention the negative stereotypes that media have ascribed to Black women.

The voices of women who fit this demographic needs to be herald abroad because women of all races, for many years, have been fighting to be heard, but Black women have experienced the most discrimination of them all. The participants of this study have expressed how frustrating and aggravating it is to be asked, "why are you not married". They have shared that questions like that make them feel like they are the reason for their singleness and they do not like or appreciate it and would like for it to stop. What is important to understand about these participants is that they are not allowing society or culture to dictate when they should marry and why they should marry. These participants indicated that they will marry when the right opportunity of marriage (of their opinion) presents itself. They indicated that they will not marry to meet status quo, but they will

marry for love. They desire to marry for longevity and if that means that have to wait until a later age to marry, then they are prepared or are preparing themselves for it.

Reportedly, Black women are the most susceptible to depression because of their oppressive history and daily occurrences with discrimination, be it, racial or gender related. Literature also indicates that marriage is more beneficial than not for mental health, which further indicates that women of this demographic is more probable to depressive symptoms (Dingfelder, 2013; Green-Davis, 2017). Although, a depression scale was not utilized in this study to determine if there were any signs of depressive symptoms; these participants did not provide any information during the interview that they have a history of clinical depressive symptoms.

I chose to employ a phenomenological approach for this study because I wanted to share the lived experiences of these women. By using Moustakas's (1994) data analysis process as modified by van Kaam, I was able to interpret the meaning and essence of this daily lived phenomenon for these participants. As already mentioned, this study did not seek to generalize all unmarried college-educated Black women, but it sought to shed light on how they manage in a society and culture that expects marriage for them.

This topic intrigued me because I can somewhat identify with this demographic; however, I employed the phenomenological method of epoché (or bracketing the personal experiences of the researcher) to not skew the results of the study because of biases, personal feelings, and experiences I might relate to with this study (Profit, 2018). I can partly understand this phenomenon because I am a college-educated Black woman;

however, I am divorced. Regardless of my marital state, I, too, am asked, "why are you not married?". My answer or feelings are very similar to these participants, "well, if I knew the answer, I would probably be married".

The older I get the less likely it seems that I will marry again because there is the assumption that I do not *need* a man. However, that should not be the reason for anyone to marry. We should only marry because we *want* to marry and *want* to marry that person, not because we *need* the person. To me, I believe *want* is more effective in this scenario.

This study uncovered the personal perspectives and lived experiences of twelve never-married college-educated Black who are between the ages of 30 – 50. They demonstrated self-confidence and self-acceptance, while also indicating how there is still an expectation for them to marry, but they are not allowing the expectations of others to determine their marital goals.

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Appendix A: Informational Flyer for Recruitment

<u>VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH ON THE EXPERIENCES OF</u>

<u>LIVING AS SINGLE WOMEN</u>

I am looking for volunteers to be interviewed for a study about unmarried Black college-educated women. **<u>You must be FEMALE, UNMARRIED (never-married and not cohabitating), of the BLACK race, within the age range of 30 – 50, and COLLEGE-EDUCATED.</u>** As a participant in this study, you would be asked questions about your own life and about your experiences with societal and cultural expectations of marriage. The interviews will take about an hour and will be held at the main local library in Jacksonville, FL. If you are interested, please email @waldenu.edu. Please include your full first name and first initial of your last name and phone number and/or best preferred method of contact. Once you have emailed this information, a demographic questionnaire will be emailed to you, along with a detailed description of the purpose of this study.

Appendix B: Screening Questionnaire

1. What is your marital status:

a. Single/unmarried

b. Married

c. Divorced

d. widowed

2. Do you identify as a member of the Black race?

a. Yes

b. No

c. _____

3. Are you of heterosexual orientation:

a. Yes

b. No

4. What is your highest, completed level of education?

a. High school graduate

b. Associates degree

c. Bachelor's degree

d. Master's degree

e. Doctoral degree

f. Post-doctoral education

5. Are you within the age range of 30 – 50?

a. Yes

b. No

6. Is English your primary language?

a. Yes

b. No

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. What views or attitudes have you learned about marriage from the Black community?

2. How do you feel about being single?

   a. How do those feelings match with the views or values of the Black community overall?

3. How do you think you are perceived by married women?

   a. How do you feel about their perceptions and/or treatment towards your singleness?

4. What have been some of the advantages of being an unmarried college-educated Black woman?

5. What have been some of the disadvantages of being an unmarried college-educated Black woman?

6. How do you feel about possibly not achieving societal and cultural expectations of marriage?

7. What are your thoughts about marriage? Is it something you want or plan to do?

Appendix D: Themes

Theme	Subtheme	Participant Codes
Me versus Them: Marital Expectations		
	Generation versus generation	P1, P3, P7, P10
	No persuasion	P2, P6, P11, P12
	The pressure is on	P1, P3, P5
Marriage in the Black Community		P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P9, P10
	Black on Black expectations	P1, P2, P7, P8
Outsider Looking In		P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P10, P11
Single and Not So Happy		
	Blame game	P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P9, P10, P11
	Education matters	P1, P2, P3, P4, P7, P9, P11, P12
	Time limit	P1, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9, P11
Single and Happy		P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P9, P10, P12
	Confident	All
	Living with no restrictions	All
	Not on a time clock	P1, P2, P6, P8, P11
Perception of Marriage		All
	Marriage is still in my view	All

What if I do not get Married?	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8, P10, P11

Appendix E: Individual Textural-Structural Description Example

Participant 1

Me versus Them: Marital expectation. Participant 1 (P1) provided insight into her experiences with society and the Black community concerning her marital status. She explained that she feels that there is an expected timeframe for women to marry, specifically Black women from the viewpoint of the Black community. During the interview she shared that she believes the Black culture expects Black women to marry in their "mid 20s timeframe" and when this expectation is not met, the women are asked, "why haven't you go this yet? Why are you not married?". She added that she has been asked, "what's wrong with you?" These questions are common amongst this group of women.

Generation versus generation. When I asked her the first interview question: "What views or attitudes have you learned about marriage from the Black community?", P1 explained that, generationally, expectations have changed. She explained that the older generations expected marriage for her years ago, when she was in her 20s; however, she believes that her generation and younger generations are getting married at a later age and it is more acceptable.

> As far as society, well, I think for millennials, no. I think it's very acceptable now for women to get married-women in general, to get married later, later, later because we've got so many freedoms, we have so many opportunities than they did in the 60s and before. (P1)

P1 expressed that it should be better understood why she is not married, yet. Although,

she believes that younger society is accepting of marriage for educated women at a later,

she believes that the Black community is not so understanding, which is where the

questions general emerges, according to P1. She informed that the "why" questions, in

her case, are from family members from her parents, grandparents, and aunties. These

noted family members are of an older generation; therefore, their marital expectations are

still firmly grounded on marrying younger, not older.

The pressure is on. Although, P1 exudes high self-esteem and acceptance of her

single marital status, she said, "Living as this demographic is extremely difficult. There

are so many expectations, coming from all sides. It's hard". She explained that being a

member of this demographic is not easy. This supports the notion that marital

expectation from other, whether it is from within culture or from society as a whole,

creates a level of pressure to marry for this participant.

Marriage in the Black community. P1 shared that her parents divorced when

she was a child, which availed that opportunity for the participant to reflect on her

childhood. This shaped her outlook on marriage. She explained, "you know, as we know,

with marriage they fail, overall, but they also fail in the Black community". When we

discussed her perceptive of marriage in the Black community, she made a point to

mention the failure of marriage in the Black community. She also expressed that she does

not want to be part of the divorce statistics for the Black race.

Black on Black expectations. Again, P1 talked about expectations within the

Black race. She made a point to say, "I don't hear much about people praising women,

per say, um, being single". This statement was made when P1 continued to talk about

within race expectations of single women. She explained that within the Black church

there is also expectancy of marriage. So much so, the Black church has Singles

Conferences. She believes that this is an indication that even the Black church confronts

marital status and works to make sure that individuals marry,

> In the Black church, there is some-they do touch on it a little bit. Like when you
>
> hear about the Single and Saved conferences or the Single Women's conferences
>
> and all of that. but what I get from that is again, "there's something wrong", um,
>
> and "we're here to fix that". (P1)

Outsider looking in. When P1 was asked how she thinks others perceive her,

she explained that married women whom she has a relationship with would not be

intimidated by her; however, any woman who does not know her personally might be

threaten by her because she has a lot to offer a mate.

> I am good catch. But, because I present myself well and because I don't get into
>
> foolishness or anything like that. I think most married women wouldn't be
>
> intimidated or concerned. Especially, to maybe not married women who are in my
>
> immediate circle. But, a random married woman on the street would probably be
>
> like, "let me hide my husband". (P1)

She also purported that married women tend to belittle the business of a single woman.

She explained that married women feel that they are busier than single women because

they have a spouse to tend to and most likely children to care for. Nevertheless, she does

not agree that the workload is any different from a married woman to a single woman. She seemed to express disdain and frustration towards this treatment.

> For instance, "well, I'm a mom; I work; I'm a wife" and, I'm like, well, what makes that any different from a single woman who owns her own business and she works and she participants in community organizations and she mentors and she might have a boyfriend. I mean, what makes that any different, just because you signed a piece of paper before somebody and said some vows, doesn't mean that you are more busy. I think that is the perception that a lot of married women have about single women. Because they're not married or don't have any children, they're not as busy. I have experienced that first hand. I'm like, come on now! Yeah, I know you got to go home and sit down with the kids and do the homework, but I have a paper to write. (P1)

Single and Not So Happy. Even though, P1 shared that there are some downsides to being single. She explained that finances can act as a reminder that she is unmarried. She continued to say that it would be nice to have financial assistance from a spouse. Paying bills and maintaining a suitable lifestyle can get expensive but having a spouse could help to offset the cost of living. When she was asked if there are any disadvantages to living as a single woman, she shared,

> Tuh! Finances! Um, tax breaks…you don't get all of that. I don't have living children, so I don't get those breaks that other women do…just day-to-day finances…I have a mortgage; I pay that by myself. I pay all of my bills by myself, all of my insurances by myself. So, for me, that's the only disadvantage. (P1)

Blame game. Alongside the fact that the lack of financial help from a spouse is a disadvantage to being single, she added that she is often questioned with accusatory innuendos that she is the fault of her marital status. For example, "What's wrong with you? Why haven't you got this yet? Why aren't you married? You should be married by now! That's like the last thing you need, so what's going on?" (P1) As mentioned earlier, she perceives living as a member of this demographic as difficult. Not only is she involuntarily single, she feels blamed for being single and assumed to a problem causing her singleness. Feeling blamed for being single is not uncommon for these unmarried women, especially this group of women; however, the probability of marriage for this marginalized group is unlikely.

Education matters. P1 provided more insight as to why she might be unmarried. She explained that finding someone who is single and has equal or better educational achievements, as herself, is rare. Because she her educational ambition and achievement, she is not necessarily willing to marry-down, marrying someone with less educational achievements.

> Of course, as Black women and we become more educated, our pickings become slimmer. I don't have too much to choose from, as far as, marriage. I have had to really, I won't say "settle" but yes, settle for someone who isn't as educated as myself. (P1)

> Nevertheless, as P1 continued to speak, she stated that she realizes she will

have to change her standards of a partner. She shared that she has accepted that having

her dream house, family, and kids was not realistic. She preferred that he genuinely loves

her and is faithful to her; she believes those factors are most important.

> I said, settle but that depends on what they do, their character. He can be as
>
> educated as he wants but a total butthole. In my 20s, when I had only my master's
>
> degree, I said, he has to be single, no children, same education as me, and he must
>
> be driven and have a business. But, I had it all planned out. Now, it's like, "do he
>
> have 2 legs?" [laughs], "does he love me?" That's where it really is. Because if I
>
> have this list, I'm cutting the pool of available men even shorter. (P1)

> *Time limit.* P1 informed that she believes society, primarily society, expects

marriage at a certain age. She mentioned marrying in 40s as a "really late time". This

supports the fact that she believes that there is a time limit on when she and other women

should marry. She made it obvious that she would prefer to marry sooner than turning 40.

"Maybe it will be that I get married in my 40s…at a really late time, where-outside of the

bounds of the expectations of when a woman is supposed to get married". (P1)

> Single and Happy. Living as a single has it moments of disadvantages, but it also

has moments of advantages. P1 explained that she enjoys her singleness and her

unmarried status allows her more personal time, time to reflect on self and improve

where needed. She recognizes the benefits in being single. She also stated that people

respect her achievements and her marital status. She believes that others see her as a

rarity because of her educational gains and socioeconomic status, which makes others

inquisitive and intrigue by her.

I do like being single. I think being single, right now, for me is allowing me to learn myself more, but it's also allowing me to do things that I really want to do, and it's just, I look at singlehood as a time to learn myself and make myself better and able to give to someone when I get married. People fear you and I don't mean that in a negative sense. It's like, "what's up with her? She's a unicorn", "there's something about her; she's enticing! I need know more; I need to be around her. I need to pick her brain. I need to figure something out. WOW!". I think people respect you a little more…" because you're Black, 1. 2. You're educated. (P1)

Living with no restrictions. This is another reason why P1 is enjoying her singleness; she does not have live with rules, regulations, and expectations from a spouse. She can go and come as she pleases; she can travel whenever when she chooses. She feels free to live her life uninterrupted and without restrictions. She expressed happiness when talking about living a single life. She seemed to brighten up and became excited to explain why she appreciates this time in singlehood.

So, there is a freedom in being single. I feel like I am just so free! I don't have to run anything by anybody. Or consider anybody else… Just do whatever I want to do! So, I like that aspect of it. (P1)

Confident. The confidence that P1 exhibits that she will is self-aware and self-assured that she is a "good catch". She understands that she has much to offer a companion whenever that time presents itself. So, she is not allowing her single marital status to dim her light or negatively affect her self-esteem.

In my case- not to brag, but I'm a good catch! I appreciate being a strong Black

educated woman. In my belief…I hope I can say this…we, Black women in

general, make the world go 'round. But, when you add that education piece-their

head on straight…So, I've always grown up knowing that as a Black woman, I

am powerful, extremely powerful-I make stuff happen. The power comes from

what my dad instilled in me, that you are somebody, you are powerful, you are

strong, you will! (P1)

Not on a timeclock. During the interview, P1 shared that she has felt some

pressures concerning her single; however, she is not allowing society's marital

expectations for her and others cause her to rush into marriage unprepared. She is

allowing this time of singleness to self-assess and adjust anything necessary for

becoming an effective marital spouse because she does not desire to add to the divorce

statistics for the Black race. "I value alone time …so, let me make sure that I get myself

together first before I try to join with somebody for the long haul". (P1)

Perception of Marriage. In studying unmarried college-educated Black women,

it is important to understand how they perceive marriage. P1 explained that she sees

marriage as a "beautiful thing". Even though she was raised by divorced parents, she still

views marriage as an institution to regard with respect and sacredness.

I respect the institution of marriage from a biblical standpoint. I just had quite a

few years to really look at it from biblical standpoint, societal standpoint…I think

marriage is a beautiful thing. Um, my view on marriage, in growing up, is that

they fall apart. That's only because I didn't have any healthy marriages to look at

growing up. I don't have any immediate examples of what a successful marriage

looks like. (P1)

However, she sometimes vacillates about the necessity of legally marrying

someone. She mentioned that marriage is a contract that can and is often disregarded,

which ultimately ends in divorce.

So, there is some, like, "why even bother?" because if this is what I've seen, and

the statistics are saying this, then the likelihood of me being in that situation is

pretty high. There are some days that I think marriage is just some piece of paper.

I mean, that piece of paper ain't gone make you love somebody anymore or any

less. It's just a symbol of people's… it's a contract… That says, "I'm going to

love you for the rest of your life" but, contracts can be broken. (P1)

Marriage is still in my view. P1 articulated clearly that she still desires to marry,

even though she maybe older than she anticipated, does not have examples of health

marriages, and divorce rate is high. "I do desire to be married. Absolutely! Yes, I do plan,

I want to get married". (P1)

What is I do not get married? This is a valid question when studying this

demographic of women because statistically they are reportedly the least likely group

of women to marry. P1 explained that she understands that she might not get married

and informed that she is okay with this possibility, now; however, she could not be

sure if she would still be okay with not marry when she gets older. She purported that

non-marriage at a later age could cause her sadness.

I have come to the conclusion that I would have to be accepting of it. It's

definitely something I've thought about seriously that maybe I will or maybe not.

Maybe it will be that I won't get married at all…I've thought about it, and I think,

at this moment, I would be ok with it. Now, 10 years from now and I'm 44, I

might go in a corner and cry…(P1)

Additional findings. As mentioned before, P1 highlighted that religion plays a role

in the marital status of individuals. She explained that not only is does Black community

have marital expectations but so does the Black church. P1 mentioned that marriage could

be entered into because individuals do not want to violate biblical principles, such as co-

habitating.

If you go back to the religious aspect of it…not only in the Black community but

in the Black church, is that, if you are with somebody, if you are co- habitating

that you should and need to be married because it is against spiritual or religious

principles. I don't nowhere in the Bible does it say you can't co-habitate. But, you

know, living with someone could lead to sinful stuff. (P1)