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African American Men's Attitudes Toward Marriage

Armon Rashard Perry[1]

Abstract

This study examines the factors associated with African American men's attitudes toward marriage as well as the circumstances and experiences that helped shape their attitudes. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, survey and in-depth interview data were collected from a diverse sample of African American men. Quantitative results revealed that men's report of religiosity, their parents' family structure, and not having a fear of intimacy predicted more favorable attitudes toward marriage. Qualitative analyses corroborated the quantitative analyses, revealing that the participants' attitudes were influenced by their family of origin and that they viewed the church and the government as central figures in both the retreat from marriage and any viable initiatives aimed at increasing marriage rates among African Americans.

Keywords

marriage, marriage attitudes, Black family, African American family, African American men

Family is the primary institution in society. In addition to the provision of material needs, the family also shapes its members through nurturance and socialization. Although mainstream society prescribes a married, two-parent configuration, a large proportion of contemporary African American families represent "nontraditional" family structures. Since 1960, the percentage of

[1]University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, USA

Corresponding Author:
Armon Rashard Perry, University of Louisville, Oppenheimer Hall, Louisville, KY 40292, USA.
Email: arperr01@louisville.edu

married African American adults has dropped from 61% to 32% (Jones, 2011). Contemporarily, African Americans have the lowest marriage rates in the United States (Cherlin, 1998; Dixon, 2009) and are more likely than any other group to get divorced after marrying (Hill, 2006; Taylor, 2002).

Explanations offered for the disparity in marriage rates between African Americans and other groups are both individual and structural. At the individual level, authors have cited the severe imbalance in the ratio of African American women to men (Rank & Davis, 1996), a shortage of "marriageable" or gainfully employed men (Harcknett & McLanahan, 2004; Wilson, 1987), and African American women's reluctance to give up their autonomy to enter into the patriarchal institution of marriage (Hill, 2006). At the structural level, the mass incarceration of young African American males (Clayton & Moore, 2003), misguided public policies that require family disruption as an eligibility criterion (Leashore, 1981), and systems of oppression that discredit and marginalize African American identity (Pinderhughes, 2002) are also cited as contributing factors to the low rates of marriage among African Americans.

Literature Review

Although there is much variability regarding the reasons for the relatively low marriage rates among African Americans, there has been an increase in research to identify the protective and risk factors of high-quality marital relationships. Studies investigating healthy African American marriages have revealed that successful marriages are those that involve men and women who are committed to being married, trusting (Marks et al., 2008), egalitarian (Davis, Williams, Emerson, & Hourd-Bryant, 2000), more well educated (King, 1999), and older and economically advantaged (Broman, 2005). Contrarily, unsuccessful African American marriages are characterized by high levels of conflict, economic insecurity, work-related stress (Marks, Nesteruk, Hopkins-Williams, Swanson, & Davis, 2006), having divorced or never-married peers (Furstenberg, 2001), and having a large number of available alternate marriage mates (Rank & Davis, 1996; Riggio & Weiser, 2008). Beyond these factors, the literature also suggests that one's religiosity (Hurt, 2012; Oliver, 2006), desire to have children (Hill, 2001), reluctance to become emotionally close to others (Ridley, 1993; Seal & Ehrhardt, 2003), and whether or not they had involved fathers during their childhood (Goeke-Morey & Cummings, 2007; Rowe, 2007; Thomas, Krampe, & Newton, 2008) all influence marriage attitudes.

Direct examinations of African Americans' attitudes toward marriage have reported that 44% of African Americans believed that marriage has become obsolete and only 24% agreed that the growing variability in contemporary

family formations (e.g., unmarried, cohabiting) was a bad thing (Jones, 2011). Research has also revealed that despite reports of low marital satisfaction (Davis et al., 2000) many African American women still desire to get married (Harris & Domenico, 2008; Oberlander, Agostini, Houston, & Black, 2010). However, there is only scant literature on African American men's attitudes regarding marriage (King & Allen, 2009). Furthermore, the literature that is available presents mixed results. Using data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing data set, Shafer (2006) found that African American men placed high value on marriage and viewed it more favorably than men of other races. Lincoln, Taylor, and Jackson (2008) found that older, more financially well-off men had more favorable attitudes toward marriage than African American men who were younger and less financially stable. However, Rank and Davis's (1996) analysis of National Survey of Families and Households data revealed that Black men reported high levels of perceived happiness outside of marriage relative to men from other races, and Ball and Robbins (1986) found low levels of life satisfaction among married Black men relative to their single, separated, divorced, and widowed counterparts. Despite the findings from the aforementioned studies, there remains a dearth of literature examining African American men's attitudes toward marriage. The gap in the literature is more pronounced with regard to examinations of African American men's life experiences and the ways in which their experiences shape their attitudes toward marriage. This is significant in light of reports that for many African American men, their initial perceptions and expectations of romantic relationships are predictive of the relationship's subsequent success or failure (Clarkwest, 2007). Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to fill the gap in the literature and to build knowledge that may be instructive to policy makers, practitioners, and educators interested in promoting marriage by answering the following research questions:

What are the factors associated with African American men's attitudes toward marriage?

In what ways do African American men's life experiences shape their attitudes toward marriage?

Method

Design

The current study employed a mixed-methods design that allows for the findings of the quantitative data to be strengthened and corroborated by the findings in the qualitative data. The quantitative data were collected through

the use of a cross sectional survey design, while the qualitative data were also collected through a cross-sectional design.

Sample

The sample included 161 adult African American males. On average, the study participants were 37.67 (*SD* = 16.98) years old, earned $38,154.71 (*SD* = 38,815.55) annually, and had 1.40 (*SD* = 1.96) biological children. In their adult lives, the participants reported having had on average 6.80 (*SD* = 7.01) girlfriends with these relationships, lasting an average of 15.69 (*SD* = 11.29) months. Of the men, 16 (9.9%) held neither a GED or high school diploma nor a college degree, 83 (51.6%) held at least a GED or high school diploma, and 62 (38.5%) held both a GED or high school diploma and a college degree. In all, 74 (46.0%) were married, 6 (3.7%) were not married but were cohabiting with their girlfriend, 45 (28.0%) were dating but were not cohabiting with their girlfriend, and 36 (22.4%) were not romantically involved with anyone. With regard to the participants' parents, 83 (51.6%) were married, 40 (24.8%) had never married and were not romantically involved with each other, 34 (21.1%) were divorced from each other, and 2 (1.2%) were not married, but were cohabiting with each other (Table 1).

Measures

Marriage attitudes. Attitudes toward marriage were measured using a scale developed for the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, 2004). The scale has six items (e.g., "All in all, there are more advantages to being single than to being married") measured on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). The scale yielded an internal consistency score of .71 with the current sample.

Relationship with father. The quality of the men's relationships with their fathers was measured using the Parent-Child Relationship Survey (Fine & Schwebel, 1983). The full scale has 24 items, but only the Father Involvement subscale was used in this study. The Father Involvement subscale contains 6 items (e.g., "How much time do you spend with your father?") measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*none or not at all*) to 7 (*a great deal*). The Father Involvement subscale has a reported internal consistency score of .89 (Fine & Schwebel, 1983). The scale yielded an internal consistency score of .81 with the current sample.

Table 1. Sample Descriptive Statistics.

	M	SD	Range
Age	37.67	16.98	18-78
Income	38,154.71	38,815.55	0-200,000
Biological children	1.40	1.96	0-19
Past girlfriends	6.80	7.01	0-50
Average length of relationships (months)	15.69	11.29	0-60
Relationship alternatives	29.39	5.39	17-41
Relationship/marital planning	21.08	6.95	7-35
Family cohesion	27.18	3.93	18-36
Attitude toward children	52.47	10.00	24-75
Fear of intimacy	14.13	4.62	5-25
Religiosity	15.36	3.86	5-20
Relationship with father	24.94	10.18	8-42
Marriage attitude	18.47	2.45	13-24

Relationship/marriage alternatives. Relationship or marriage alternatives were measured using the Marital Alternatives Scale (Udry, 1981). This scale has 11 items (e.g., "You could get another woman as good as she is?") measured on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*impossible*) to 4 (*certain*). The Marital Alternatives Scale has a reported internal consistency score of .70 (Udry, 1981). The scale yielded an internal consistency score of .72 with the current sample.

Relationship plans. Relationship plans was measured using the Kansas Marital Goals Orientation Scale (Eggeman, Moxley, & Schumm, 1985). The scale has seven items (e.g., "How often do you and your partner discuss the way you would like your relationship to be five years from now?") measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*almost never*) to 5 (*almost always*). The Kansas Marital Goals Orientation Scale has a reported internal consistency score of .94 (Eggeman et al., 1985). The scale yielded an internal consistency score of .92 with the current sample.

Family cohesion. Family Cohesion was measured using the Self-Report Family Instrument (Beavers, Hampson, & Hulgus, 1985). The scale has 36 items (e.g., "Our family would rather do things together than with other people") measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*fits our family well*) to 5 (*does not fit our family*). The Self-Report Family Instrument has a reported internal consistency score of .85 (Beavers et al., 1985). The scale yielded an internal consistency score of .75 with the current sample.

Attitude toward children. Attitude toward children was measured using the Barnett Liking of Children Scale (Barnett & Sinisi, 1990). The scale has 14 items (e.g., "I like children") measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The Barnett Liking of Children Scale has a reported internal consistency score of .93 (Barnett & Sinisi, 1990). The scale yielded an internal consistency score of .82 with the current sample.

Fear of intimacy. Fear of intimacy was measured using the Fear of Intimacy Scale (Descutner & Thelen, 1991). The scale has 35 items (e.g., "I have held back my feelings in previous relationships") measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all characteristic of me*) to 5 (*extremely characteristic of me*). The Fear of Intimacy Scale has a reported internal consistency score of .93 (Descutner & Thelen, 1991). The scale yielded an internal consistency score of .81 with the current sample.

Religiosity. Religiosity was measured using the Religiosity Measure (Rohrbaugh & Jessor, 1975). The scale has eight items (e.g., "When you have a serious problem, how often do you take religious advice or teachings into consideration?") measured on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*almost never*) to 4 (*almost always*). The Religiosity Measure has a reported internal consistency score of .90 (Rohrbaugh & Jessor, 1975). The scale yielded an internal consistency score of .86 with the current sample.

Procedures

In an attempt to recruit a diverse cross section of African American adult males, potential participants were recruited from a local university, social service agencies, barber shops, and philanthropic organizations. The participants received study packets including consent forms, quantitative surveys, and preaddressed envelopes with return postage. On completion and return of the 20-minute survey questionnaires, participants were instructed to indicate whether or not they were interested in participating in the face-to-face qualitative interview. For those not interested in completing the qualitative interview, returning the survey questionnaire marked the end of their participation in the study. Those who were interested in participating in the qualitative interview indicated their interest by providing their contact information. On return of the survey questionnaire, those expressing interest in the qualitative interviews were contacted to schedule the interviews at a date, time, and location of the participant's choosing.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of two stages. The first stage involved the quantitative data analysis, while the second stage involved the qualitative data analysis. With regard to the quantitative data, bivariate analyses included a series of analysis of variance (ANOVA) comparing the attitudes toward to marriage among African American, adult males of various ages, incomes, and family backgrounds. The multivariate analysis included a multiple regression analysis used to determine the strongest predictors of attitudes toward marriage.

The second stage of data analysis involved qualitative data analysis. These data were collected via semistructured, in-depth interviews utilizing a phenomenological approach. Consistent with the tenets of the phenomenological approach, the interviews were transcribed and the texts were coded for emerging themes and subsequently grouped into meaning units that led to an overall description of the participants' attitudes toward marriage and the significant life events and experiences that shaped those attitudes. QSR International's NVivo 8 was used to assist in data analysis. With regard to interpreting the data, per the guidelines of Creswell (1998), the participants' experiences and epiphanies were highlighted along with the contexts in which they occurred to present the patterns, processes, and unique features of their lives.

Results

Quantitative Data Analysis

The first ANOVA revealed that the effect of age was statistically significant, $F(2, 158) = 20.850$, $p = .000$. Post hoc analyses using the Bonferroni correction for significance indicated that men younger than 25 ($M = 16.97$, $SD = 2.37$) held attitudes toward marriage that were significantly less favorable than men ages 26 to 39 ($M = 18.82$, $SD = 2.28$) and men ages 40 and older ($M = 19.51$, $SD = 1.97$).

The second ANOVA revealed that the effect of income was statistically significant, $F(2, 152) = 12.944$, $p = .000$. Post hoc analyses using the Bonferroni correction for significance indicated that men earning $0-24,999 ($M = 17.49$, $SD = 2.78$) held attitudes toward marriage that were significantly less favorable than men earning $25,000-49,999 ($M = 18.76$, $SD = 1.84$) and men earning $50,000 and more ($M = 19.60$, $SD = 1.71$).

The third ANOVA revealed that the effect of the men's parents' relationship and family structure was significant, $F(2, 156) = 12.931$, $p = .000$. Post

Table 2. Multiple Regression Model for Attitudes Toward Marriage.

	B	SE B	β
Income	1.069	0.000	.158
Age	0.019	0.013	.135
Education	0.174	0.290	.045
Parents' relationship/family structure	−0.585	0.218	−.201**
Religiosity	0.277	0.057	.331***
Family cohesion	0.079	0.057	.102
Attitude toward children	−0.036	0.023	−.118
Relationship with father	−0.023	0.022	−.074
Relationship alternatives	−0.064	0.043	−.096
Relationship planning	−0.024	0.036	−.046
Fear of intimacy	−0.126	0.047	−.190**
Constant	17.862	2.470	

Note: R^2 = 41.3%.
**$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

hoc analyses using the Bonferroni correction for significance indicated that men with parents who never married each other and were not romantically involved with each other ($M = 16.97$, $SD = 2.29$) held attitudes toward marriage that were significantly less favorable than men whose parents were married ($M = 19.18$, $SD = 2.17$) and men whose parents were divorced from each other ($M = 18.31$, $SD = 2.44$).

With regard to the multivariate analysis, multiple regression analysis was used to determine the significant predictors of African American adult males' attitudes toward marriage. The results of the regression analysis indicated that the predictors in the model explained 41.3% of the variance. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that higher levels of religiosity ($\beta = .342$, $p = .000$), being less fearful of intimacy ($\beta = -.180$, $p = .013$), and having parents who are involved in a more traditional relationship and family structure with each other ($\beta = -.152$, $p = .050$) significantly predicted favorable attitudes toward marriage (Table 2).

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data consisted of 33 in-depth face-to-face interviews. The interviews yielded 23.12 hours of digital audio records and 211 pages of text transcripts. On average, each interview lasted 42 minutes and yielded 6.39

pages of single-spaced, eight-point-font transcripts. Although the interviews were very comprehensive and rich, there were a few predominant themes that emerged from the data, including the characteristics that men saw in potential marriage mates, the influence of their families of origin (especially fathers) in shaping their attitudes, and the roles of the church and the government in promoting marriage. The following section presents a more detailed discussion of the emergent themes, including data on the number of men expressing various opinions and direct quotes that serve to illuminate those opinions.

Marriage Material

Regardless of their marital status, the men expressed their thoughts about the traits that would make a woman an ideal marriage mate. While the nine single, never married men discussed the traits of their ideal marriage mate from a "wish list" perspective, the 24 ever married men who were either currently married ($n = 17$) or had been married in the past ($n = 7$) talked about the traits in the context of the things that made their current or ex-wives stand out from the crowd. The characteristics discussed were having an open mind, which entailed being receptive to learning about different cultures, experiences, and ways of practicing one's spirituality. The men described how sharing in these types of activities were the things that did or could potentially bring them closer to their partners. Attractive marriage mates were also described as being honest, trustworthy, reliable, and consistent.

Strength and shared values were two other characteristics that were mentioned by 24 of the men. According to the participants, having a "strong woman" manifested itself in many different ways. To 5 of the men, a woman's strength was connected to her ability to raise children appropriately, while 2 others emphasized intelligence and the ability to engage in discourse related to current events as strength. However, most ($n = 17$) of the men defined strong women as those who not only could maintain their financial independence but also could serve as a support system for their partners, while simultaneously inspiring them and holding them accountable for becoming better men, husbands, and fathers. According to a 29-year-old married, unemployed father of three:

> Just um, like I said, the supportiveness. The fact that even though I'm flawed as all men are, nobody is perfect, but . . . [sighs and pauses] she looked past all that. She saw me for who I was and who I'm capable of being. And she's given me her love, we don't have no trust issues. And times that I've been down, she's picked me up. So for me, that

was major! That's hard to find these days, you know. She was a diamond in the rough.

Shared values were also high on the men's list of marriage mate traits and characteristics. Of the 17 married men, 14 spoke about how easy it was to get to know the women who became their wives when they shared common values regarding religion, spirituality, child rearing, and family. As one 27-year-old married man stated,

> When I met her and uh . . . I liked her. I liked that she had some drive and that she was very intelligent. I saw that she was trying to make a life for herself and you know, she wanted some things. We kind of . . . , well our checklists kind of matched up. So we got together and got along really well, so I said I'll try to keep this one if she'll let me.

In many ways, the fact that the men identified open-mindedness, honesty, strength, and shared values as characteristics of their ideal marriage mates suggests that they not only were concerned with finding a mate and establishing a relationship, but also were interested in developing and cultivating that relationship into one that would thrive and flourish. Beyond sharing their opinions of their ideal marriage mate, the men also provided some insight into the people who helped shape those opinions. Specifically, the men discussed how, for better or for worse, their experiences and interactions with their families of origin had a direct impact on their attitudes toward marriage.

Family of Origin

There was general consensus related to the ways in which the men's families of origin influenced their attitudes toward marriage. In fact, when asked about the largest influence on their attitude toward marriage, 28 of the 33 men cited experiences in their immediate or extended family. The experiences of 16 men encouraged marriage, while 12 others' experiences served as cautionary tales and deterred marriage. A 22-year-old man who was considering proposing to his girlfriend mentioned,

> It's like . . . my grandparents have been together before since, like since before I could remember. I have an auntie and uncle that have been together since the sixth grade. You know, and I'm like I want that. But when there is a certain standard by which it's so entrenched in your family that you don't know any other way, then that's just how it is. I wish we could get back to that.

This excerpt speaks to the importance of having positive models of marriage for African American males, an issue that came up repeatedly in the interviews. Another 31-year-old man who was married spoke in clear detail about how watching his own father's behavior provided him with guidelines, established a standard, and set clear expectations for how men should stand by their partners and honor their commitments in marriage:

> Like I said, the way my father treated my mother [who subsequently died from cancer]. Making sure my mom made all her chemo[therapy] treatments and any type of rehab. You know, she got to a point where the cancer had got into her bones so she had to sleep in a . . . you know, a hospital type issued bed and, you know, he had to sleep on the floor. He couldn't sleep in the bed with her, you know. He had to bathe her. Um . . . , there was a point that he had to feed her. Man, she couldn't even go to the restroom without him. So to me, that was like the epitome of love.

However, not all of the men had such powerful examples to follow. In the absence of a tangible, positive example, according to 12 of the men who were interviewed, young men are in many ways lost and confused about the purpose, structure, and function of marriage. A 37-year-old divorced man stated,

> If you're a young man, if you don't see or hear about marriage, a husband and a wife . . . what is marriage? It becomes whatever you see on TV or maybe what somebody told you. It's not often that I get to see a husband and wife interact?

Moreover, three men stated not having any model for marriage may have been a welcomed change. For these men, it was the model that they were exposed to that was the source of their ambiguity, hesitation, and reluctance to embrace marriage. The feelings of ambiguity and reluctance were best expressed by a 27-year-old man who admitted being anxious about the seeming inevitability of marriage:

> People of color often don't see marriage modeled well. My mother has been divorced 3 times. So . . . there is a part of me that is like . . . [uncomfortable laugh] I don't know about getting married. I look at it like, if she can't do it and she is the one who raised me, then . . . then it's clear that whatever needed to be poured in me wasn't done by her so how am I going to be successful at this?

In this discussion, the men clearly describe the ways in which their attitudes toward marriage were directly affected by their experiences and interactions with their families of origin. Specifically, men whose families provided them with positive examples of marital relationships mentioned how these models propelled their interest and belief in the possibility of successful marriage. On the other hand, those with no example or negative familial examples questioned whether or not they themselves could be successful at marriage. Consistent with the emphasis that the men placed on having models and examples of successful marriages, they also gave consideration to whether or not institutions such as the church and government should be involved in providing those models or offering other resources in the name of marriage promotion.

Church, State, and Marriage

After discussing the state of marriage among African Americans and describing the events and experiences that shaped their personal attitudes about marriage, the men were asked if they perceived increasing marriage rates among African Americans as a worthwhile goal. If so, they were asked what about their thoughts relative to how increasing marriage rates either should or could be done. In response, an overwhelming majority (32 of the 33 men) agreed that increasing marriage rates was a worthwhile goal. The one man who disagreed was a 22-year-old single man who stated that "marriage isn't for everyone." For the 32 men who perceived increasing marriage rates among African Americans as a worthwhile goal, the rationales were mostly related to the fact that the men saw healthy marriage as synonymous with stability. Specifically, 26 men stated that too many African American families are missing strong fathers serving as the heads of their households. According to the men expressing this opinion, the best way to reinstall fathers as the heads of their households is to increase marriage rates and reduce the number of African Americans who divorce. Another 12 mentioned that in their opinions, marriage equals strong families, and strong families mean strong communities.

Despite the general agreement that something should be done to increase marriage rates among African Americans, there was less agreement as to who or what should take on that responsibility. A total of 9 men stated that they did not think it was the role of government to encourage or promote marriage, citing the separation between church and state, but 7 men stated that they thought that it was very appropriate for the government to get involved in promoting marriage to African Americans. In fact, in the views of these men,

it was the government that had a hand in splitting up many African American families via public assistance policies that required that fathers be nonresident as a condition for eligibility.

The other institution that was identified as an ideal body to encourage marriage among African Americans was the church. None of the men expressed any disagreement with the church promoting marriage. Of the men, 17 stated that they would like to see the church become more aggressive in its marketing of marriage. According to these men, evidence of the church's need to become more active in promoting marriage is the changes in African American family structure. A 60-year-old married man lamented what he viewed as a generational divide with regard to the increasing acceptance of nontraditional family structure in contemporary society.

> Certain things are more socially acceptable these days. The single Black mother is praised these days and the single Black father is damn near the Ebony [magazine] man of the month. Marriage is no longer the end all, be all. A lot of people have that mindset.

When asked their thoughts about the specific ways that the church could get more involved in the promotion of marriage, the men mentioned that many churches have couples ministries that are ideal for providing congregations and communities with images and models of strong, healthy marriages. Of the men, 10 highlighted the importance of the church partnering with community partners to do outreach on the benefits of marriage, as well as providing relationship education. According to a 21-year-old single man, "I feel like that should be a part of the church curriculum. You know, teaching young men and women how to coexist in a relationship, be in love, and how to treat each other." In describing his attempt to cultivate one such partnership, a 53-year-old pastor stated,

> The church should have ongoing retreats and workshops for singles and married folks. Even in our youth programs in the church, we are confronting issues such as sexual abuse, date rape and moving beyond the past because these things happen and people bring them into their relationships. I tell ya . . . , one of the things that our church does is we have to talk about sex and what a responsible relationship is. Then for our young adults, we have to create an environment for them, especially the singles where they can have time to fellowship together without the pressure to "date." This helps because they learn to become friends first.

As can be seen from these comments, the study participants not only were receptive to the church's promotion of marriage, but also looked to it for leadership in promoting marriage. Therefore, in light of its central role in many African American communities, the church may be able to affect marriage rates by becoming more flexible and innovative in the development or implementation of its family formation programs.

Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to fill a gap in the literature by examining African American men's attitudes toward marriage and exploring the ways in which the men's life experiences shaped their attitudes. African American men's marriage attitudes is an important area of inquiry given the relatively low rates of marriage among African Americans, the reported benefits for children and families associated with marriage (Bulanda, 2010), and the fact that many African American women desire to marry, provided they can find a willing and able partner (England & Edin, 2007). The bivariate analyses revealed that younger men, more economically disadvantaged men, and men whose parents were never married to each other held significantly less favorable views toward marriage than their counterparts who were older, were more well-off financially, or had parents who were married to each other. These findings were expected given that previous research has found that younger men who are often less economically viable tend to marry less often than men who are older and have higher incomes (Anderson, 1990; Broman, 2005; Edin, 2000; Testa, Astone, Krough, & Neckerman, 1989). This occurs as both men and women tend to associate a man's ability to provide financially for a family with his attractiveness as a potential marriage mate. As Anderson (2008) explains, men without stable and gainful employment are discouraged from attempting married life because making significant contributions to the family's financial well-being is crucial to fulfilling the roles consistent with being a head of household, a role that many men aspire to.

Although there were significant differences in men's marriage attitudes by age, income, and their parents' marital status, not all of these differences held in the multivariate analysis. In the multivariate analysis, the impact of men's age and income was decreased as higher levels of religiosity, less fear of intimacy, and their parents' marital status significantly predicted more favorable views toward marriage. Given the findings from the bivariate analyses, the question became this: What might explain the reduced impact of age and income in the presence of the other factors? First, starting with the strongest predictor, reporting high levels of religiosity seems to go hand in hand with

more favorable attitudes toward marriage (Brown, Orbuch, & Bauermeister, 2008). As one might imagine, the church's preference for traditional family structure featuring male headed households (Billingsley, 1992; Tinney, 1981) is consistent with the participants' favorable marriage attitudes. Furthermore, men who subscribe to traditional gender roles (Cazenave, 1983) and are more religiously inclined would also be more apt to view marriage as normative and as an expected and natural progression of a positive romantic relationship. Or, in the words of a 60-year-old community center director, "In my mind, I treated all my dates as though they were interviews for the position of husband and soulmate." Second, men who had less fear of intimacy were associated with holding more favorable attitudes toward marriage. The association between less fear of intimacy and more favorable marriage attitudes can be understood considering the emphasis that the men placed on having a mate who was both strong and supportive, to, as a 29-year-old married man put it, "Pick me up when I am down." The level of vulnerability expressed in this statement suggests not only that those who viewed marriage favorably did not fear intimacy, but also that they sought it out and expected it from their part-ners. This finding is consistent with previous research concluding that many Black men seek out partners with whom they can establish respectful relation-ships characterized by effective and intimate communication (Marbley, 2003). Third, men whose parents were involved in more traditional relationships and family structures were also associated with more favorable attitudes toward marriage. The association between the men's marriage attitudes and their par-ents' family structure finding is consistent with research suggesting that mar-riage has intergenerational effects for many (Wallerstein, Lewis, & Blakeslee, 2000). As corroborated by the qualitative data, having parents who are mar-ried provided the men with tangible examples of what a successful marriage looked like and established a standard for the men to strive for.

With regard to the qualitative results, the themes that emerged not only served to strengthen and corroborate the findings in the quantitative analyses, but also spoke to the men's desire to develop, contribute to, and live in con-texts where marriage was encouraged, expected, and respected. According to men, increasing marriage rates was one of the ways, if not the best way, to strengthen African American families and communities. Beyond expressing their support for interventions by the church and, to a lesser extent, the govern-ment, the men also acknowledged the utility of having strong healthy relation-ships and marriages in their own families so that the younger generations as well as they themselves could benefit from those couples' wisdom, experi-ence, and perspective. Moreover, despite the contention by some that marriage promotion (Coltrane, 2001) is a slippery slope that masks a hidden agenda driven by conservatism, patriarchy, and promoting marriage at all costs, in

many ways the men did not conceptualize marriage as an arrangement that favored them as dominant and relegated their wives and girlfriends as second-class subordinates. Rather, the men conceptualized marriage as a way to honor and edify their partners. Or, in the words of a 50-year-old married father,

> Man, put it like this. She gives me the desire to carry myself with integrity even outside of her presence because she's just that real and it gives me the desire to cherish her and I never got that from any other woman.

This interview excerpt provides a succinct yet eloquent description of the ways in which the study participants who held favorable attitudes toward marriage felt compelled to become better men and husbands based on their love for their partners. This is important because the perspectives of this participant and those like him are rarely represented in the literature on African American families.

Limitations

Although the current study gives voice to men who have been marginalized in much of the literature, it has some limitations that should be considered when examining the results. First, the cross-sectional design provides only a snapshot view of the participants' experiences and does not measure them over time. Therefore, changes in the participants' attitudes based on new experiences and circumstances were not captured. Second, the nonprobability sampling strategy does not allow for generalizations of the findings to the population of African American men. It is also possible that this study was susceptible to bias in that those with extraordinarily positive or negative attitudes about marriage may have been more likely to self-select into the study. Finally, the reliance on participant self-report is a limitation in that it increases the likelihood of participants providing socially desirable responses, particularly given that African American men are often criticized and blamed in the media, popular culture, and social science for the low rates of marriage among African Americans.

Implications

Despite the study's limitations, the findings from this study have implications for those concerned with African American families generally and marriage rates among African Americans specifically. For policy makers,

the findings suggest that there may be ways to encourage and promote marriage that move beyond the usual recommendations related to allocating funds for programs and services that will increase men's economic viability as a way to make them more attractive in the marriage pool. This is not to minimize the importance of economics in discussions and initiatives dedicated to marriage and family structure because, as Edin and Kefalas (2005) remind us, gone are the days when people were satisfied with being "poor and happily married." However, the findings provide support for the notion that while economic stability is important, when viewed in the context of other factors, it is not the only factor in determining whether one is favorable toward marriage. In fact, both the quantitative and qualitative results suggest that African American couples might benefit from relationship mentoring initiatives, particularly those developed or implemented by culturally informed and competent practitioners (Davey & Watson, 2007). Therefore, in addition to improving men's economic stability, policy makers should support programs designed to expose them to successfully married couples.

The findings also point to the central role that the church plays in the lives of many African Americans, including African American men. Despite the fact that African American male church attendance is down from that of years past (Chatters, Taylor, & Lincoln, 1999), the study participants not only expressed a willingness to participate in church-related activities and events to promote and encourage marriage, but also expressed an interest in helping the church do outreach work and engage with the local community in conversations about marriage (Pinderhughes, 2002). Given this finding, churches and faith-based organizations may continue to be important community partners, clearinghouses, and referral agencies for faith-based and secular relationship education and mentoring interventions.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Author Biography

Armon Rashard Perry, PhD, MSW, is an Assistant Professor in the Kent School of Social Work at the University of Louisville. His research interests include fathers' involvement with their children, African American males' contributions to family functioning, and social welfare policy.